Student Veterans and Their Transition to Becoming a College Student

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Student Veterans and Their Transition to Becoming a College Student

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Abstract

This study sought to understand how student veterans view their transition to becoming a college student. A small, but increasing, amount of studies have been conducted on this topic. A qualitative approach, specifically a narrative method, was utilized to better understand how student veterans made meaning of the life events they experienced during their transition. Six student veterans in at least their second semester at their current institution were interviewed one-on-one, and their narratives are included here. This study revealed that student veterans and adult learners share many characteristics and that by viewing the student veteran as a student in transition, institutions will be better positioned to remove barriers, create a military friendly environment, and best facilitate this student population’s successful transition to college student.

*Keywords*: Student Veteran, Military, Transition, Adult Learner, College, Higher Education, Veteran Services
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs (2016), there are currently 21,174,983 veterans in the United States (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016e). In addition, the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) (2016) states there are 1,334,911 men and women who currently serve on active duty, the Reserve forces, or the National Guard. There are numerous educational benefits available to veterans and military members alike. Benefits such as the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944, Korean GI Bill, Vietnam Era GI Bill, Post-Vietnam Era Veterans Educational Assistance Program, Montgomery GI Bill, Post-9/11 GI Bill, and the Yellow Ribbon Program have often enabled this population to attend college at little to no cost to them (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.-d). The Post-9/11 GI Bill, an investment in excess of $30 billion dollars, is the single biggest benefit to veterans since World War II (Cate, 2014; The Post-9/11 GI Bill, n.d.). President Barrack Obama (2009) stated, “With the post-9/11 GI Bill, we can give our veterans the chance to live their dreams” (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, para. 19).

An estimated one million student veterans enrolled in higher education used the Post-9/11 GI Bill between 2009 and 2013 (Cate, 2014). As veterans return home they look to utilize this program as well as other educational benefits (Vacchi, 2012). Their presence increases the diversity of the college campuses they land on (Norman et al., 2015). Transition, according to Schlossberg (1984) is “any event or nonevent resulting in change” (p. 43). This study focused on the transition student veterans face as they become college students at their institutions.
It is important for institutions to make intentional efforts to provide and connect student veterans with the resources and support they might need to cope with transitions (DiRamo, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). The presence of student services or practices that have been identified as beneficial to facilitating the success of student veterans past and present can assist with their transition to college (Wilson et al., 2016). Student services are defined as services and support for students at institutions of higher education to enhance student growth and development (NASPA, 2013). Identifying such services begins with looking for military friendly institutions of higher education. Is any institution completely military friendly, however? The reality is, each institution needs to identify its student veteran population and work to accommodate them. As an overall guide for this study, military friendly schools are institutions that have educational benefit offices, transfer assessment, orientation and academic transition, and military student services designed to facilitate a smooth transition to college with student veteran’s unique needs in mind (Strickley, 2009; Wilson, 2014).

A review of the literature regarding this topic highlights two specific areas that assist student veterans transition to becoming a student. Military friendly institutions provide avenues above and beyond the average school to emphasize socialization and social reintegration of student veterans while working to identify and remove barriers to their successful transition (Norman et al., 2015; Strickley, 2009; Summerlot, Green, & Parker, 2009; Wilson, 2014). According to Schlossberg (1984), “Social support is regarded as one of the keys to successful coping with transitions” (p. 140). Academic support services are another area that the literature review highlights as important to
facilitating student veteran academic success (American Council on Education, 2014; Norman et al., 2015; Wilson et al., 2016). The more veteran-specific the student services, the more likely student veterans will use and benefit from them in their effort to adjust and transition successfully (Jones, 2013). Institutions need to examine their role in the student veterans’ transition to college. Schools should take a close look at their student veteran population and be intentional as to the specific services offered to this group.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research study was to investigate how student veterans transition to becoming a student, as well as what aspects of orientation and support services are most beneficial in facilitating this transition. Having a single office or point of contact in which all student veterans are referred to is not enough (Wilson, 2014). This study looked deeper into the specific services and culture that student veterans utilize or seek out in their transition to becoming a college student. This study investigated the impact of orientation, student services, and social support services provided by institutions to student veterans and the influence they have on student transition. This study looked at how student veterans view their transition, the orientation process, and services provided.

**Research Questions**

The researcher developed the following research questions to guide the study in answering the overarching research question of how student veterans view their transition to becoming a college student.

1. How do student veterans describe their transition?
2. How do student veterans describe the formal orientation process?
3. What specific services do student veterans utilize or seek out? At what point did they become acquainted with the resource(s)? To what degree was it beneficial to them?

**Significance of the Study**

Many of the student veterans coming into their institutions already have some type of college credit. Prior learning assessment and academic advising are examples of services that are important to student veterans (Wilson, 2014). Student services, overall, play a large role in easing the transition of incoming students to that particular institution (American Council on Education, 2014). It is important to understand how this student population views their transition to college, to know which parts of the orientation process they deem helpful, as well as what student services they utilize and desire, and how beneficial they were to their transition. Identifying how student services offered at military friendly institutions are aligning with the needs of student veterans aids in determining what is being done right and what can be done to improve.

Student veterans are a unique group with unique needs (Vacchi, 2012; Wilson, 2014). They utilize very specific educational benefits, they transfer credits from their military experience, and have difficulty integrating socially (DiRamil et al., 2008; Elliot, Gonzalez, & Larson, 2011; Gregg, Howell, & Shordike, 2016a; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Vacchi, 2012; Wilson, 2014). Failure to identify and accommodate these needs might very well exclude institutions from a prospective student veteran’s consideration (Gregg, Kitzman, & Shordike, 2016b). By evaluating, emulating, and implementing veteran-specific services student veterans deem beneficial to their transition, institutions can hope
to not only attract, but ultimately retain, this expanding group of students (Brown & Gross, 2011).

Limitations

**Researcher.** As an Air Force veteran who has used, and is using veteran educational benefits, I conducted this research to better understand what today’s student veterans encounter as they transition to becoming a college student. I have used the Montgomery GI Bill and the Illinois Veterans Grant (IVG). I have not personally experienced any issues in doing so. I have found these benefits to be a wonderful resource. They have enabled me to complete my undergraduate degree and are allowing me to pursue my master’s degree. I have taken an untraditional road to get to this point in my educational journey. My personal educational path has limited the opportunity to experience the issues that a review of the literature has revealed. I attended both a community college and transferred to a four-year public school while working full-time. I relied on my educational benefits to cover my tuition. I had the resources to provide shelter, food, purchase textbooks, and so on.

While serving on active duty in the United States Air Force, I was never deployed to a combat zone. I enlisted just as the first Gulf War came to a close and separated from the military prior to any of the current engagements. My experiences as an active duty military member and as a student utilizing his veterans educational benefits are quite different than the student veterans interviewed in this study. There was, however, still the potential for researcher bias as I am a student veteran myself.

**Gender/Race.** Another factor which could limit the results of the study included the gender and race of the research participants. All six individuals were Caucasian
males. While every individual is unique, the lack of diversity amongst the interviewees is indeed a limitation to the study. While this study focused on student veterans in general, having one gender and race will certainly prevent the experiences and opinions of any other genders or races from being given a voice. An attempt to minimize this limitation utilizing Krefting’s (1991) recommendation that the interview process involves the reframing and repetition of questions as well as an expansion of questions at different intervals during the interview to learn the essence of the topic, look for themes, and enhance the credibility of the data was used.

**Location.** While this research was conducted at two different institutions in two different states, there is still a limitation in generalizing the results of this study to other schools in other geographic locations. Student veterans populate a high percentage of the nation’s institutions, and perspectives, experiences, and how each individual makes meaning of life events will be impacted by their location.

**Employment.** The employment status of the student veterans in this research will influence their outlook and experiences. Five out of the six participants either currently work or have worked in their institution’s veterans office through a work study program. One’s involvement on campus and knowledge of services and benefits will have been impacted by such employment. While the students worked at two separate institutions their experiences will be similar in many ways as opposed to student veterans that have not had the same employment history.

**Adult Learner.** Four of the six student veterans have families and/or children. Four of the six participants were over the age of 25, while the other two were 24. The adult learner status of these students will result in different experiences, opportunities,
and perspectives than their more traditional-aged peers. The socialization aspect of the transition to becoming a college student will be greatly impacted by having children to take care of as opposed to those students that do not have such responsibilities.

**Branch of Service.** Two of the five branches of service were not represented. None of the six participants served in the United States Navy or the United States Coast Guard. While student veterans are not labeled based on their branch of service, the experiences one had in their respective branch has the potential to impact the experiences that student veteran had during her or his transition. The mission of each department of the military is unique by definition and thus, so is the experience of its members and must be taken into consideration.

**Methodology.** A qualitative narrative analysis was conducted. According to Kohler Riessman (1993), "The narrative analysis takes as its object of investigation the story itself" (p. 1). The purpose of the narrative is to examine the sequence of experiences in the participants' lives and learn how they make sense of these events and actions (Kohler Riessman, 1993). This research project represents a desire to tell the stories of the participant student veterans. While I cannot give a voice to these individuals, I share Kohler Riessman's (1993) goal in striving to hear, record, and interpret their voices for others to study.

This methodology presents a limitation as it represents a limited portrayal and cannot be generalized to the entire student veteran population. Another limitation, according to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), is narcissism and solipsism on the part of the researcher. Efforts were taken to minimize this limitation by being aware and understanding that every response is valid, in some sense, and has some truth to the
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participant in it (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is their story, not the researcher’s. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest researchers be wakeful regarding any and all inquiry decisions. By viewing the narrative through the study’s research questions, I was able to minimize these risks and share the stories of the participants, their past actions and experiences, and how they comprehend them (Kohler Riesman, 1993). An additional safeguard towards minimizing limitations is noting participant responses that seem inconsistent and cross-checking them against other responses and observations during the interview (Finlay, 2002; Fraenkel, 2015).

**Student Services.** This study will not address all the issues/services pertaining to student veterans. Health and medical services, for example, is a resource that is often utilized off-campus and would be better served as the primary focus of an entire study.

**Definitions of Terms**

Many terms related to this study will be defined as specific topics are presented and discussed. Four main terms: military friendly, student service, student veteran, and transition will be discussed here in more detail to familiarize the reader with specific definitions that have been utilized throughout this study. Other relevant terms will be discussed in the literature review and throughout the discussion.

**Military friendly.** Depending on the topic, researchers will define military friendly differently. As an overall guide for this study, military friendly institutions are those that have educational benefit offices, transfer assessment, orientation and academic transition, and military student services designed to facilitate a smooth transition to college with student veteran’s unique needs in mind (Strickley, 2009; Wilson, 2014). Military friendly institutions provide avenues above and beyond the average school to
emphasize socialization and social reintegration of student veterans while working to identify and remove barriers to their successful transition (Norman et al., 2015; Strickley, 2009; Summerlot et al., 2009; Wilson, 2014). Veteran friendly institutions provide support and are aware of the varying degrees of support individual student veterans might seek (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). Common features of military friendly schools include: veterans offices, veterans clubs, at least one administrator who is a veteran or veteran spouse, veteran-specific trained faculty and staff, veteran admission preference, and priority registration for student veterans (Altman, 2015). The fundamental aspects of a military friendly college are creating and fostering an acceptance of military culture and offering a wide-range of academic and social support services specific to student veterans to aid their transition to their institution (Wilson, 2014). Military friendly institutions, overall, have a firm grasp of the student veteran and aim to provide and connect them with services and social support systems to facilitate their transition to becoming a college student.

**Student service.** Services and support for students at institutions of higher education to enhance student growth and development (NASPA, 2013).

**Student veteran.** Any student who is a current or former member of the active duty military, the National Guard, or Reserves regardless of deployment status, combat experience, legal veteran status, or GI Bill use participating in higher education (Barry, 2015; Vacchi, 2012). National Guard and Reservists generally serve one weekend a month and two weeks a year and are subject to being called to active duty at any time (Military.com, n.d.-a.; National Guard, n.d.). National Guard members serve both their state and the federal government and can be activated by state governors for state
emergencies or the federal government to support the federal military (STACK Basic
Training, 2011, November 14). Reservists, on the other hand, can only be activated to
support the federal military (STACK Basic Training, 2011, November 14).

**Transition.** “Any event or nonevent resulting in change” (Schlossberg, 1984, p. 43). Changes in the student veterans’ roles can range from military member to student, from being deployed overseas to returning stateside, to being activated from the Guard or Reserve forces to returning to reserve status, or from being in a strict, military
environment to a more unstructured collegiate setting. Changes to one’s settings, relationships, expectations, routines, health, or financial situation can also lead to transitions (Schlossberg, 1984). It is important to note that a person’s individual relationship to the transition is what is important (Schlossberg, 1984). What is significant to one person might not be to another, causing the transition to be insignificant. This study focused on the transition to becoming a college student.

**Summary**

Student veterans are coming to campus. The student veteran population is growing and will continue to grow (Gregg et al., 2016b). By identifying how student veterans transition to becoming a student, as well as what aspects of an institution’s orientation and support services are most beneficial in facilitating this transition, this study will help to build upon recent studies and fill the gaps that exist in this area. Several studies have focused on student veterans’ transitions to higher education; this study will focus on how student veterans describe their transition to becoming a college student, as well as what specific services student veterans utilize or seek out, when they became acquainted with them, how beneficial they were, and the impact of orientation
and social support on their transition. “Success is not static; it changes and evolves with time. And we must evaluate it constantly, aligning it with our goals and values” (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014, para. 64).
CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

The need for veteran-specific student services and a culture accepting of student veterans is clear as the literature review will show. Studies have shown that student veterans indicate a strong need for veteran-specific student services (American Council on Education, 2014; Jones, 2013; Moon & Schma, 2011; Wilson, 2014). Veteran-specific services may not be enough to facilitate a successful transition. Negotiation of student services as well as socialization are often times a problem for student veterans (Alexander, 2015). Student veterans have had unique experiences and come to campus with unique needs. Colleges must focus on how to facilitate the process of becoming a college student for this increasing student population.

History of Student Veterans in Higher Education

A brief statutory history of the path veterans have taken to higher education begins with the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944, also referred to as the GI Bill. In an effort to invest in the country, after World War II President Franklin Roosevelt, with the help of the American Legion, saw the GI Bill become law (Mettler, 2012). Under the GI Bill tuition and fees were covered at any institution the student veteran was accepted to (Mettler, 2012). Veterans looking for a better life returned to college in hopes of improving their job prospects.

The GI Bill afforded returning veterans the opportunity to receive education or training they might have missed out on due to their military service (Smole & Loane, 2008). Prior to World War II, college was deemed for the well-to-do; the GI Bill changed that as millions took advantage of the opportunity now available to them (Mettler, 2012).
In fact, between 1944 and 1956, 2.2 million veterans attended college or graduate school and 5.6 million received vocational training (Mettler, 2012). Four out of five men born in the 1920’s in the United States were in the military; nearly half of the 16 million veterans utilized the GI Bill (Mettler, 2012; United States Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.-a). In 1947 student veterans composed 49% of those admitted to college (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.-a). The GI Bill made the dream of going to college a reality for many veterans. The basis of our middle class has been credited to the original GI Bill (O’Herrin, 2011). Subsequent conflicts led to other educational programs for veterans including The Korean GI Bill and the Vietnam Era GI Bill (Smole & Loane, 2008).

The Vietnam War ended in 1975. In 1973 the United States military became an all-volunteer force (Rostker, 2006). According to the DMDC (2016), there were 2,252,787 total active duty military personal at the time. The Post-Vietnam Era Veterans Educational Assistance Program (VEAP), effective January 1st, 1977, provided benefits to veterans who served between December 1976 and July 1985 (Smole & Loane, 2008; The Post-Vietnam Era Veterans Educational Assistance Program, 1977). The VEAP is unique because it represented the first time an educational benefit was created during peacetime (Smole & Loane, 2008). It was also the first time that benefits required a contribution by the veteran (Smole & Loane, 2008). The VEAP was used as a recruiting tool to draw men and women to military service (Smole & Loane, 2008). Four years after the dissolution of conscription, the all-volunteer military nearly maintained its 1973 level with a total of 2,074,543 members (DMDC, 2016). Many service members joined
the military with the intent of going to college after separation, an option that might not have been financially possible prior to enlisting.

The Montgomery GI Bill was established in 1985. It is named for Mississippi Representative G. V. "Sonny" Montgomery who was responsible for the legislation that led to the GI Bill becoming permanent law (Villanova University, n.d.). The GI Bill continued to be instrumental in attracting recruits to an all-volunteer force. There were 2,169,112 active duty personnel in 1986, a number that held steady through 1990 (2,043,705 members), when the military began a reduction of force due to the ending of the cold war (DMDC, 2016). The 1,384,338 military personnel in 2000 has remained relatively constant as there are 1,334,911 personnel currently serving (DMDC, 2016). In 2007-2008, the last year of the Montgomery GI Bill, full-time student veterans were entitled to $1,101 dollars a month in benefits, paid directly to the student veteran (Walton Radford, Bentz, Dekker, & Paslov, 2016). In fiscal year 2015 the Montgomery GI Bill paid $442,174 dollars to 61,403 eligible beneficiaries (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016a).

The Montgomery GI Bill eventually gave way to the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008, known as the Post-9/11 GI Bill. This benefit is available to veterans having served at least 90 days after September 11, 2001, or are still on active duty (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.-b). O’Herrin (2011) states that the Post-9/11 GI Bill represents the biggest increase in educational benefits for student veterans since the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944.

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) (n.d.-b) website, the Post-9/11 GI Bill allows for tuition and fees for in-state residents attending public schools.
Southern Illinois University, in Carbondale, Illinois (SIU-C), for example, charges $303.30 dollars per semester hour to in-state undergraduate residents which, along with mandatory fees, would be covered by the Post-9/11 GI Bill (Southern Illinois University, n.d.). Should the student veteran choose to attend a private school, the lower total between tuition and fees or the national maximum capped rate, $21,970.46 for the 2016 academic year, are covered by the Post-9/11 GI Bill (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016b).

The Yellow Ribbon Program is available for those who choose to attend private schools or graduate school in excess of the program’s state tuition cap (NEWGIBILL.ORG, n.d.; United States Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.-b). Institutions that voluntarily participate in the Yellow Ribbon Program provide an additional amount of funding for the student veteran’s educational program with no effect to one’s Post-9/11 GI Bill, while the DVA matches that amount (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016c). Active duty military members and dependents are not eligible to participate in the Yellow Ribbon Program. Institutions must be approved by the DVA in order to participate in the program (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.-c). Once approved, the DVA lists the approved schools on their website, along with the specific information of each institution’s agreement with the DVA (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.-c). The amount the school has agreed to provide to the student veterans, how many student veterans are eligible, along with any particular designations are listed. For example, SIU-C will provide $4,221 dollars to a maximum of 10 graduate students (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016d). The DVA will match the $4,221 dollars.
The Post-9/11 GI Bill, according to the DVA website (2016b), includes a monthly housing stipend and an annual book stipend, of up to $1,000 dollars, that the Montgomery GI Bill did not provide. The housing stipend is paid on the E-5 (enlisted rank), with dependents, pay scale, along with a Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) commiserate with the institution's zip code; the housing stipend at SIU-C in 2017 is $1,257 dollars per month (Military Benefits, n.d.; United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016b). With an investment in excess of $30 billion dollars as of 2014, the Post-9/11 GI Bill constitutes a tremendous investment in our countries veterans (Cate, 2014). In 2015 the Post-9/11 GI Bill provided $11,199,215 in educational benefits to 790,507 student veterans (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016a).

Many states also provide veterans educational benefits. As mentioned above, I personally utilize the IVG. The IVG pays tuition and fees at state public colleges, universities, and community colleges for Illinois residents (Military.com, n.d.-b). The IVG has several qualifications that must be met in order to receive benefits, including: being honorably discharged, recipients must have been living in Illinois for at least six months prior to beginning their military service, they must have served at least one complete year of active duty, and they must have resumed their residence in Illinois within six months of separation from the military (Military.com, n.d.-b). Another veterans educational benefit in Illinois is the Illinois National Guard Grant (ING). The ING pays tuition and certain fees at every Illinois public school or community college (Military.com, n.d.-b). Benefits vary depending on the length of time one has served in the National Guard (Military.com, n.d.-b). Veteran educational benefits vary from state to
state. Should any of the participants of this study utilize such benefits in their respective states at the chosen institutions, further discussion of state educational benefits will occur.

The history of student veterans in higher education reflects a commitment by the United States Government of providing opportunities for those who served their country to improve themselves and their future prospects. As the nature of the military changed from conscription to an all-volunteer force, so too has the student veterans’ educational benefits. Returning veterans are utilizing the Post-9/11 GI Bill in record numbers (Norman et al., 2015). As veterans leave military service many will look to use their educational benefits (Vacchi, 2012). Durdella and Kim (2012) state that when benefits increase, as they did with the Post-9/11 GI Bill, decisions of whether to enroll in college and where to apply are influenced. Just as the original GI Bill educated countless scientists, engineers, businessmen, artists, teachers, and tradesmen, institutions should expect student veterans to come to campus seeking to be the next generation of such professionals and strive to help them in their transition to becoming a college student (O’Herrin, 2011).

Transition

Schlossberg’s Transition Theory examines issues related to transitions, the individual, and their surroundings to determine what impact these transitions will have (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). While Schlossberg’s theory focuses on adults in general, the concepts can be readily applied to student veterans transitioning to a college student. Transitions, according to Schlossberg, are events or non-events that occur producing a change in one’s relationships, patterns, conventions, or roles (Evans et al., 2010).
DiRamio et al. (2008) studied 25 student veterans who had served in Iraq or Afghanistan between 2003-2007. The participants ages ranged from 20-34 with most being in their early twenties (DiRamio et al., 2008). The sample consisted of six females and nine males (DiRamio et al., 2008). The participants were selected from three campuses from across the United States (U.S.); one campus was in the Northern U.S., one from the Southern U.S., and another was from the Western U.S. (DiRamio et al., 2008). The study utilized Schlossberg’s theory as the guiding theory to generate “a conceptual framework” (p.73) for student veterans transitioning from wartime to college. While DiRamio et al.’s (2008) research used Schlossberg’s theory to examine students transitioning from wartime to college, and parallels can be drawn, this study will focus on student veterans’ transition to becoming a college student. These students may, or may not, have just left a wartime scenario. According to DiRamio et al.’s (2008) study, the transition to college was one of the major challenges student veterans face. It is not the particular transition, according to Schlossberg (1984), that is significant but the individual’s perception of it that matters. Transition can be managed. If one understands the transition, they will have at least some tools available to them to manage the process (DiRamio et al., 2008).

Transitions happen over a period of time and consist of three phases: moving in, moving through, and moving out (Evans et al., 2010). While student veterans in this study will have, in most instances, already moved out of their military service, they are most assuredly in the moving in phase of their transition to college student. Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (1997) refer to the moving in process as a “need to learn the ropes” (p.167). This is an accurate portrayal of student veterans moving into higher
education. The military environment and culture from which they came is a far cry from the culture they will experience, or are experiencing, at their four-year institution. Student veteran and Student Veterans of America (SVA) board member, Brian Hawthorne was cited in an article in *Inside Higher Ed* that talked about how the transition to becoming a college student is very challenging for student veterans at traditional schools where, he believes, most of their college peers have no idea what they have experienced or been through (as reported by Johnson, 2012). There is a distinct need for student veterans to learn the ropes in an environment where traditional students transition from high school to college, take classes full-time, and have little to no real-world experience (Johnson, 2012).

Building upon the extant literature utilizing Schlossberg’s framework to understand the transition of student veterans, this study will frame veterans as students in transition (DeRamio et al., 2008; Gregg et al., 2016b; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughey, & Harris, 2011). Using Schlossberg’s model will allow for the examination of the transition student veterans are going through and possibly help in identifying ways for them to successfully navigate the challenges they face. In order to get to where one is going, they must know where they are. Schlossberg’s Transition Theory will provide student veterans and institutions that roadmap and, hopefully, direction.

Goodman’s study indicated that situation, self, support, and strategies are influences that factor into one’s management of transition (as cited in Evans et al., 2010). While this study will focus on the moving in phase of transition, the four S’s are a major part of the entire transition. While examining the student veteran’s transition to college
student, Schlossberg’s framework will be looked at through three separate but related lenses: military, inside the institution, and outside the institution.

**Situation.** Factors such as control, role change, and previous experience are all factors that must be looked at when examining one’s situation (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016). From a military viewpoint, the student veteran must look at her or his role change from military member to college student. The difficulty of the role change depends on whether the student veteran views her or his new role as a loss or a gain (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). Adjusting back to their role in regular society can be hard for some student veterans (Johnson, 2012).

Gregg et al. (2016a) studied 13 student veterans with deployment experience transitioning to becoming a college student at the University of Kentucky. The ages of the sample had a range from 20-45 with only two members between the ages of 21-24 (Gregg et al., 2016b). The study consisted of 11 males and two females, and all were less than three years removed from a combat tour (Gregg et al., 2016b). The study utilized Adult Transition Framework to examine student veterans coping with the transition of becoming a college student (Gregg et al., 2016b). Gregg et al.’s study (2016b) found that 15% (n = 2) of the participants reported feeling “down in the dumps” (p. 93) due to their situation which they judged negatively, or as a loss.

The change in environment can actually influence a student veteran’s sense of control (Ryan et al., 2011). Griffin and Gilbert (2015) conducted a study involving 72 administrators, staff, and student affairs professionals, as well as 28 student veterans from seven institutions. The study was part of a larger study and used Schlossberg’s Transition Theory to explore how different institutions strive to provide student veterans resources.
and support as they transition to college student (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). Griffin and Gilbert’s (2015) participants identified finances and transfer credit evaluation as their two primary concerns that affect their sense of control.

While the student veteran might actually have had less control in the military environment they came from, they might feel as though they have less control inside the institution’s loosely structured collegiate environment. Research was conducted in relation to the differences between military and collegiate cultures and found that moving from the highly regimented and structured environment of the military to an environment with less rules and no visible chain of command can make the student veteran feel less in control of their situation as she or he might not know who to turn to with a complaint or a problem (DiRamo et al., 2008; DiRamo & Jarvis, 2011; Elliot et al., 2011; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Lighthall, 2012; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). The change in environment often causes a culture shock as student veterans often do not enjoy the unstructured college atmosphere (Johnson, 2012). Comparing their previous military experience to their experience as a college student is an integral part of their situation. One student veteran interviewed by DiRamo et al. (2008) discussed how the experience he gained traveling around the world and the leadership responsibilities he had in the military helped his situation as he transitioned to becoming a student again.

The nontraditional role most student veterans play is that of student, employee, spouse, and even parent. The factors occurring outside of the institution can impact the student veteran’s situation. Online courses, for instance, might be more attractive to this student population as they may fit into a busy schedule which can include work and family (Johnson, 2012). Research by Gregg et al. (2016b) revealed that 45% of the
student veterans in their study considered their transition to college non-typical compared to their classmates. Many studies have examined and identified the nontraditional role student veterans often play in higher education (DiRamo et al., 2008; Elliot et al., 2011; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010).

**Self.** Personal and demographic elements as well as psychological resources are aspects to be considered when examining self (Patton et al., 2016). The student veteran has transitioned from military member to student. The military self of the student veteran defines herself or himself as military member, an airman, soldier, sailor, or Marine. They were either enlisted or an officer. Gregg et al. (2016a) identified that student veterans found it challenging to move on from their military self, making their transition more difficult as they looked to find their self inside the institution.

Inside the institution the student veteran can simply be a student. It is possible they will now be identified by their race, ethnicity, age, or socioeconomic status as opposed to rank or branch of service. A top issue identified by counseling, advising, and tutoring offices in the study by Griffin and Gilbert (2015) was the fact that student veterans often do not self-identify their veteran status. Being known by characteristics other than student veteran makes the identification and assessment of successes and challenges they encounter equally difficult to determine. In fact, this student population has been called the “least visible minority on campus” (Horton, 2012, para. 19).

Outside of the institution, the student veteran might be a neighbor, spouse, daughter or son, parent, or employee. A major demographic issue regarding self encountered in transition identified in the study by Ryan et al. (2011) is that of the nontraditional student. Nontraditional students, or adult learners, are generally age 25 or
older and juggle school, employment, and family (Ely, 1997). Student veterans often are older, have families, or work full-time in addition to being a student (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014; Horton, 2012; Johnson, 2012). Ten out 13 participants in the study conducted by Gregg et al. (2016b) reported being between the ages of 25–39, while four of the participants were married. All of these definitions of self will affect the student veteran’s psychological resources such as their outlook, commitment, values, and resilience.

**Support.** In Schlossberg’s framework support deals with social support (Patton et al., 2016). As a military member, student veterans found support in the members of their unit and the structure of their unit. Student veterans often feel as though institutions do not comprehend their needs (Cook & Kim, 2009; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). This belief can lead to the student veteran associating more with their military identity than any other. Many studies have shown that this student group feels more comfortable socializing with other student veterans as they believe they have little in common with other, more traditional, college students (DiRamio et al., 2008; Elliot et al., 2011; Gregg et al., 2016a; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). A participant in Griffin and Gilbert’s (2015) study described this disconnect, “You don’t have anything in common with people who are eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one years old who pretty much haven’t been anywhere or done anything” (p. 88).

Inside the institution student veterans might find support from faculty, staff, peers, or Student Veteran Offices/Organizations (SVOs). Some student veterans in transition desire to leave their military identity behind (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). A study conducted by Gregg et al. (2016b) found that 69% ($n = 9$) of their participants took part in activities that focused on an identity that was not a veteran. Meg Mitcham, a former student
veteran and director of veterans programs at the American College of Education, shared that college is a perfect environment for veterans to transition due to the information, guidance, and support (as reported by Horton, 2012).

A dedicated Veterans office provides institutional, staff, and peer support (Cook & Kim, 2009; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Research to understand how student veterans felt about support inside the institution was conducted by Gregg et al. (2016b) and revealed that 62% (n = 8) of their participants felt as though their needs were supported at their institution. SVOs are another area that student veterans find support to combat isolation and facilitate social connections inside the institution (DiRamio et al., 2008; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Summerlot et al., 2009). Rumann and Hamrick (2010) studied the transitions student veterans go through when re-enrolling in college after deployment to a war zone. Six full-time, undergraduate student veterans were interviewed at a large, land-grant university in the Midwest with approximately 25,000 students enrolled (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Rumann and Hamrick (2010) found that supportive peers can assist student veterans’ transition. Even with all the research pertaining to ways student veterans can find support inside their institution, they do not always seek it out. Gregg et al. (2016b) found that 62% (n = 13) of their participants did not utilize the campus Veterans Resource Center. This might very well be explained by the diversity of this student population as well as how each individual perceives their transition and their need for support.

Outside of the institution support can be found amongst family or friends. Many student veterans are adult learners and have a family, a job, and are older than their traditional college peers (Gregg et al., 2016b; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). The demands on
adult learners, such as family and life outside the institution, often lower their enthusiasm and ability to participate in SVOs or social events (Gregg et al., 2016b; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). Research by Gregg et al. (2016b) indicated that 46% \((n = 6)\) of the participants in their study satisfied their daily roles within their family for support. Spouses are often identified as providing the most support for nontraditional students (Ryan et al., 2011).

It is important to remember that Schlossberg (1984) states that it is how a person views the change that defines it as a transition. Student veterans are a very diverse student population (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). This diversity means that the value of support is predicated upon how one views the change as well as through what lens they perceive their identity. Student veterans might hold onto their military identity and look to connect with other veterans, or they might have a student identity and look for support inside the institution, and finally, those that identify as adult learners might look to their family and friends for support outside of the institution (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). The student veteran’s definition of self, or identity, becomes more important to understand as institutions look to assist this group’s transition to becoming a college student since they often view the social aspect of college more difficult than the academic portion (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015).

**Strategies.** Strategies deal with how individuals cope with transition (Patton et al., 2016). While in the military student veterans were continually put through training related to health issues, financial issues, and even issues related to local conditions. For example: I recall going through a session called “180 Days of Summer” when I was stationed at Eglin Air Force Base, FL. The briefing covered everything we needed to know as the area entered hurricane season. The discipline, knowledge, and routine
learned in the military can provide student veterans with effective skills they can use in college (Johnson, 2012). Gregg et al. (2016b) found in their study that 77% \((n = 10)\) of their participants used their military decision-making skills in school, while 93% \((n = 12)\) used their military experiences/training for managing stress. While in the military student veterans learned skills that have proven useful in their transition to college (Johnson, 2012; Ryan et al., 2011).

Inside the institution support is found in veterans services offices, amongst other veterans, or veteran groups either formal or informal. Many of these resources are identified and discussed during student veteran orientation sessions and panels (Ryan et al., 2011). Student veterans often times encounter information barriers in ways traditional students do not (McBain, Kim, Cook, & Snead, 2012). Having access to accurate information is important (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). Veterans Offices that provide consolidated information pertaining to benefits, services, and veteran-specific initiatives can provide multiple strategies all in one stop (Cook & Kim, 2009; DiRamio et al., 2008; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). Socializing with peers and mentors at Veterans Offices can also provide strategies inside the institution as they might share their insider knowledge about navigating campus, points of contact, and useful resources (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Ryan et al., 2011). Veterans groups such as the SVA understand student veterans’ struggles and strive to recreate the camaraderie experienced in the military (Johnson, 2012).

Family, friends, employers, or local organizations might be part of a student veteran’s strategies for coping outside of the institution. If the demands on a student veteran steer her or his priorities to an identity other than military or student, strategies
for coping with their transition might be found among family or coworkers (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). Gregg et al. (2016b) found that 54% ($n = 7$) of their sample considered their transition normal compared to their peers. This reminds us that the diversity of the student veteran will result in many different views of the changes they are experiencing and subsequently the strategies they will look to employ to manage them.

**Resources**

Specific resources can influence transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995). The 4 S’s, according to Schlossberg et al. (1995), are such resources. Several resources were identified during the examination of the 4 S’s above. Orientation sessions and panels as well as accurate information are resources that can be found throughout the orientation process. The Office of Financial Aid is an institutional resource to assist student veterans with their finances and educational benefits. Transfer credit and trained faculty and staff can all be addressed by the academic support resources. Many resources at institutions can be utilized to address student veteran involvement and socialization. A review of the literature will focus on how orientation, veterans’ benefits/financial aid, student involvement, and academic support are resources that address issues found in the examination of the 4 S’s and how they impact transition.

**Orientation.** The primary objective of orientation programs is to facilitate or assist in the successful transition of new students to college (Mayhew, Vanderlinden, & Kim, 2010). According to Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), common objectives of a traditional orientation include: acquainting students with institutional and administrative regulations, learning the expected behaviors of an institution, introducing them to student services, providing students with opportunities to meet faculty and other peers, guiding
students in designing an academic program, assisting in career planning, and helping students develop the skills they need, academically, to survive as a student. Additionally, traditional orientation assists in facilitating students into a new and unfamiliar academic and social setting (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Daddona and Cooper (2002) state the traditional goals of a freshman orientation program involve helping students adjust academically and personally to college, aiding students’ families in learning how support and encouragement can assist a student’s success, and also helping the institution itself learn more about their students.

College orientation programs are “an institutionalized attempt at early student socialization” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 403). This concept was developed by Merton (1957; 1972), and referred to, as anticipatory socialization. Anticipatory socialization is the process in which an individual learns to anticipate the norms, values, and behavioral expectations of a new environment through a certain group of experiences (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). According to Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), students entering college shed previous social groups and identities as new social networks and identities are developed in new social settings. New behaviors and norms must be learned, and orientation is a resource to begin this learning.

Learning these new behaviors and connecting with every student that attends orientation can be a challenge. Traditional first year student orientations are rather large. The University of Georgia, for example, had 5,475 first year students in the Fall of 2016 (University of Georgia, 2016). Clarkson University, on the other hand, had 797 first year students enrolled in the Fall of 2016 (Clarkson University, 2016). The University of Georgia has 16 orientation sessions compared to Clarkson’s one (Clarkson University,
2016; University of Georgia, 2016). That means Clarkson University could potentially have 797 students at their first year orientation while the University of Georgia might have around 342 students per session as all first year students are required to attend orientation. Covering the basic objectives of orientation is a challenge with groups this large; attending to the needs of specific student populations is even more difficult.

Schools have increasingly targeted specific student populations with unique orientation sessions. It is common to find international student or transfer student orientations at an institution. This allows institutions to tailor their orientation programs to the specific needs of these targeted student populations. The University of Georgia (n.d.) states that the information found in their orientation for international students is exclusive to this program. Immigration issues, taxes for international students, adjusting to a new culture, and much more are covered to fit the program to this specific student body (University of Georgia, n.d.). Just as traditional orientation programs focus on providing support and guidance to incoming freshman, so too can veteran-specific orientations (Daddona & Cooper, 2002). Ryan et al. (2011) have suggested conducting sessions and panels focusing on veteran-specific issues. The focus of such sessions might include: financial aid, academic support, educational benefits distribution, socialization opportunities and more.

The Association for Orientation, Transition, and Retention (NODA) states on their website, in their ethical principles, that they will “recognize the diversity of experiences of students in transition, and work to meet the various needs of new students, transfer students, adult learners, and other special populations” (tp://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.nodaweb.org/resource/resmgr/docs/revised_statements_of_ethica.pdf). As
mentioned above, Ely (1997) defines nontraditional students, or adult learners, as students that are generally age 25 or older and juggle school, employment, and family. Many student veterans fall into the adult learner category. In a study looking at nontraditional students, Wardley, Bélanger, and Leonard (2013) found that they were less involved in orientation procedures and used support services less than traditional students. By viewing student veterans as students in transition, institutions can modify their traditional orientation process to better support their transition to becoming a member of the college community.

Extending the orientation process into a student’s first year at an institution has proven successful (McMenamin & Kurzynski, 2016). McMenamin and Kurzynski (2016) conducted a pilot study of five institutions to find commonalities and best practices pertaining to course structure, objectives, course work, and assessment of first year courses for student veterans. Student veterans will stay in touch with faculty and staff by attending class regularly, while having increased opportunities to interact with students who “know the ropes” regarding the transitional experience (McMenamin & Kurzynski, 2016). Such courses, in addition to orientation programs, increases the visibility of staff support and provides an opportunity to develop relationships with other student veterans (McMenamin & Kurzynski, 2016). Students in McMenamin and Kurzynski’s (2016) study reported low expectations of the class prior to taking it, but the post-course evaluations were extremely positive.

NODA stresses the importance of training and supporting faculty and staff in an effort to help them meet the expectations of students in transition (Statement of Ethical Standards, n.d.). The competence and training of faculty and staff plays a large role in
facilitating the student veteran’s transition. Trained faculty and employees benefit from having a further understanding of student veterans as a student population (DiRamio et al., 2008; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Ryan et al., 2011). Training faculty and employees on the needs and culture of student veterans will assist them in providing support and resources that play a large part in the student veteran’s successful transition. Exposing student veterans to trained, supportive staff in first year courses can also help this student group in their transition.

In another study looking at best practices in student veteran education, Dillard and Yu (2016) found through an examination of the extant literature and their personal experiences as faculty members at a large, state school that first year courses familiarize nontraditional students to the “practices and rigors of academic life” (p.185) as well as helping to establish a long-lasting relationship between fellow students while helping develop strong associations between students and faculty. Dillard and Yu (2016) conducted a post-course survey of all the student veterans in the Veterans First Year Seminar they taught, and every participant (N = 9) in the course believed new student veterans should take the veteran-specific first year course. Student veteran only first year courses can help facilitate socialization and support, a feeling of fitting in, and assist in learning more about the transition to becoming a college student (McMenamin & Kurzynski, 2016).

A survey of student veterans conducted by Morin (2011) addressing transition, identified that 44% of more than 1,800 veterans had difficulty transitioning to civilian life. Pach and Sells (2013) studied a cross-sectional population of 30 veterans and identified that establishing meaningful relationships with non-military people and
transitioning to the role of college student were challenging. Navigating the college environment and not knowing the formal chain of command are challenges student veterans face that can be addressed in a veteran orientation. Pairing student veterans with transition coaches, or mentors, who have already learned the ropes around campus is one way to assist this group in navigating the college environment (DiRamio et al., 2008; McMenamin & Kurzynski, 2016). Having a one-stop location for services in the form of a veterans office, introduced in orientation, might help student veterans navigate the college environment, as well as, simplify the chain of command for them (McBain et al., 2012).

Gregg et al. (2016a) found in their study focusing on the experiences student veterans face transitioning to college that the transition process became more manageable if they participated in social or group functions that included other student veterans. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) state that initial encounters with the institution may have major effects on a student’s level of involvement. Having opportunities to interact with other student veterans who know their way around during orientation should have a big impact on this student populations’ current and future involvement. By building relationships with other student veterans who know the ropes, new students might be more likely to engage in future involvement and come into contact with more traditional college students. Navigating the college environment, uncertainty regarding the chain of command, difficulty establishing social relationships with peers are all challenges student veterans face during their transition to college student that can be addressed in orientation.
Pairing new student veterans with a mentor, or transition coach, can be a very powerful piece of a veteran-specific orientation (DiRamio et al., 2008). In a study conducted by Gregg et al. (2016a), a purposive sample ($N = 13$) of student veterans stated, “Building relationships with other veterans served as a strategy for developing the social support needed to participate in meaningful educational activities” (https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov PMC5072277/). Mentors can ease the transition of new student veterans by imparting their knowledge gained from already navigating the transition to college student. Finding those who can empathize with their situation helps new student veterans feel and become more connected to their institution (Gregg et al., 2016a).

By narrowing the focus of orientation for traditional students to fit the specific needs of student veterans, institutions can better help them transition. According to Mayhew et al. (2010), several veterans they interviewed felt unprepared in their transition out of the military due to the support they received from their branch of service upon separation. A veteran-specific orientation can help explain the ways a campus is different from the military environment, as well as, discuss ways to better control and navigate their new environment (Barry, Whiteman, & MacDermid Wadsworth, 2014). NODA orientation professionals aim for program improvement as a result of evaluation and monitoring of issues on campus (Statement of Ethical Standards, n.d.). By bridging these two environments through a student veteran-specific orientation process, schools can hope to better assist their transition to becoming a college student.

A key tenant of orientation, according to NODA, is to ensure that students receive proper, accurate information (Statement of Ethical Standards, n.d.). A study by Mayhew
et al. (2010) found that when there is a visible, dedicated space for orientation it may convey the message that institutions are dedicated to meeting the needs of students in transition. Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) has a dedicated Office of Military and Veteran Affairs and offers two Veterans Orientation courses in place of the mandatory orientation requirement. These courses focus on the specific needs of this student population. Topics covered include: on and off campus services that are covered by subject matter, experts from the DVA and the Counseling Center, academic advising, and the Honors Program (http://va.eku.edu/sites/va.eku.edu/files/files/Operation%20Veteran%20Success.pdf). EKU’s practice epitomizes NODA’s ethical principle of ensuring that students have access to materials that are relevant and pertain to their transition (http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.nodaweb.org/resource/resmgr/docs/revised_statements_of_ethica.pdf).

Institutions do face issues with student veterans self-identifying. As mentioned above, Griffin and Gilbert (2015) found student veterans often do not self-identify their veteran status. Often times this population seeks to leave their military identity behind (Horton, 2012). Concealing their identity as a veteran from those they believe might misunderstand them is common among this student population (Horton, 2012). Student veterans do not like to ask for help (Vacchi, 2012). They are used to being independent and solving their own problems leading many to not identify; if no one knows they are a veteran, they will not face stigma, and in their eyes, might receive better access to support (Vacchi, 2012). Schools must find ways to accurately identify this population if they are to maximize the benefits of a veteran-specific orientation.
Orientation plays a vital role facilitating the successful transition of new students to college (Mayhew et al., 2010). Successful orientations can assist students in getting involved earlier and more consistently in academic and social aspects of their school (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). This statement holds true for the student veteran as well. What an institution values, or does not value, is on display during orientation, and schools would be well served to keep that in mind as they look to assist various student populations transition to becoming a college student (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Understanding and examining the unique needs of student veterans, as well as their expectations of orientation, will not only assist them in their transition, it will send a powerful message that this student population is important to the institution and as much support as is needed will be provided to ensure their success (Mayhew et al., 2010).

**Financial Aid.** Tinto indicates that economics play an important role in one’s ability to attain an education (as cited in Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). The necessary investment and varying degrees of financial resources students have result in a prominent role for financial aid in education, especially for student veterans. Educational benefits make it easier for student veterans to attend college (Kirchner, 2015). As noted above, 790,507 student veterans received Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits in 2015 (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016a). That number does not include other federal and individual state benefits available to this population.

A study conducted by the American Council on Education (ACE), American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA), and the National Association of Veterans’ Program Administrators (NAVPA) of officials at 690 institutions across the United States revealed
that financial aid is the second most pressing matter faced by student veterans (McBain et al., 2012). Financial aid was identified by 71% of the institutions in the study as the second biggest issue student veterans face, after degree retention/completion (77%) (McBain et al., 2012). A study by Southwell, Whiteman, Wadsworth, and Barry (2016), however, found that student veterans did not visit the financial aid office at their institution more than their non-veteran peers, nor was there a significant difference in student veterans’ perception of their environment suggesting that financial aid might not be as pressing as previous research has indicated.

A further look at the literature pertaining to financial aid is required. There is a need to have services that work exclusively with the GI Bill and other veteran educational benefit processing (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Vacchi, 2012). Student veterans often are not aware of the amount of benefits they might be entitled to, or the time table needed to receive those benefits (American Council on Education, 2014). In McBain et al.’s (2012) study assessing programs and services for student veterans it was discovered that schools that had veteran-specific offices tailored their financial aid counseling specifically for student veterans more frequently (70% of the time) than did institutions without veteran-specific offices (61%). By reducing or eliminating information barriers, student veterans can feel more in control of their situation and develop better strategies for coping with their transition (Cook & Kim, 2009; DiRamio et al., 2008; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; McBain et al., 2012).

In addition to an exclusive system, this process should begin prior to the academic year as the financial aspect is one of the first obstacles that must be navigated once a student veteran is admitted to an institution (Wilson, 2014). Working with an individual
trained and dedicated solely to the GI Bill and other federal and state educational benefits student veterans might be using would provide a better understanding of the process thus minimizing mistakes, missed deadlines, and confusion from the student veteran (Norman et al., 2015). Communication is critical. Officials must be able to articulate why policies are in place and what changes might be on the horizon. This will assist student veterans in developing assets to help them navigate their situation in Schlossberg’s Transition model (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015).

Schools need to consider adjusting their institutional deadlines and payment dates for student veterans. Many student veterans report being unable to register for classes due to nonpayment, involuntary withdrawal from courses, and difficulty purchasing textbooks (Norman et al., 2015). A California study conducted by Norman et al. (2015) consisting of 31 student veteran participants in higher education found that 96.8% \((n = 30)\) of the student veterans were concerned with the prevalent late, uncertain, and variable benefit disbursement and viewed it as a significant challenge. Changes to the payment schedule to reflect the veteran educational benefit payment dates would assist student veterans’ academic transition. One of the schools studied by Griffin and Gilbert (2015) has gone so far as to credit student veterans accounts while waiting for distribution of benefits to eliminate any chance of account holds. Another institution studied by Griffin and Gilbert (2015) implemented a short-term, no-interest loan program to student veterans to cover any outstanding expenses due to delayed distribution of federal benefits.

The federal financial benefits student veterans bring to a college campus is appealing to institutions (Wilson, 2014). Financial aid plays a prominent role in the
student veterans’ education. Considering the necessary investment and numerous educational benefits this group has available to them, the more veteran-specific role the financial aid office can play, the better served everyone will be. To best serve their student veteran population, and best assist them in their transition, there needs to be consistent veteran-specific policies and personnel in place to accommodate student veterans’ special circumstances (American Council on Education, 2014; McBain et al., 2012). Southwell et al.’s (2016) study must be kept mind as we are reminded that it is how the student veteran perceives the change that makes it a transition. By having financial aid services specifically tailored to the student veteran population, institutions will have valuable resources available to every member of this student population that requires them.

**Student Involvement and Social Support.** Social participation and integration provides challenges for the student veteran (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). A study by McBain et al. (2012) found that 55% of (N = 690) the institutions participating in their study believed the social acculturation of student veterans was a priority issue. Assisting veterans in their social transition is a key component in helping veterans adjust to their academic surroundings. Veterans look to connect with those that have had similar experiences (Summerlot et al., 2009). Participants (N = 13) in a study by Gregg et al. (2016a) felt their transition became more manageable when they participated in groups that included other student veterans resulting in a more positive experience. A study by Griffin and Gilbert (2015) also revealed an increased comfort level when participants interacted with other student veterans.
There is a tremendous difference in both the culture and socialization between the college and military environment that requires that socialization resources be very inclusive to student veterans (Gregg et al., 2016a; Vacchi, 2012). These differences can lead to a socialization strategy best defined as blending in rather than actively participating in the college environment (DiRamio et al., 2008). Olsen, Badger, and McCuddy (2014) studied 10 student veterans, made up of both graduates and undergraduates, in Kentucky in an attempt to understand their college experience. The mean age of the participants was 30 ($SD = 7.23$), and their ages ranged from 23-47 (Olsen et al., 2014). The study found the student veteran participants in their study unanimously felt frustration over their social dealings with traditional students (Olsen et al., 2014).

The frustration felt by student veterans might be, in part, due to an inability to find common ground with their traditional college peers (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Olsen et al., 2014). A student veteran in the Olsen et al. (2014) study said, “Socially connecting with other [undergraduate] students is difficult . . . it’s hard to find common ground with other students” (p.104). Griffin and Gilbert (2015) received a very similar response from a student veteran at Big State in their study, “It is not that I didn’t feel welcome . . . I didn’t feel that I had common ground to meet them on” (p. 88). Barriers to student involvement and social support include: lack of common ground, maturity and attitude, being older than non-veteran peers, and having different backgrounds and life experiences (Gregg et al., 2016b; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Olsen et al., 2014).

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) state it is reasonable “to expect that student involvement will be greatest if new students can be immediately linked with people who are already invested in the institution, whether faculty or other students” (p. 650).
Pacarella and Terenzini referred to new students in general, and the concept applies to new student veterans as well. While this can be best addressed by utilizing a veteran-specific orientation, there are other ways to connect student veterans with others invested in the school. One student in Olsen et al.'s (2014) study voiced his thoughts regarding getting connected, “Social support would be the biggest purpose of the [ideal] program, to help [veterans] feel connected again to something” (p. 105). Extending those connections and involvement past the initial orientation can be done in many ways.

Services such as the ALIVE center at Western Kentucky University (WKU) can assist in combating blending in by providing the opportunity for veterans to connect with other veterans, nonveterans, and their community (Wilson, 2014). It is a resource that can assist the student veteran in participating in the academic and surrounding community. SVOs are a place where student veterans can socialize and interact with their peers without the military language and culture barrier impeding the process (Summerlot et al., 2009). The Student Veteran's Alliance and local chapters of Student Veterans of America are other great examples of SVOs that can facilitate the social interaction of student veterans (Wilson, 2014). Other efforts to enhance the socialization of veterans include: lounges in Military Student Service offices, Vet-2-Vet Peer Mentoring Programs, special campus social and/or cultural events, and Military Listservs for relevant announcements (McBain et al., 2012; Wilson, 2014).

Griffin and Gilbert (2015) discuss the consistency of social connection, or lack thereof, amongst student veterans. This highlights Schlossberg’s concept that it is the individual’s relationship to a transition that is important, not necessarily the transition itself (Schlossberg, 1984). Schlossberg (1984) states that what is a significant transition
to one might not be significant to another. The importance of an institution’s social
support efforts is really underlined by looking through this lens. By connecting student
veterans to others invested in the institution during a veteran-specific orientation, having
a veteran-specific office, and continuing those links and involvement past orientation,
institutions cannot only identify who needs what support but will also know where to
direct them to access it (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015).

A study by McBain et al. (2012) of 690 institutions across the U.S. evaluating
programs, services, and policies that institutions have in place to assist student veterans,
found that schools with a dedicated veterans office offered social acculturation
counseling more frequently (48%) than institutions that did not have a veteran-specific
office (27%). The same study also found that 58% of student veterans utilized social
events that were planned specifically for student veterans (McBain et al., 2012).

Participants in a study by Olsen et al. (2014) rated their comfort level in seeking social
support as a 6.5 (SD = 2.84) on a Likert scale of 1 (minimal comfort) to 10 (maximum
comfort). Research conducted in relation to the comfort level of being associated with
student veteran groups found student veterans rated their personal level of comfort as 7.4
(SD = 2.84) (Olsen et al., 2014).

The findings of a study by Gregg et al. (2016b) examining the coping and well-
being of student veterans transitioning to academia indicate that while this student
population might feel comfortable seeking social support and being associated with
student veteran groups, they are not always utilizing the resources available to them. In a
study of 13 undergraduate and graduate student veterans at the University of Kentucky
only 38% (n = 5) utilized the Veteran Resource Center, 38% (n = 5) sought out people or
situations for support within the university, and 62% \( (n = 8) \) communicated with peers or family members (Gregg et al., 2016b). These results seem to indicate that while student veterans feel comfortable with resources available to them, they do not always use them. This makes starting student veteran involvement and social support at orientation and extending it throughout their transition critical.

Student veterans come from significantly different backgrounds than their nonveteran classmates. They face many challenges having personal relationships in the college landscape (Barry et al., 2014). A veteran-specific orientation, a dedicated veterans office, SVOs, community programs such as the ALIVE Center, and peers and mentors that encourage socialization and student involvement are keys to helping them in this area. Norman et al. (2015) stated that a campus that embraces and supports the student veteran population and culture through a “visible presence of other veterans and veteran-specific cocurricular activities” (p. 708) can have a positive impact on the socialization and successful transition of student veterans to college student.

**Academic Support.** There are many aspects of academic support. A review of the literature found that prior learning assessment, academic advising, and advisor training, are key areas in the student veterans transition. Schools should have a special focus on the accreditation processes, admission, and transfer credit evaluation for student veterans (Wilson et al., 2016). Transfer assessment is critical as many student veterans have earned college credit through their military training (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Wilson, 2014). A veteran-specific focus in these services will go a long way towards enabling postsecondary institutions to excel at facilitating academic success among student veterans.
There is often confusion on the part of the student veteran as there is no consistent format for awarding college credit for their military courses (Vacchi, 2012). This is a major factor in the student veteran’s transition process as it affects the student veteran’s situation, as well as their strategies, for coping with their transition (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). The student veteran often arrives on campus with transfer credits, earned through distance learning or by taking classes part-time at either local colleges or satellite campuses on their military post (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Wilson, 2014). College credits are also earned by student veterans for their military service and training (Wilson, 2014).

Some schools are figuring out avenues to remedy this issue. WKU, for instance, utilizes the American Council on Education military transcript service to evaluate and award credits based on student veterans’ military training and leadership classes taken (Wilson, 2014). WKU has also implemented a portfolio program, whereby veterans put together a portfolio that will showcase their mastery of specific areas of study (Wilson, 2014). The portfolio is then forwarded to the appropriate faculty to evaluate for potential college credit.

It is important for faculty and staff dealing with transfer credit to keep the student veteran informed about the process. Often student veterans have learned skills through application during their military service resulting in an expectation of college credit (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). Griffin and Gilbert (2015) identified institutional structure, specifically credit transfer and allocation, as a main theme in their study of faculty, administrators, and student affairs professionals at seven different institutions, focusing on how institutions strive to assist student veterans in their transitions. The decision of whether or not to apply college credits earned while in the military towards the student
veteran’s degree program was found to be a challenge in this student group’s transition (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). In fact, Griffin and Gilbert (2015) reported in their study that it is not uncommon for student veteran’s application knowledge from the military to have gaps as opposed to the content knowledge required for completion of an institution’s education. Lacking certain areas of knowledge can be a barrier to the student veteran’s academic progress, particularly if they are missing the foundation needed for advanced coursework (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). Evaluation of transfer credit must be determined with the student veteran’s best interest in mind. Ensuring that student veterans have the information as to why, or why not, certain transfer credits count towards their degree program can help them understand their situation and assist them in developing strategies to cope.

Reduced College Level Examination Program rates for veterans is another avenue for student veterans to achieve college credit for their experience and knowledge (Wilson, 2014). Consistency and transparency in prior learning assessment is an important tool for institutions to use in supporting their student veteran population. Academic advisors should work closely with faculty and staff throughout the credit evaluation process. Being able to update and explain transfer credit decisions to student veterans will help them understand their situation and improve their strategies for their transition (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). By eliminating or reducing confusion in this area, schools can improve their academic support for this student population, as well as, their chances of a successful transition to becoming a college student.

Training academic advisors in the needs and culture of student veterans is another way to improve academic support and facilitate their success (DiRamio et al., 2011; Ryan
et al., 2011). A study by Wilson et al. (2016) of 102 student veterans found that 56.99% \((n = 58)\) found it very important/extremely important that institutions have academic and admissions counselors who are military veterans. While having counselors who are veterans might not always be feasible, training them properly in the unique needs of this student population is. Veterans in transition often come to campus unsure of how things work. As student veterans get used to their new institution, academic advising is a crucial aspect of their transition. The American Council on Education has recommended that to better ease student veterans' transition, institutions should increase one-on-one advising and train advisors on the culture and terminology of student veterans (American Council on Education, 2014). Academic advisors will benefit from understanding the unique transitions of student veterans. This knowledge will allow advisors to understand where student veterans are in the transition process and connect them to the appropriate personnel and services if needed (Ryan et al., 2011).

McBain et al. (2012) reported that 50.2% of the 690 institutions surveyed in their study indicated that they offered veteran-specific academic advising. It was also found that institutions having a dedicated veterans office were more likely to offer veteran-specific academic advising (45.1%) compared to campuses that did not have a dedicated veterans office (21%) (McBain et al., 2012). In a study examining facilitators and barriers to student veterans achieving their academic goals, Norman et al., (2015) found that 64.5% \((n = 20)\) of the participants were appreciative of veteran-specific academic services. The academic advisor is often one of the first persons a student veteran comes into contact with, and advisors will most likely have greater interaction with student veterans than many other positions on campus (Ryan et al., 2011). Having a veteran-
specific academic advisor will provide support to the student veteran above and beyond traditional academic services and might help ease their transition to college student.

Prior learning assessment, academic advising, and advisor training are areas of academic support that the literature review has shown are key components of the student veterans transition to becoming a colleges student. An exploratory study by Olsen et al. (2014) seeking to understand the student veteran’s college experience revealed that the 10 participants reported a mean score of 7.4 ($SD = 2.2$) on a Likert scale of 1 (minimal comfort) to 10 (maximum comfort) pertaining to the comfort level seeking academic advising. While the study shows that student veterans are comfortable seeking out support, it is important to ensure that they are receiving support from trained, caring advisors that are familiar with their unique circumstances. Only with the proper training and resources in place, can institutions hope to best assist student veterans in their transition.

**Military Friendly Institutions.** Veteran friendly institutions provide support and are aware of the varying degrees of support individual student veterans might seek (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). There is various terminology and criteria in the literature that define military friendly. As discussed earlier, it is debatable as to whether any institution is entirely military friendly. Identifying and accommodating this student population are important things to do. It is more important to understand all of the resources schools utilize rather than know their definition of military friendly. Through an understanding of the commonalities that best serve this student population, institutions can hope to create and foster an acceptance of the group and their culture, as well as offer a variety of services to support student veterans in their transition to college student (Wilson, 2014).
One way to develop and foster acceptance of student veterans and their culture is through Green Zone (GZ) programs. Developed by Virginia Commonwealth University, GZ strives to create a military friendly environment by training individuals about the unique needs of this student population (Nichols-Casebolt, 2012). There are three key principles behind GZ initiatives. First, there must be an inclination to assist student veterans in need, second, individuals must attend GZ training, and lastly a public acknowledgement of being military friendly must be stated (Nichols-Casebolt, 2012). Modeled after LGBT “safe zones”, GZ offers safe spaces for student veterans to turn to for assistance and support in their transition to becoming a college student (Nichols-Casebolt, 2012).

This study will focus on the following characteristics to define military friendly: institutions that have educational benefit offices, transfer assessment, orientation and academic transition, and military student services designed to facilitate a smooth transition to college with student veteran’s unique needs in mind (Strickley, 2009; Wilson, 2014). Common features of the military friendly school include: established veterans offices, veterans clubs, at least one administrator who is a veteran or a veteran’s spouse, veteran-specific trained faculty and staff, veteran admission preference, and priority registration for student veterans (Altman, 2015).

Military friendly institutions, overall, provide resources and support above and beyond the average school to emphasize socialization and student veteran involvement, while working to identify and remove any barriers to this group’s transition (Norman et al., 2015; Strickley, 2009; Summerlot et al., 2009; Wilson, 2014). Military friendly schools support the cultural, social, and academic challenges this student population faces...
and works to provide and connect them to resources, support, and strategies to best facilitate their transition to college student.

Summary

A review of the literature has shown the need for accepting a military culture and providing specific student veteran services. Student veterans indicate a strong need for veteran-specific student services (American Council on Education, 2014; Jones, 2013; Moon & Schma, 2011; Norman et al., 2015; Wilson, 2014; Wilson et al., 2016). Ways to develop that culture is to understand and facilitate their transition through an orientation process that focuses on the specific student veteran needs and to make dedicated resources available. Resources the literature review shows that support the student veterans transition include: financial aid focusing on their unique needs, actively supporting and promoting socialization of student veterans, training academic advisors, having an established dedicated veterans office, and creating a military friendly institution aware of the needs and culture student veterans bring to campus.

According to Schlossberg (1984), the predominant question for helpers is how to assist those in transition develop the social support systems they need to cope with their transition. It is helpful to look at the ecological perspective as student veterans transition to becoming a college student. The responsibility, in this transition, should not be placed entirely on the student veteran or the institution, but instead, on the interaction between the two (Schlossberg, 1984). Institutions must continually strive to provide the best resources, connect this student population to them, and promote their involvement. The student veteran, in turn, must be aware of the resources available to them, be willing to utilize them, as well as connect socially with their peers. By focusing on the interaction
between the individual and the institution, framing veterans as students in transition, and utilizing Schlossberg’s framework, institutions might better facilitate student veterans successful transition to becoming a college student (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015).
CHAPTER III

Methods

This study utilized a qualitative inquiry approach designed to look at how student veterans viewed their transition to becoming a college student. This research was designed to explore how this student population described their transition, and also looked at how this group described the formal orientation process. Finally, an examination of what specific services student veterans utilized or sought out, as well as the point they became acquainted with said resource(s), and the degree it was beneficial to them were explored. A qualitative approach allowed for capturing the depth and essence of the student veterans’ experience while allowing for additional probes to understand their experience (Fraenkel, 2015; Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005).

Design of the Study

The study used a qualitative design, specifically a narrative approach. Data was collected by interviews conducted from a purposive sample of student veterans. A narrative inquiry was chosen for this project because, “narrative research issues claims about the meaning life events hold for people. It makes claims about how people understand situations, others, and themselves” (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 476). Understanding how individuals organize and make sense of past actions and life’s experiences is crucial to understanding the meaning of events (Kohler Riessman, 1993). Six purposively selected student veteran participants from two different military friendly schools were interviewed using approved interview protocol (Appendix A).
Research Site

The research sites were two military friendly institutions. For this study, military friendly institutions were those that have educational benefit offices, transfer assessment, orientation and academic transition programs, and military student services designed to facilitate a smooth transition to college with student veteran’s unique needs in mind (Strickley, 2009; Wilson, 2014). These two specific institutions were chosen for their support of student veterans as well as the veteran-specific focus of their dedicated veterans offices. One of the institutions chosen has a somewhat low student veteran population compared to the large overall student population while the other has a large student veteran population. Both institutions embody the definition of military friendly identified in this study with contrasting institutional missions and student veteran populations. While a review of two very different schools was deemed prudent to examine the unique perspectives student veterans at each institution might provide, this did not truly come to fruition. There are indeed differences, but the perspectives of all the participants were unique without preference to institution as the study will show. I will refer to the military friendly schools as North Technical University (NTU) and Rolling Hills University (RHU).

NTU is a public research university renowned for its contributions to science, technology, and engineering located in the Midwest. Total enrollment at NTU as of Fall semester 2016 is 40,451. The actual number of student veterans is difficult to ascertain as NTU experiences trouble with this student population self-identifying. The Veterans Success Center (VSC), which opened in the summer of 2013, stated when contacted, that they have approximately 425 student veterans. The VSC provides many resources to the
school’s student veterans including: assistance with processing GI Bill benefits, sharing other financial resources, connecting student veterans with both on and off campus resources, open study areas from 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, a place for the NTU Student Veteran Organization to meet, a veterans mentoring program, Green Zone training to faculty and staff, and more.

The Veterans Peer Advisors (VPA) program is a support program that pairs current NTU student veterans with new student veterans to help them in their transition to becoming a college student. VPA conducted its second student-led orientation program for new student veterans in 2016. Unfortunately, both of the participants from NTU transitioned into the school prior to the development of the VPA program. The local Student Veteran Organization is a registered student organization (RSO) that strives to provide information, support, and camaraderie to student veterans. They are responsible for gaining priority registration for all student veterans at NTU. The last revision to the organization’s constitution was January 21, 2010, so the organization is not new.

RHU is a public regional, comprehensive institution in the East South Central U.S. with a total student population of 16,954. The student veteran population is over 1,200 students; this number might contain veterans’ dependents utilizing educational benefits. The Military and Veterans Affairs Office (MVAO) is a one-stop resource center for all student veterans enrolled at RHU. The stand-alone office, which houses a veterans lounge, moved to their current location in Fall of 2012.

The Military and Veterans Affairs Office program, debuted in 2010 and includes: no admission fees for undergraduate student veterans and their dependents, veteran priority registration, the Veterans Bridge to College Success cohort class, and a veterans
orientation course. RHU is home to a local SVA chapter, who help provide peer mentoring through their VET-2-VET mentoring program, holds regular meetings, and strives to assist incoming student veterans in their transition to college.

The directors working in the military assistance type offices were contacted and agreed to work with the researcher in identifying appropriate participants. The director at NTU assisted in identifying participants by posting a flyer advertising the study on the organization’s social media sites, posting physical flyers in the VSC, and sending email blasts to all identified student veterans at NTU. The director at RHU identified participants that he personally knew and contacted them with the study’s information. The participants then randomly contacted the researcher for participation in the study. The research sites’ Institutional Review Board (IRB) Offices were contacted for approval and guidance as to how to proceed in securing participants. NTU provided a letter of support for the study, and no other action was required. RHU provided a similar letter of support and required that an IRB Authorization Agreement be initiated by the home institution and be signed off on by RHU’s Associate Vice President for Research. The document was executed and is included in the complete IRB folder for this research study. The interviews were conducted via Skype and over the telephone.

Participants

Because the focus of this study was the transition of student veterans to becoming a college student, a purposively selected sample of six student veterans (four at RHU and two at NTU) enrolled in courses at their institution were interviewed. Student veterans were required to be in at least their second semester at the school. Six student interviews were deemed sufficient due to the use of the narrative inquiry method. Narrative
inquiries involve lengthy, storied texts that "serve as evidence for personal meaning" (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 479). These storied texts that the narrative provides about how individuals make meaning of the events in their life provide the best possible evidence about their experiences (Polkinghorne, 2007). According to Kohler Riessman (1993), this is "especially true of difficult life transitions" (p. 4). A description of each participant has been provided below.

Aston is a junior, male, Caucasian at RHU. He is a 29-year-old Army veteran and works part-time in his institution's veterans office. Earl is a sophomore, male, Caucasian at RHU. He is a 24-year-old Marine Corps veteran, and he works part-time at this institution's veterans office. Peter is a senior, male, Caucasian at RHU. He is a 43-year-old Air Force retiree that previously worked part-time at his institution's veterans office but does not work currently. Bob is a sophomore, male, Caucasian at RHU. He is a 27-year-old Air Force veteran and works full-time at a local factory. Carlton is a junior, male, Caucasian at NTU. He is a 30-year-old Air Force veteran and is in the Air Force National Guard, does paid research with a professor on campus, and volunteers at his institution's veterans office. Neville is a junior, male, Caucasian at NTU. He is a 24-year-old Marine Corps veteran and works part-time at this institution's veterans office.

The research project was made up of six individual semi-structured interviews. Demographic information including: age, gender, branch of service, and race/ethnicity was asked. Participants were identified by contacting the institution's IRB office, veterans office, and veterans office directors. The participants chosen for participation were not provided an informed consent form due to the remote nature of the interviews. Form I of the IRB process, requesting a waiver of documentation of informed consent
due to the minimal risk of the study and remote nature of the interviews, was requested and granted. The purpose and design of the study and that the student veterans' participation was voluntarily and could be discontinued at any time was discussed and agreed upon prior to moving forward with the interviews.

Instrument

The semi-structured interviews consisted of demographic questions, opinion questions, and knowledge and experience questions. Guided and probing questions as well as prompts such as, “What has assisted your transition to college student?” (prompt for reasons not addressed in research questions), were used to learn the essence of the topic and uncover participant’s feelings (Appendix A). Questions regarding the experiences of the participants such as, “How has the climate/culture towards student veterans been,” were used to verify researcher observations and data meanings (Krefting, 1991). Interviews were audio and video recorded, dependent upon the nature of the interview, in April and May of 2017, and transcribed no later than three days after the conclusion of each interview.

Data Collection & Analysis

Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were conducted via Skype, or telephone, once the purposive sample was identified and selected through communication with the veterans center directors. Field notes were also utilized to allow the researcher to record on-going commentary consisting of observations and analyses (Van Maanen, 1988). The interviews were conducted in April and May of 2017. Interviews were audio or video recorded, dependent upon the nature of the interview, and transcribed within three days of each interview completion.
Transcribing ensured that all features of the interviewee's speech were recorded, so that important information was not missed (Kohler Riessman, 1993). Transcribed data was then analyzed for commonalities. The data was coded into themes and categories that arose regarding the participants’ perception of their transition to college student. The coding of the data allowed for the discovery of patterns and themes (Saldana, 2013). According to Agar and Hobbs (1982) the validity of the data is increased by addressing the coherence of the global, local, and themal aspects (as cited in Kohler Riessman, 1993). The stories of how the student veterans in this study transitioned to becoming a college student addressed the global aspect. These are their stories about past actions (Kohler Riessman, 1993). The narratives of the participants were used to relate events to each other addressing the local aspect (Kohler Riessman, 1993). By identifying portions of the interview data pertaining to repeated and specific themes the themal aspect was addressed (Kohler Riessman, 1993). According to Agar and Hobbs (1982), presenting and understanding the narratives “in terms of the three kinds of coherence, the interpretation is strengthened” (as cited in Kohler Riessman, 1993, p. 29). This data was subjected to an external audit by the thesis advisor.

**Treatment of Data**

Data was collected using audio or video recordings of interviews, transcription of the interviews, field notes taken by the researcher during the interviews and while transcribing the data, and coded data from interview transcription. Verbal informed consent was received from each participant prior to the interview beginning. All identifying data was converted to alpha-numeric codes and pseudonyms to protect the participants’ identities. The researcher and thesis advisor were the only individuals with
access to this data. All data was stored in a password restricted account only accessible
by the researcher and thesis advisor. After three years, per IRB policy, the research data
will be shredded and destroyed.

Summary

“To encourage those we study to attend to and tell about important moments in
their lives, it is necessary to provide a facilitating context in the research interview”
(Kohler Riessman, 1993, p. 54). This study utilized a qualitative inquiry approach
designed to elicit different information pertaining to how student veterans view their
transition to becoming a college student. This research was designed to explore how this
student population describes their transition. These interviews will assist other student
veterans, institutions, and professionals in understanding the interviewees experience as
well as build upon the extant literature of student veterans in transition.
CHAPTER IV
Narratives

This chapter will examine the narratives of each of the study’s participants. The reason for this chapter is to scrutinize, or unpack, the words, viewpoints, and stories of the student veterans interviewed (Kohler Riessman, 1993). This unpacking of events will allow for a better understanding of how student veterans make meaning and order of their experiences transitioning to becoming a college student (Kohler Riessman, 1993). To discover and clarify how these students view their transition to college, specifically, their background, process to college, transition to school, orientation experience, and student services utilized will be shared and explored. The narrativization of six student veterans’ stories from two different institutions will be recorded to tell of past actions and the way the individuals comprehend those actions allowing the reader to make meaning of their experiences (Kohler Riessman, 1993).

Aston

Background. Aston is a Caucasian, 29-year-old junior in college. Aston enlisted in the Army at 20 years of age. The idea of joining the military surfaced at a young age. “I always kind of had the idea of doing it ever since I was a kid.” Family influence played a large role in Aston’s decision to enlist.

My father was a tanker, and it just became something I was interested in. My brother had already went through, and my sister was in the military already. When the time came about, it just seemed like it was the right thing to do. I wanted to be a tanker so I joined.
After a yearlong deployment to Iraq and service abroad in Korea and Hawaii, Aston separated from the Army.

Aston had decided to go to college after leaving the Army. “That was kind of the main point of me getting out of the Army was to go to school.” Aston and his wife moved to Georgia to be near her family. The decision to go to school, however, was put on hold as Aston faced some hurdles to actually enrolling. “Once I got to Georgia it kind of . . . the cost of living there was a little bit higher.” Even with the benefits of his Post-9/11 GI Bill, Aston did not feel he was in a position to go to college. “Umm . . . yeah, it was, it was a lot higher cost of living, and the amount I could have gotten from the GI Bill was not . . . wouldn’t have covered it.” Aston ended up getting divorced from his wife and went on to work as a crane operator and truck driver to “kind of save up money” to go to school.

Several factors led to Aston deciding to attend RHU. Much like Aston’s decision to enlist in the Army, family influence again played a role. “My brother was going here at the time.” The manner in which RHU handled veterans was another factor. “I heard about this school’s reputation of having a military friendly background.” The program Aston was interested in majoring in was an important factor as well. “I looked them up, and they had the program I was interested in. I decided to apply. Because my brother was here I just decided to move closer to family.” Having Aston’s desired program, RHU’s military friendliness, and family influence were the reasons Aston ultimately enrolled at RHU.

**Process to College.** Aston applied to more schools than just RHU. “I had actually applied to Northern Arizona University . . . I got accepted there at Ohio State.”
Overall, according to Aston, there were not many issues with the application process. Aston identified as a veteran on his applications. "Mostly, I identified as a veteran so that I could waive the application fee."

Like many student veterans, Aston had prior college credit from another university as well as from his military training and experience. "I did a little bit of coursework at American Military University prior to coming to RHU. So those credits transferred really well." In order to receive any college credit for his military training and experience, Aston would have to request his Joint Service Transcript (JST) from the Army. This is not something he has done. On having his JST sent to RHU Aston revealed, "I still haven’t got my JSTs evaluated yet here. I’m not really looking forward to using those credits because none of them really apply to my degree."

**Transition to School.** When it came time to head to RHU and transition to school Aston explained, "I’d lived here [RHU] for a few months because I had got here a little bit early to prepare to start going to school. I guess it really wasn’t that significant of a challenge or anything." Aston utilized RHU’s Military and Veterans Assistance Office (MVAO) to assist him in his transition. The MVAO office was there to help Aston ensure that he managed his educational benefits correctly. "I came over here [MVAO] and got enrolled and made sure that the DVA was aware that I was using my benefits.” Aston explained that providing support and accurate information was also something the MVAO did as he visited them to “make sure that I was doing the correct things and filling out the right forms.”

While, in Aston’s words, the transition to school was not a challenge, the academic transition was another story. "Well it had been a while. This is one thing that’s
significant,” stated Aston. The gap in education was a significant challenge to Aston as he made his academic transition to college.

I think the biggest challenge was just, it had been a while since I had taken certain types of classes, you know, you kind of lose that proficiency a little, like Algebra obviously. After at least 10, I think it was like 13 years since I had taken a class, so that was probably the most significant thing that I was challenged in.

Aston confessed to not having done “very well in school” previously, and the academic transition to college, specifically the gap in his education, presented a real challenge.

Aston’s social transition to college was impacted by the fact that he is an adult learner. “I live off campus. I have three kids at the house that I take care of.” Living off campus “hasn’t effected it negatively at all,” stated Aston. Taking care of three children and doing homework in addition to working part-time in the MVAO, however, has made socialization on campus a challenge for Aston. There were a few RSOs that Aston was interested in joining, but his schedule and commitments prevented him from doing so as he explained, “It would have been a lot more time that I don’t really have.”

While Aston has not had any negative institutional interactions and stated, “I’ve never had a problem at any of the offices I’ve visited,” he does not always identify himself as a student veteran. “I don’t really go out of my way, or display myself as a veteran too often. It’s not like I’m against it. I personally don’t see a need. I’m out of the Army.” Aston does not see a reason to announce that he is a veteran. He is no longer in the Army and talked mainly about the issues at hand as well as ones that might be encountered in the future.
Orientation Experience. Aston did not participate in RHU’s orientation experience in any capacity. He had more than 20 credit hours of college upon admittance and therefore was not required to attend orientation as per RHU’s policy. Aston chose not to attend orientation and did not feel as though he needed to. “I didn’t really need it.” Aston is one to discover answers on his own and operate independently for the most part. Aston explained by saying, “I was able to do plenty of research on my own. I know some people kind of struggle a little bit when they transition to college, and it’s a little bit hard to find things.” Aston reflected that not attending orientation has not negatively impacted him, “I’ve got along just fine.”

Student Services Utilized. Aston utilizes the Post-9/11 GI Bill to go to RHU. By knowing he planned to attend college upon separation from the military and applying for his educational benefits early, Aston was able to avoid many of the pitfalls that student veterans often encounter. Aston explained:

I ended up applying for my benefits kind of early. I know some people, when they end up getting to school, when they come in they say, ‘What do I need to do?’ It usually takes a month and a half to get their certificate of eligibility. I applied right when I got out of the military so it wasn’t hard for me.

RHU has a user-friendly web page for student veterans to request their benefits every semester. The DVA certifying official, located in the MVAO, provides a quick turnaround for processing the benefit requests. This procedure has worked well for Aston as he stated, “I’ve never been paid late or anything like that. It has all been pretty simple.” Initial certification of his Post-9/11 GI Bill, processing, and payment as well as
the fact that everything he needs to accomplish these tasks are located in the MVAO has made things go smoothly for Aston.

The Admissions office put Aston in touch with services he might need to work with. Aston explained, “When I was applying, calling the admissions office, they kind of directed me to the right people.” Aston has utilized his advisors as well as the registrar’s office and stated, “The registers (sic) I’ve called them a few times in order to make sure that all my classes were transferred from the other college that I was going to.” Contact with his advising office helped to ensure “that I’m working through my degree plan in an appropriate manner.”

Another service that Aston has utilized and sought out is tutoring. Aston explained, “Here at RHU, they have a tutoring center built in the Math department’s building. I’ve used that a few times, especially when I didn’t understand some stuff. That was a good resource.” Aside from tutoring and the aforementioned services, he has not used many services on campus. As Aston tells us, “I haven’t really had too much experience with any of the other offices.” Aston became acquainted with many of these offices prior to beginning classes on campus at RHU thanks to the Admissions office. He has utilized these services to ensure that he has the credits he has earned, is on the right track towards degree completion, as well as to fully understand his course material.

Earl

Background. Earl is a Caucasian, 24-year-old sophomore in college. Earl signed the paperwork to enlist in the Marine Corps at 17-years-old. The idea of joining the military was not an idea he had ever seriously entertained. “I had always talked about military, but never really seriously considered it.” Earl’s enlistment was not well thought
out or planned. Earl explained that he “went into a recruiting office on a whim with a friend of mine.” After signing the enlistment paperwork, the then 17-year-old Earl “stopped going to high school.” Once he graduated from high school, Earl left for boot camp. Earl described how it happened by stating, “Two weeks after I graduated high school I left for Parris Island to go join the Marine Corps.” Earl was deployed twice to the Pacific before separating from the military.

Military Transition Schooling is something the Marine Corps requires their members to do prior to separation. Earl spoke highly of this schooling stating, “I really want to stress, I guess, the importance of the transition schooling that we do before we get out.” The decision to attend college occurred when Earl went through his Military Transition Schooling.

I was on my second deployment and was doing all my transition stuff. . . . I went through the transition school they make us do. I decided I wanted to be a paramedic due to the research they [USMC] made me do and my own personal interests.

Earl did not, however, find anything in his research that he felt, at the time, would be worth his GI Bill.

Still in the research process of what he wanted to major in, Earl separated from the military and lived with his mom for the summer. She was an important avenue of support for him. Earl stated, “She helped me get everything set up.” Another family member, Earl’s sister, was also a support system as Earl explained, “My sister is a year ahead of me in school, and she kind of had . . . advice for me about going to college.” An external influence, along with settling on a major led Earl to RHU. “My girlfriend had
been here [RHU] so, and I was looking at a nursing program. That’s what brought me to RHU.” The program Earl desired, a girlfriend that had been there, and the support of his family all led Earl to decide to attend RHU.

**Process to College.** Once Earl decided on nursing as his major, he looked into institutions other than just RHU. “I did look briefly at like University of Urban-city, umm, just because I’m from the Urban-city area. So, I looked at that, but RHU had a better nursing program.” After settling on RHU due the strength of their nursing program, Earl went about applying to the school. Earl did identify as a veteran on the application and described the process:

> On the application, it does ask . . . it did ask me if I was a veteran. It was just a way for me to be coded. I get to register early being a veteran here. I get to . . . I didn’t have to pay any type of application fee. It helps me. So yeah, it did ask, and um, I answered.

The application process went smoothly for Earl. He identified as a veteran and understood that by doing so, he would reap some benefits such as priority registration, waived placement test fees, and no application fees.

Earl was aware that he had earned college credit from his military training and experience, but he was not concerned with having it applied to RHU. In the Marine Corps Earl’s military occupational specialty was artillery, and that caused him to believe it would not be worth the effort. An encounter with RHU’s DVA Coordinator changed his mind.

The coordinator explained that if he sent his JST to RHU, the school would match up the things he did in the military with courses the university had an equivalent for. Earl
was still, “not real worried about it.” The DVA Coordinator would not be deterred, however. Earl retells her response, “She was like, ‘No, you need to because it gets you out a . . . the least you’ll get is . . . get out wellness credits, the wellness requirement for the university.” Earl relented and had his JST sent to the school. Earl discussed the outcome of having his JST evaluated and shared:

I did. I got the nine that we get; you get three for health and wellness and then six for military science, which usually are free electives. But I ended up getting a couple more just kind of random ones they considered upper division classes which helped my upper division requirements.

The institutional support of the DVA Coordinator in the MVAO helped Earl decide to have his JST sent and evaluated which led to him keeping the college credits he had earned while in the military.

The support of Earl’s family played a large role in helping him learn the ropes as he transitioned to RHU. Earl described the impact of his mom and his sister. “They definitely helped ease it from leaving the military and going to school. The fact that they were able to help me transition made it a little bit easier.” His sister, in particular, assisted him as he transitioned from the rigid military environment to the less-structured college atmosphere. While talking about the support his sister provided Earl shared:

She had already done, like the freshman thing . . . . all you’re gonna need is a couple of notebooks, a pack of pens, backpack, and a laptop. You’ll be fine. It definitely helped make it a little bit easier because I was stressing out because my . . . . what I was used to was being told, you know, what to bring and how to
bring it . . . [now] you just kind of wing it. No packing list for me. My sister
definitely helped ease that move.

While Earl’s sister was instrumental in helping him begin his college transition, his mom
supported him by providing him with a place to live. Earl did not have to worry about
where he was going to live, and he did not even have to go to college right away. Having
that support system was vital to Earl’s transition as he shared, “I had my entire family on
the other side that, they were supportive of me.”

When talking about other veterans Earl stated, “There are definitely veterans that
get out . . . they don’t have that support system.” The support of Earl’s family played a
large role as he began his time at RHU. Earl reflected on that particular transition, “I was
just fortunate. It was easy.” Earl’s mom and his sister provided support, and his sister
helped him with the strategies he needed to head away to school.

**Transition to School.** One of the first hurdles Earl faced after he arrived on
campus and transitioned to college was creating and building a class schedule. Once
again Earl found institutional support from the MVAO. Earl explained:

> Ms. Wilson [DVA Coordinator] she is, she was terrific in helping me get . . .
> helping me walk through some of the, like, issues I was having where I didn’t
> know who to go to. I’d run into, I can’t make a schedule.

Making a schedule where all the classes fit together was a challenge for Earl. When it
came time to ensure he had a schedule that allowed him time to do the things that needed
to be done throughout the day, Ms. Wilson proved to be a valuable resource. Earl went
on to describe the process:
So, she then broke down when I would be able to go to class, if I wanted to do mornings, evenings, afternoons. And make sure that I had some time in there to eat, and then, you know, do those other kinds of things. She really helped me make it into a workable schedule that I could actually do.

Finding himself in an academic setting once again proved to be another trial Earl faced as he transitioned to RHU. The fact remained that since he had signed the paperwork to enlist in the Marine Corps, Earl had stopped putting forth much effort into high school. Now he was beginning classes at RHU, and he faced the challenge of sitting in a classroom once again. Earl described what it was like for him:

I wasn’t used to sitting at a desk for three and four hours a day or anything like that. I worked on my feet all day. It was one of those things where being able to sit and focus and absorb and take tests and everything like that wasn’t something that I was used to anymore.

It was not only the academic setting that challenged Earl, it was the added struggle of adapting to the military versus college transition. The structured military environment had been replaced, leaving things totally up to Earl as he shared:

I was also completely, like, on my own program. Go to class if you want to. Wake up for your 8:00 a.m. if you want to. Nobody was standing over my shoulder telling me, like you’ve got to do these things. Now I had nobody telling me to go.

Being required to sit at a desk and focus for hours on end was not the only transition Earl had to make academically. Having to do the course work was a hurdle as Earl described, “You have to go to this school that you haven’t done in five years to do subjects that you
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haven’t done in a long time.” Earl mentioned English and Chemistry as examples of subjects where he had troubles. English was never a strong subject for Earl as he stated, “I’ve never been a strong English person.” Writing papers, in particular, he said had “never been a strong suit of mine.” The last Chemistry class Earl had taken was in his sophomore year in high school. Now, he found himself enrolled in general, organic, and biochemistry all combined. “I was freaking out,” was how he described it.

Earl found institutional support as he “was able to talk to, a lot of the professors.” In addition to the faculty support he received, Earl turned to a fellow veteran for support as well. Earl described his experience in Chemistry class:

I actually was in that class with an Army veteran who is a friend of mine now. We both worked together; we’re like, this is much better. It was definitely hard, but just because of the, the, it’s not something I was used to. I ended up pulling an “A” in that class.

As Earl faced challenges in creating a schedule, returning to an academic setting, transitioning from the military to college, and completing the academic work he found support at the MVAO, from faculty, and from his fellow veterans.

Earl lived on campus in the residence halls his first year at RHU but now lives in an apartment off campus. He works at the MVAO on a work-study program. Due to the flexibility, willingness to work around his schedule, and leniency of the office, Earl does not feel as though his employment has a negative impact on his social transition. Earl described what he meant about his job, explaining, “I don’t have to rush out of class and get to work and then work a 12-hour shift or anything like that. If I’m not helping students, then I do my homework.”
The interactions Earl has had with professors has been positive at RHU. Earl stated, “I’ve never, honestly, at RHU never run into a professor that I haven’t liked in some capacity or another.” He described his appreciation for the faculty he has had, sharing, “What I really appreciated about it, a lot of the teachers, is that they didn’t take it as, you just got out of high school; you should know these things.” Teachers were willing to stay after class to answer questions and teach material as if it was brand new. Earl found these things very helpful. Staff interactions have also been positive for Earl. While discussing his dealings with faculty and staff, Earl summed things up by saying, “The professors helped me while I was in school. My advisors were good. They were great.”

Earl’s interactions with RHU students have not been negative. While describing student interactions, Earl shared, “I’ve never been attacked or anything. No one has ever yelled at me for doing . . . for being a vet or anything like that. I’ve never told my story and someone’s called me some sort of name or anything like that.” Along with the amount of veteran and military members enrolled at RHU, Earl provided a couple of other reasons as to why he thought that was the case. “I mean this is definitely a veteran friendly school. Very rarely do you go into a class that doesn’t have at least one veteran or National Guardsman, or something like that.”

After living in the residence hall his first year, Earl made a group of friends. Unfortunately, due to transfer, graduation, and a foreign exchange student going back home, Earl needed some people to socialize with. It was a family influence that convinced him to look at a new strategy to ease his social transition. Earl joined a fraternity. Earl’s sister, who had helped him prepare to head to RHU, was now the one
who, as Earl described, “pushed for that, and I appreciate her so much for doing it, because she made me go, and now I really enjoy it.”

In Earl’s fraternity, there are “a lot of military.” Earl described why this was important to him and his social transition:

That was one of the reasons I picked it. It’s like half is military affiliated in one way or another. I’m a guy that likes . . . I’ve always been a part of something. So that gave me a little bit more . . . gave me a more structured type . . . you know I had people I could lean on. I have guys who, that I’m friends with here that have been to some of the same places I’ve been. . . . your certain type of veteran stories, like deployment stories, or whatever it is, that some people just don’t really ‘get’, but you really like to tell. Guys that can actually understand what I’m talking about and appreciate the stories.

Earl will disclose his veteran status when necessary. There are times when he needs to register for class and cannot get a hold of his advisor. In these instances, he seeks out the DVA Coordinator to contact his advisor. As a student veteran Earl receives priority registration, and it is necessary to reveal his veteran status. It is in situations such as this, when being a veteran makes a difference, he is okay with disclosing. As a whole, Earl believes, “It’s not a get out of jail free card, or let me do whatever I want.” While discussing his veteran identity, Earl made his opinions clear:

I kind of pride myself a little bit that I am not one of those . . . I’m not . . . there are certain archetypes when it comes to veterans, and one of them is the, kind of, ‘gimme, gimme, gimme’ type veteran that thinks that they have some sort of entitlement because of the things that they’ve done.” Nobody owes me anything.
Earl takes great pride in his military identity and displayed his pride and independence. These characteristics were at odds with those that he described as archetype veterans.

**Orientation Experience.** Earl was not required to go to orientation at RHU, stating, “I was old enough where I didn’t have to go.” Even though Earl could have opted out of orientation he decided to attend because, in his words, “I felt like it could only benefit me.” When discussing why he made the decision to attend orientation, Earl shared, “I decided to go there because it just felt like it was the smarter move to be able to get some type of . . . to learn things that I wouldn’t know.”

It turned out that there were indeed many things to be learned by attending orientation. Earl described the benefits of the orientation process by saying:

> It was at orientation, I met Ms. Wilson [DVA Coordinator working out of the MVAO]. I learned how to register for my classes. I learned how to, you know, different things about, aspects, of, college that I wouldn’t have known otherwise.

> We met the college of health and sciences advisors and stuff like that.

While learning about many of the important things he would need to know, Earl also first learned about the Gurus and the Geeks at orientation. The Gurus and the Geeks are two student-run organizations that are present at RHU to help students. The Gurus are more of a tutoring group, while the Geeks main focus is computer science and information technology. Overall, Earl found orientation to be helpful and shared, “The most helpful part was just they, they just give you a lot of information, but it was information that I would not have known how to get otherwise.”

While Earl found orientation helpful, that did not mean that it was without its issues. Earl was not designated as a veteran in any way and was treated as any new
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Student would be. Earl described his feelings as the students were separated by major:

It was a little of a culture shock because I was 22 at the time, and I was going through and, you know, veteran with deployments, and yada-yada-yada, and I was there with high school kids. That [age difference] was strange.

While not a fan of the games they played at the new student orientation, that was not the biggest issue he had with the program. Earl shared what bothered him the most, “It was more of a thing with me that I was like . . . I had to listen to this kid, essentially, as I saw it, that was trying to tell me what to do and how to go places.”

Student Services Utilized. Earl utilizes his Post-9/11 GI Bill to attend RHU. He was proactive, and his GI Bill was certified and accepted “before I actually got off deployment or was discharged.” RHU has a full-time and part-time DVA certifying official that work out of the MVAO. The certification process is managed quickly and smoothly. In Earl’s experience, however, the payment process can be a little late, “especially in the fall, because that’s where they’re like the most overloaded.”

In Earl’s first semester he did encounter issues with the disbursement of his GI Bill funds. An individual’s first semester is often a time when payments can be late due to the fact that, as Earl explained, “they have to make files and check things and that other kind of stuff.” Earl’s first semester issues were compounded by the fact that there was a software overhaul. Earl described the situation he endured:

School started in August. I believe it was mid to late October before I saw any money. My first semester it was a little bit more of a struggle just because I was living in a dorm. I had to pay out of pocket because the GI Bill doesn’t pay for dorms. They pay housing, to me, that I have to pay out my own pocket.
Earl received institutional support from RHU in this instance as many of the late fees he had incurred were forgiven, and “they let me set up a payment plan way after what I was allowed to.” Earl eventually got paid all he was owed. The institutional support extends to any instance where educational disbursements are late as Earl said, “The school does really well with like, not hassling you if the money is not in right on time, because they see that you’re a veteran waiting on the GI Bill.”

That particular semester was the only time that Earl has ever experienced any issues with the payment of his GI Bill benefits. In Earl’s words, “It’s like clockwork; I could set my watch to it.” Being proactive with his initial GI Bill certification, the support of the MVAO, and institutional support and strategies in times of payment issues has helped Earl’s financial aid experience go well at RHU.

When discussing what other services he has sought assistance from Earl stated primarily just the MVAO. The one-stop shop experience of the MVAO has made Earl’s experience go smoothly as he explained, “Nine times out of 10, if I have an issue on campus . . . I talk to Ms. Wilson [DVA Coordinator], and she’ll make the call and send me to the right people.”

He has used the Geeks and the Gurus as well as academic tutoring. He likes the Geeks due to the fact that one is able to make appointments with the same individual every time, whereas with departmental counseling it is, “a little hit-or-miss.” Earl has used, “some of the tutoring centers a couple of times just to help me break through an issue that I was having.” For the most part, however, “it’s this office [MVAO].” Earl became acquainted with the MVAO, as well as the Geeks and Gurus, during his orientation. For the most part, Earl utilizes the MVAO and referred to it as a
“springboard”, meaning if one does not know where to go, they should start at the MVAO.

**Peter**

**Background.** Peter is a 43-year-old, Caucasian, senior at RHU. The idea of enlisting started for Peter at a young age. Peter shared the story of why he first thought of joining the military:

> It’s kind of a funny story the reason why I joined the military. When I was younger I saw my brother drawing (chuckles), of all things, an ICBM [Intercontinental ballistic missile] with a USAF [United States Air Force] on it. I don’t know why, but that was something that struck me, and I kind of always wanted to join the Air Force. I don’t even know what age . . . or how old I was when that happened.

Other than his brother, there was really no family influence for Peter to join the military. Peter stated, “It wasn’t like a family thing.”

The influence of his brother was not the only thing that led Peter to enlist in the United States Air Force. Peter’s dad was a tool and die maker whose job led the family all over the country. Peter finished high school in a rural town in the Midwest where there was not a lot of opportunity. There were only a few limited options as Peter explained:

> I knew that the only couple options I had was working at a farm in the Midwest, working in a factory or restaurant, or . . . sounds weird but there’s a whole lot of drugs and stuff in that area, and that was the other option.

These choices left Peter feeling as though he had only one choice. He described that
option by saying, “The military was the only option I had that didn’t have me stuck in a small town in the Midwest.” Peter graduated from high school in June and was in the Air Force in July. After deployments to Turkey, Japan, Qatar, and one in support of 9/11 in which the nondisclosure is still in effect, and service abroad in Hawaii, Peter retired from the military.

A couple of factors led to Peter’s decision to attend college. He was at a Commander’s Call approximately six months prior to his retirement when he was informed that he had to complete his Community College of the Air Force degree before he retired. That information had an impact as Peter shared, “For whatever reason, that kind of got me stoked on completing that degree, and then it just kind of went from there.”

Around that same time Peter was trying to decide what he wanted to do after he retired from the Air Force. Seeing an airplane carry power lines near his house led to a decision to fly planes. Peter was able to get his eyes fixed while still in the military, and that solidified his decision to pursue aviation. “That’s something I always wanted to do is fly planes.”

With that decision made, Peter went about researching aviation programs. Peter knew that with “the Post-9/11 GI Bill they would pay for you to go to school if the flight program was associated with a degree.” His research led him to RHU. “I didn’t know that RH even had . . . an aviation program, but in my research I found it.” Having his desired program that his GI Bill would pay for was an important factor in Peter’s decision to attend RHU, but it was not the only factor.

Finding a place where he could put down roots and settle down was also
important to Peter. After living in Hawaii and California, where the cost of living is quite high, during his military service, being able to own land was important to Peter. “I wanted to live some place cheap . . . I wanted to buy some property and build from there on my own.”

Being near family after spending so many years far away was also an important element in Peter’s decision-making process as he explained, “I kind of wanted to be closer to them [his parents] because I spent 20 years nowhere near them. My wife’s mom also lives up in the next state, so we are kind of centrally located.” There were three primary factors causing Peter to choose RHU. In addition to being near family Peter shared, “After looking at programs and stuff, trying to find an aviation program. I was looking for a place with property and . . . it just kind of fit. So that’s why I came to RHU.”

**Process to College.** With his three criteria in mind Peter looked at institutions other than just RHU. “I could have gone to NTU, which is 20 miles from my hometown. I don’t know; I just never wanted to go back there. Another option was North Dakota, and I don’t know anybody that wants to live there.” After eliminating those schools and deciding on RHU, Peter applied for admission.

Peter identified as a veteran on his application admitting that RHU “gave me plenty of opportunity to say that.” His application fee was waived due to his veteran status, even though in Peter’s words, “that wasn’t why I came here.” One thing that became clear to Peter while he was researching colleges was that RHU was veteran friendly. “It seemed like, at the time, doing my research that they were pretty military friendly at RHU. It was helpful.”
Peter had completed his degree from the Community College of the Air Force while on active duty and transferred those credits to RHU. The Community College of the Air Force is an accredited institution which makes transferring credits from there to another institution a bit easier than the JST, which the other branches of the military use, as Peter explained, “All I had to do was transfer my transcripts, just like going from any other university, but that’s not the case for any of the other branches.”

While the credit transfer and assessment process was a bit simpler than using the JST, most of Peter’s credits from the Community College of the Air Force did not apply to his degree and came in as electives. Peter described his feelings regarding this process, “It came in as a regular degree, but it’s not like it kept me from taking anything, or saved me, from taking a whole lot of classes.”

As Peter began his transition to RHU he relied upon his ability to discover answers on his own and operate independently. Peter’s transition was successful in his estimation because of the type of person he is as he explained:

I’m just the type of person that I’ll talk to anybody. I’ll get to know people. I think that’s probably what made college a success for me is that I don’t just sit back and wait for somebody to tell me what to do. I’m going to try to find out what I’ve got to do next.

Although he is an individual that will seek answers independently, Peter stated, “I’ve never felt like I was not getting assistance when I needed it.” Peter’s sense of self gave him the strategies he needed for successfully beginning his transition to RHU.
Transition to School. The MVAO played a major role in Peter's transition once he arrived at RHU. The office served as a springboard, or place to access accurate information, as Peter described, “I'd go in there just for, Hey, can I get this class paid for? Hey, what can I do?” After stopping by the MVAO for assistance during his “first two or three semesters” Peter began working in the office part-time. Peter also relied on himself, and his independent personality, to help him learn the ropes. The support of the MVAO combined with his personality made for a smooth transition to RHU as Peter explained:

I got to know a lot of people in the university. I'm kind of a talkative person. I don't think I really needed a lot of help though, you know what I mean?

Whatever I needed I'd already learned working in that office.

The academic transition to RHU was an interesting one for Peter. On the one hand, going to school was not new as he had recently completed his Community College of the Air Force degree, but on the other hand, his attitude towards school might have been seen as an obstacle. Peter explained, “It wasn’t new [going to school], but I’ll be honest with you, I was like . . . I’ve just got to get C’s; you know to get through.” This reflected Peter’s attitude in high school as he “did enough to get through.” As Peter transitioned academically at RHU his attitude began to change as he shared, “I want to set an example for my kids.”

It was not only that he wanted to set an example, but it was also what he had learned along the way in the military that changed his outlook on academics. “You know, you pick up skills about the importance as you move along in life.” That importance applied to setting an example for his children as well as his understanding of doing the
things that are necessary to succeed. Peter seemed genuinely uncertain as to the reason for his success. “I’ve done remarkably better than I figured I would. I never really expected that I would do well. I never thought that I would, might graduate with honors and all of that stuff. I don’t really have any idea.”

The social transition to RHU was a mixed bag for Peter. His status as an adult learner, with property of his own, combined with his outgoing personality resulted in an interesting social transition. As Peter had discussed, finding an affordable piece of property was a main reason he decided to attend RHU. Peter explained his adult learner situation and the influence it had over his desire to transition socially to campus:

I have a family, property, and kids, and everything else... I was more trying to be a member of the area that I live in and become part of this thing. I’ve really never been into other things, like sections, on campus. I’d go to college and do my stuff, but I didn’t really spend a lot of time over there.

Being an adult learner who is invested in his outside of academia interests may have limited the social interaction Peter had on campus, but his personality did make up for it in many ways. “I tend to be talkative and stuff. I get to know people in the class.” His involvement in class, interacting with fellow students, and his talkative personality helped Peter transition socially at RHU which Peter confirmed, “I got involved.”

As Peter got to know his fellow classmates he recounted that there “has never been an issue” with his student interactions. Institutional interactions with the faculty and staff at RHU were also positive as Peter shared:

RHU seems to be very accommodating to vets. I never had any conflicts with any of the professors or anybody in the university. I’ve heard of a couple of
professors that weren’t so military friendly, but generally speaking the whole university is. I never really saw a whole lot of conflict, or issues.

**Orientation Experience.** Peter stated that orientation was not required for him, and he did not attend it. After reflecting on his experience thus far at RHU Peter shared, “I kind of wish I would’ve now that I’ve gone through it. It’s such a different life.” The significant differences between the structured military environment and the more casual college environment was the main reason Peter wished he would have attended orientation. Peter discussed the differences. “You have someone telling when to go get your teeth cleaned in the military, and [here] they barely even tell you where the maps are located so you can figure out what building you are supposed to be in.” Peter certainly believed that having gone through the orientation experience would have been beneficial to him.

**Student Services Utilized.** After learning his Post-9/11 GI Bill would cover an aviation degree program, Peter began his college career at RHU using that benefit. While utilizing the Post-9/11 GI Bill, Peter had not yet received his disability rating from the DVA. Once Peter received his rating, he switched from the Post-9/11 GI Bill to Chapter 31, or Vocational (Voc) Rehabilitation (Rehab). Peter explained Voc Rehab:

It’s not an education benefit. It’s actually an employment benefit through the DVA. Okay, the guy can’t do what he did in the military because my back was messed up really bad. Because of the rating I got for my back and a couple of other things; you know, being around loud aircraft, you lose hearing. I was eligible for 31.
Peter switched to Voc Rehab because, in his opinion, it offered better benefits. The Post-9/11 GI Bill provides 36 months of benefits, whereas Voc Rehab offers 48 months. The Post-9/11 GI Bill provides a book stipend of up to $1,000 per academic year. Voc Rehab pays for all of your books along with “what you need to do whatever it is you’re trying to do.” Peter described what Voc Rehab had provided to him in his aviation program:

I’m trying to be a pilot so they provided me with headsets. They provided me with a laptop and an iPad because all of our charts and stuff for flying planes are on iPads now. There was just more benefit available to me for doing my flight training to use Voc Rehab.

Aside from meeting the eligibility requirements for Voc Rehab, there is another important factor to consider as Peter explained, “You get access to better benefits as far as paying for more things, you have to give up some of your freedom, I guess to go and do what you want to do.”

Unlike the Post-9/11 GI Bill, with Voc Rehab Peter had to have the DVA approve everything he does. This included: taking an aptitude test, a personality test, and meeting with a DVA counselor every semester. These processes allow the DVA counselor to determine if Peter’s degree choice was right for him and if he could do it with his disability rating. After the initial testing and certification, Peter had to report his grades and meet with a DVA counselor face-to-face every semester. The DVA and RHU work very well together as “they [DVA] actually come to RHU because there’s quite a few [using Voc Rehab].”

After the DVA counselor approves the benefit, the certification for disbursement is done by RHU, the same as with the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Although there are more steps to
go through, and more freedoms given up, Peter has never had an issue regarding payment of his benefits. “It was never an issue for me.”

The other primary resource Peter used at RHU in addition to the MVAO is the Writing Center. “I’ve used them quite a few times. What they do over there is they help you—English majors volunteer—and they go in, sit down, and help people write papers and prepare for presentations and that kind of thing.” Peter has also used the school’s testing center because, “you have to take the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] written exam, and they run that at the office over there.” Aside from those two services, Peter shared that he does not utilize anything else. “I don’t really use a whole lot of those things [resources]. I’d go back to class, then I’d go back to the office [MVAO].”

Bob

Background. A self-described “blue-collar guy,” Bob is a 27-year-old, Caucasian, sophomore at RHU. Bob enlisted in the Air Force shortly after graduation. He graduated in 2008 and was in the Air Force by October of the same year. The decision to enlist, “was the vast majority on a whim.” As to how it occurred, Bob shared:

Out of the blue one day, an Air Force recruiter called me, asked if I could sit down with him, asked if I’d ever thought about it. I sat down and had lunch, I believe, maybe three days later we got paperwork going to join.

While Bob joined the military on a whim, he did have his reasons for enlisting as he explained, “I guess I just went in to get out, do something different . . . get my, get my fair bit of traveling experience in life.” After serving abroad in South Korea and Hawaii Bob separated from the Air Force in 2014.
Bob did not attend college right after he left the military. Being the blue-collar guy that he is, Bob went to work at a local factory near he and his wife’s hometown, which just happened to be minutes from RHU. An anticipated transition caused Bob to consider his future as he shared:

It [going to college] became serious at the beginning of probably 2016. We had our second child, and then I really got to thinking about what kind of moves I needed to make to get us in a better position in life.

During his initial search Bob researched and considered his options. After looking at some entirely online programs, including Arizona State, Bob shared, “I made the decision, being the kind of person that I am, I need to do at least some on actual campus. I need face-to-face interaction.”

Both internal and external influences played a role in Bob’s decision to attend college, specifically RHU. The fact that Bob “lived 10 miles down the interstate from RHU” was an internal influence. Another internal influence was the military friendliness of the institution. “I looked at their Veterans Affairs program and saw that they were more than at least competent.” The fact that Bob determined he needed face-to-face interaction, location, and the military friendliness of the school were internal influences that combined with the external, family influence in his decision to attend RHU. Bob discussed the important family influence that made him decide to attend RHU:

Both of our families live within an hour and a half as far as support system for having the kids and all of that. After that it wasn’t much of a decision. I decided to go ahead and enroll for the first time in Fall 2016.
**Process to College.** Once Bob decided to attend RHU he applied for admission. The application process, according to Bob “was straight forward, no hiccups.” Bob did identify as a veteran on RHU’s application sharing, “I think, being a veteran waived, maybe, my application fee to go to college. I think that sounds right.”

Having been in the Air Force, Bob transferred his college credits from the Community College of the Air Force for assessment and evaluation towards his degree. Bob described the process, “As far as credits go, I actually got, I think the exact number was 34 credits transferred in from the Community College of the Air Force.” The process went smooth, and even though he was just finishing his second semester at RHU, he will have 60 credit hours total at the end of the semester.

It was an internal influence that assisted Bob as he began his transition to RHU. The influence of the military structure that he had while in the Air Force benefitted Bob. As to how it related to his transition to RHU, Bob explained:

- Having some mental discipline, obviously learned from my time in the Air Force, helped me settle in and make sure that I was on the schedule that I needed to do and helped me, I guess I don’t know a word or phrase besides mental toughness to balance out work full-time, school full-time, and raising two kids full-time.

Bob did not want to speak for the entire student veteran population, but he did express that he felt he had, “more discipline coming in than, I would say, your traditional college student.”

**Transition to School.** Bob falls into the category of being an individual who finds answers on his own and operates independently for the most part. Bob described what this means, “I was kind of just one where I would just push through it and figure it
out as I go, and if I needed to, wing it when I had to.” The military structure that helped Bob as he began his transition continued to play a big role. While the adjustment from the strict military structure to a looser college environment can cause issues, Bob found a way to create his own structure which he shared:

(Sighs) it’s umm . . . I don’t know how to phrase it. In a way, it [employment] helps me. I work—I’m a blue-collar guy—I just work in a factory, but we get three breaks a day. I take my homework into work every day with me and sit on my breaks and do homework. I’m a third shift guy, and I get off at 7:00 in the morning and come straight to class and do a couple of hours of class. So as far as, it actually helps me in not missing class because I have no excuse because I’m already up, and I’ve been at work so what reason do I have not to drive two miles away and come to class every day?

Employment played a role in Bob’s transition. He identified it not only as part of his identity, his self, it provided the structure that he had in the military. These factors, along with his mental discipline made Bob’s transition to RHU go well.

Bob was a strong student in high school as he recalled, “I might have finished high school with a, maybe a 3.7-3.8.” His strength in academics led to a relatively smooth academic transition to RHU. Bob shared how he felt about beginning college academically, “I don’t think that I had any problems with the transition back to an academic setting.” Again, Bob credited the structure he had in his life with helping him transition academically to RHU.

I’ve actually been in—last semester I went down to the computer lab that the Geeks are kind of based out of. I was down there once a week. I had an hour and
a half after getting off work before my first class so I'd go down to their computer lab that opened at 8:00 [a.m.] and do some homework.

That structure allowed Bob to find the time to get his homework done and stick to a schedule, ensuring he got everything completed that he needed to. The structure worked, although Bob shared that “it has the same sort of monotony day-in-day-out” as the military.

While the structure to Bob’s days helped with his academic transition, the gap in his education presented problems. Bob graduated high school in 2008 and was now returning to college in 2016. Bob shared his concerns, “I’ve been out of school for closing in on a decade,” and he wondered if he would “be able to take certain classes and kind of just catch up with the material.” Doing his homework in the computer lab the Geeks were based out of, in addition to seeking out tutoring helped Bob make the academic transition back to college.

As an adult learner with a family, working full-time, and living off campus the opportunities for Bob to socialize and get involved at RHU were quite limited. Bob confessed, “My time on campus is more or less three hours, three times a week.” He does not know many buildings on campus aside from the ones he needs to frequent. While these factors have limited his social transition, the interactions Bob talked about having on campus have been overwhelmingly positive.

The interaction with other students on campus has been smooth. The difference in age and social situation has not been a problem as Bob stated:
Interaction wise there was no problem as far as me being able to talk to these younger kids that are here. I just talk to them, more or less, the same way that I talk to anybody else. I’ll cut up with them. I have had zero negative interactions.

In regards to interactions with RHU’s faculty and staff, Bob had some preconceived notions about that.

I was under the impression coming in that I was going to have professors that wouldn’t help you with anything that you need help with. Maybe it was just some stigma that goes around about it. I’ve been very pleased with the staff on campus, so far.

Both faculty and students are usually aware of Bob’s veteran status. The reason for this, Bob explained is, “The first day or two we have done a little meet-n-greet with all the students. So, they find out that I’m 27, and I’m married.” Questions about what he is doing here inevitably ensue as Bob shared, “I’ll tell them I got out of the military and started back to school as an adult. Once they find out about that, they usually don’t give me a hard time.” Even though he is an adult learner, Bob interacts with his classmates, and his experiences with RHU’s faculty and staff have been positive.

Orientation Experience. Since Bob transferred in so many credits he was not required to attend RHU’s orientation. However, since he had, “never actually set foot on campus,” Bob decided to attend to “kind of get a feel for campus.” The only aspect of orientation that was helpful, in Bob’s estimation, was “probably campus familiarization. As far as actually knowing where the actual buildings on campus are.”

There was not a veteran-specific aspect to the orientation Bob attended. The event was “more geared towards your traditional students that went to school and that
was it.” The age difference, as well as the fact that the orientation was geared toward younger participants, were issues as Bob described the experience:

I was just lumped in with them. I mean straight out of high school, 18-year-old students more or less. They had time to do all these other activities around campus and stuff. I realized that the people leading the groups, that were degree-specific, that I was still four to five years older than that person. I hate to say it, but not particularly for my situation was that day really helpful. I kind of realized there wasn’t going to be much help for me that day.

**Student Services Utilized.** Bob utilizes his Post-9/11 GI Bill to attend RHU. As far as certification and processing of his benefits, Bob stated he, “sat down, they [MVAO] told me A, B, and C, what I needed to do.” When it comes time to certify each semester Bob goes online and plugs his courses into the enrollment form and sends it off. A confirmation is then sent to him. As far as payment is concerned, it is “like clockwork; the first month each semester there is my benefits making their way to me.” The process, according to Bob, is “not a problem.”

Bob discovered his own answers in regards to the MVAO and his Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. He described how he found the MVAO initially:

All I did was deduction . . . assumed that if I Googled RHU-Veterans Affairs that it was going to pop up something. Just a quick Google, and then I was on RHU DVA website, and right at the bottom of the first page had an address, and I just showed up here one morning.

Bob continued to be proactive as he sought out the MVAO before his classes began and shared, “I showed up in this specific building [MVAO] before I registered for my first
semester of classes, when I was getting a feel for things.” By finding answers on his own and operating independently, the initial certification, processing, and payment of his GI Bill went smoothly.

As far as services and resources Bob has utilized or sought out, he freely admits that the MVAO has helped him take care of everything that he has needed. Another resource Bob has used is his academic advisor “to talk about classes or where we’re at in my degree program.” Tutoring is another resource he has used at RHU. Bob found out about tutoring from tutors that were sent to his classes. They provided a handout that detailed the tutors available, subjects they specialized in, and their hours. Aside from the MVAO, his advisor, and tutoring Bob stated, “I wouldn’t say that I’ve used any services that I guess are campus affiliated.”

Carlton

**Background.** Carlton is a Caucasian, 30-year-old junior in college. Carlton enlisted in the Air Force shortly after he graduated from high school. The decision to enlist in the Air Force started when Carlton was still in school. He signed up for Junior Reserve Officer Training Corp (JROTC) while in high school. The decision to join JROTC was driven by his interest in space as Carlton shared, “I’d always been fascinated with space just like everybody else.” Carlton explained the details of his interest in space and decision to join JROTC:

I knew the recruiter couldn’t guarantee me a job, you know, the job I wanted. I got to pick my AFSC [Air Force Specialty Code] right out of there [JROTC].

What I wanted out of the program was the assignment. So, to have the
opportunity to be able to do that was something that I was gonna take advantage of. I got a space and missile assignment.

There was another factor that contributed to Carlton’s decision to enlist aside from the opportunity to work in the Air Force’s space and missile program as Carlton shared, “The combination there as well as the Iraq war that was going on at the time and Afghanistan.” His interest in contributing to the war effort along with the assignment he wanted prompted Carlton to enlist in the Air Force. “I chose that route. . . . graduated in May or June, and then I had to wait until October to get in.” After serving abroad in Germany, Carlton separated from the military.

Carlton took online college courses at Embry Riddle while he was on active duty and shared, “That was one of my goals, to get my degree.” While stationed in Las Vegas, Carlton realized “that it was going to take my whole 20-year career to finish.” The decision to attend college occurred when “my schoolwork just became more important than my job.” Carlton recognized that and began planning to leave active duty and attend college full-time. One thing needed to happen before Carlton could move forward with his plan. “As soon as I found a Guard unit that would take me, I made the transition.”

There were both internal and external influences that led Carlton to NTU. Carlton explained his process as he made the decision to attend NTU:

One of the reasons I chose NTU was because I knew I would get that interaction. I wanted to be in a place where I could ask whatever questions I wanted because I know that I can ask some pretty good questions about space. The final say was, go where the family is and being from the Midwest . . . it was just a good match. And that’s where I ended up. It came down to family.
The quality of the school, the interaction with faculty, and being near to family were the internal and external influences that prompted Carlton to decide to attend NTU.

**Process to College.** Carlton did apply to a couple of different schools before deciding to go to NTU. During the application process Carlton shared, “The base education office was basically telling everybody going through not to go to public universities. . . . public universities don’t take military transfer credits well.” Despite the warnings of the base education office Carlton decided to attend a public university, NTU, and began the application process.

Things did not go smoothly for Carlton. “The process of applying to NTU was a little bit rough.” One of the primary issues he encountered while applying to NTU was indeed their policy pertaining to military training credits. Carlton discussed NTU’s policy, “NTU does have a blanket policy where they don’t accept Air Force military, ahhh, military schools. That was super frustrating.” While that was a major issue, it was not the only one Carlton encountered.

Carlton was not able to get into his desired program at NTU. “I’m still not able to get into their Aerospace Astro Engineering Program, which is what they’re known for here.” Part of the reason for that, Carlton believes, is that he applied to NTU as a transfer student. Carlton explained what being a transfer student meant, “I originally applied to the Aero & Astro Engineering School as a transfer student. So that transfer label . . . NTU and most public schools, most four-year institutions, don’t really know what to do with transfer students.” While Carlton awaited a response to his application he heard from an unexpected source.
They basically told me that, no, I couldn’t transition into Aero and Astro. The only reason why I didn’t get rejected was because one of the Admissions advisors called me up and basically said . . . basically warned me that I was going to get rejected. The lady that called me was also a veteran. I don’t know if choosing to identify as a veteran that another veteran decided to call me and reach out and warn me about this, but I can only assume so. I was able to change my application to physics, and then get, ultimately, accepted. That was very interesting to say the least.

Carlton did identify as a veteran on his application to NTU which very well might have been the reason his application was not rejected. Even with the kind gesture from a fellow veteran, the application process to NTU continued to be rough for Carlton as he shared, “It really made me angry at a lot of points just because, especially because of their blanket policy to not accept anything—even as elective credits—so yeah, that was, that was a unique experience, I believe.”

Even though Carlton had an Associate degree from the Community College of the Air Force, “NTU doesn’t really care about it, so I had to start basically freshman classes when I got here.” NTU did not take any of the credits Carlton earned from his time in the military. This fact, along with starting as a freshman, according to Carlton, “That was pretty rough.”

**Transition to School.** Once Carlton’s application was accepted it was time for him to begin the process of transitioning to NTU. A connection with the Director of the school’s Veteran Success Center (VSC) was a primary area of support for Carlton as he made his transition. “I’d been in contact with him [VSC Director] continually throughout
this whole process.” The VSC Director helped Carlton learn the ropes. The Director was particularly helpful in regards to Carlton’s veteran educational benefits as he shared, “He [VSC Director] was more help than anyone else really when it comes to that stuff. I knew how to get my GI Bill. I knew how to take care of the paperwork. So, I knew what to do.”

Carlton is a member of the National Guard and that commitment has impacted his transition to NTU. Having to train with the Guard one weekend a month takes away valuable study time, “especially if it’s an exam week.” When speaking of disruptions caused by Guard duty, Carlton shared, “I’ve also had several times where I’ve had to ask for extensions for homework because of not getting that time to work on homework.”

The Guard base “is usually pretty understanding,” according to Carlton, and “NTU does have a policy where you can get excused for classes for military assignment.” Overall, Carlton felt as though “they’re [NTU] fairly accommodating.” Being accommodating, however, does not mean that Carlton’s Guard commitment has not been disruptive to his transition to NTU. Carlton shared his assessment of NTU and their policy for military assignment, “It’s a push and shove, and as long as the paperwork is together, it all works out pretty well. But it’s a push and shove so it interferes.”

The interruption of study time due to Carlton’s Guard responsibilities has certainly impacted his academic transition. Having to go through the “push and shove” to receive accommodations for his military employment commitments has meant extra time spent on that aspect and a need for intentional study plans. Another factor in Carlton’s academic transition is his major as Carlton stated, “Classes themselves have
been tougher for me obviously. I’m in the Physics program, and that’s not the easiest
decision. My classes, are pretty rough.”

Carlton is an adult learner, married with a two-year old, and lives off campus. His
social transition to NTU has been influenced by these facts. He discussed the overall
impact of living off campus as a student veteran:

It’s pretty hard to get involved after hours, or you can’t just walk down the hall
and knock on somebody’s door and say, ‘Hey, can you help me with this math
problem, or chemistry problem, or whatever.’ I think that experience is what
veterans are probably missing the most.

There are also hurdles that he has had to negotiate due to his status as an adult learner.
Daycare concerns are a prime example of issues he has faced at NTU.

Where I have run into issues is with, if I have some sort of daycare situation that
can’t get resolved. That is usually not excused by NTU very nicely. They [NTU]
really don’t know how to deal with adults. I [emphasis added] don’t think it has
anything to do with being a veteran.

Carlton went on to describe a specific incident that frustrated him when it came to a
situation that occurred due to him being an adult learner.

I had a situation this spring where my daughter had a scheduled surgery, and I was
able to get out of one class but not the other class. That is really frustrating
because it was instructor specific, or instructor discretion. NTU has not been
accommodating in those situations.

One thing that has helped Carlton is that NTU recently implemented a policy providing
priority registration to student veterans. This development has assisted Carlton plan his
daycare schedule much farther out as he shared, “I can project daycare for next semester. I already know. I can already tell my daycare when I’m going to be there next fall.” When discussing the impact of this policy, Carlton stated bluntly, “That was a huge, huge, huge benefit.”

Carlton’s veteran identity is often revealed in the classroom as he explained, “I’m about 10 years older than everybody else, so somebody ends up asking.” The institutional interaction Carlton has had with professors at NTU has been varied as to their support of student veterans and the military. Carlton summed up his experience with NTU professors, “I find that professors are usually hit and miss as to whether or not they support military or former military students.”

Carlton does paid research with a professor at NTU and had very positive things to say about his interactions with the professor. “Yeah, so the professor I do research with is extremely helpful in keeping me encouraged and keeping me going and then, ahh, providing interesting problem sets and also using my background so that’s like an outlet.” This interaction, while positive, is the opposite of other experiences Carlton has had with NTU professors.

Not all professors at NTU, according to Carlton, support student veterans or the military. In fact, Carlton revealed, “Some of them make life harder on you purposely because you’re a veteran.” Carlton tried to explain it as “a bias that goes around.” There have been times, Carlton shared, where he has been “treated like I was 18-years-old,” other times professors have made inappropriate or insensitive comments.

In one instance, such a comment led to an argument between Carlton and a professor. “I got into it with one professor who, in engineering, who decided to make an
Carlton’s background is in space and missiles and that includes experience in global positioning systems (GPS). When Carlton was looking to do research, he came across this particular professor. Carlton shared his experience:

My space background was with global positioning system (GPS). There is a professor here that does research with it, the GPS signal and analysis, and I thought to myself, wow, I’m pretty well qualified. I’ve done that for nine years. I sent him a resume, sat down with him and he basically said, ‘Get out of my office. You don’t know anything because you’re Air Force.’ That was a wakeup call for me.

The institutional interactions Carlton has had with faculty at NTU have been on both ends of the spectrum. He has benefited from institutional support in the form of the professor he does paid research with, and he has had some challenging encounters. Carlton did mention avenues he has found to get some support from his peers and fellow veterans. “We’ve tried to overcome that [support via fellow vet or peers] through this office [VSC], and so that’s been probably the biggest help.”

**Orientation Experience.** Carlton attended orientation at NTU. Meeting and talking with his academic advisors were the most useful parts of the experience for him. Carlton found the orientation “frustrating to go through” since “it was not tailored towards adults.” He summed up the experience by stating, “It was kind of largely
pointless.” Carlton did comment that a veteran-specific program “would have been extremely helpful.”

**Student Services Utilized.** Carlton attends NTU on his Post-9/11 GI Bill. Carlton had been in contact with the Director of the VSC during his process of arriving at NTU, and he assisted in getting Carlton’s benefits in order. NTU’s certifying official is in the VSC and they are the ones that file the paperwork, certify, and make certain everyone gets paid. Carlton summed up the VSC stating, “Everybody that’s using their veterans benefits comes through here. That way it is seamless for them.”

The VSC collaborates with the financial aid office at NTU. A financial advisor from the financial aid office comes “over here to the Success Center about once a week.” The advisor assists student veterans with finding “other types of benefits through them.” With every student veteran coming through the VSC to utilize their benefits and the collaboration with financial aid, the VSC is “almost entirely a one-stop shop,” according to Carlton.

Carlton is very involved with the VSC at NTU. The VSC has a tutoring service available. Carlton has used tutoring and shared, “I do have a math tutor. NTU is paying for my math tutor through one of their programs that helps out adult students.” He learned about this benefit through the VSC. The VSC has been a great resource for Carlton. As previously mentioned, Carlton had been in contact with the Director and the office throughout his transition to school, even reaching out to them before he even came to campus.

While Carlton became acquainted with the VSC before stepping foot on campus that is not the case for many student veterans. According to Carlton, “This office has a
lot of resources. The key is getting, getting the information that the office exists out there.” The VSC collaborates with several resources at NTU including: mental health, career services, and a tutor matching service. Carlton shared, “I’ve taken advantage of a lot of those programs and then I help match other students to that program.” Support from fellow veterans is another resource that Carlton has utilized. “Some of the other guys in here have had, for instance, my high-level math classes.” It is not uncommon for fellow veterans to assist one another in instances such as these. The VSC is a resource that many student veterans seek out and utilize.

Neville

**Background.** Neville is a 24-year-old, Caucasian, junior in college. He enlisted in the Marine Corps right out of high school. There is a long family history of military service in Neville’s family as he shared:

My brother is currently a Reservist, and he’s been a Reservist for 12 years. My uncle . . . one of my uncles was in the Army during the Gulf War. Another uncle was an Army officer during Vietnam. My grandpa was in the Army during World War II. My great grandpa was drafted into the Army during World War I.

Neville attended a Catholic high school and worked summers to help his parents pay the tuition. Having to work in order to pay for school was something that was on Neville’s mind when he began to think about attending college. “I didn’t have any degree . . . any schooling that I was particularly fond of, and I wasn’t going to go just to go.” When a friend, who was already in the Marine Corps, asked Neville if he wanted to join, he did. The prompting of his friend combined with the family influence were the reasons Neville
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enlisted. After serving abroad in Hawaii and deploying to Okinawa and Korea, Neville separated from the military.

The decision to attend college came, according to Neville, “probably the day after I got to Boot Camp.” Actually, the decision did take a bit longer than that, but the driving factor to attend college occurred, “probably a year and a half to two years into my enlistment” when “I realized that I was not [emphasis added] going to make a career out of the Marine Corps.”

One thing that Neville did know was that “I worked with demolitions when I was in the Infantry, and I wanted to continue to do that somewhere.” After researching careers and programs that would allow him to continue in his field, Neville discovered that he could work as an explosive engineer or pursue construction management. Neville focused on institutions that were “close enough to where I was at at home and reasonably priced.”

The Section 702 Act, which allows student veterans to attend out of state public schools at in-state tuition costs, went into effect the year Neville got out of the military. This led him to look at NTU, which has a construction management program. Having his program of interest, a location close to home, and the ability to pay in-state tuition combined to make it, “kind of a no-brainer to come to NTU.”

Process to College. Neville is an individual who will seek out answers on his own and attempt to discover what he needs to know independently. He utilized these attributes as he looked for schools that featured his interest in explosives as he explained, “I pretty much Googled what works with explosives.” After deciding to attend NTU, Neville went about applying for admission.
The application process was similar to what a new student would have to do as opposed to a transfer student as Neville shared, “I had to apply as a regular student because it hadn’t been five years since I graduated high school, so I had to retake my SAT to do the writing portion to meet NTU’s standards.” As to whether he identified as a veteran on the application, Neville was uncertain, stating, “If it was on there, I definitely did, but I don’t remember if it was.”

Neville did have his JST sent to NTU for credit assessment and evaluation. NTU does have a blanket policy of not accepting military training credits, and that was indeed the case. Neville was not surprised as he shared:

I wasn’t expecting to get any transfer credits for my military education. All of my classes were infantry tactics related and things like that. I did not expect them to take the Marine Corps version of grammar and spelling for an English class here at NTU.

NTU did award some credits for Neville’s active duty service. Neville explained the credits he received, “The only credits that I got were from my DD 214 [Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty] for my time being deployed and just military credits for that.” He was awarded eight credits, and they were all used towards “general education stuff.” NTU did take the time and effort to apply his military service towards appropriate classes as Neville described the process:

If I hadn’t gone on deployment, they might not have been able to . . . my advisor might not have been able to put that on as the Exploratory study type thing. It’s supposed to be like a foreign language or foreign course, you know about other places.
While Neville was not able to receive any credit at NTU for his military training, he did receive eight credits for his active duty military service. NTU did apply them in a more specific manner due to his military experience.

In his transition to NTU, Neville did experience a difference between the military structure and the structure at NTU. Aside from his first semester, Neville has been “working everyday outside of class.” By taking classes full-time and working every day, Neville has recreated some of that structure he had in the military.

**Transition to School.** Neville’s strategy for transitioning to becoming a college student was pretty straightforward. He explained his strategy as just “kind of grinning and bearing it.” Working at the VSC has also helped. Along with a place to help him learn the ropes, it is also a space to get things he needs to do done. Neville explained the role the VSC played in his transition:

> It’s probably helped since I’m here; if I don’t have anything to do, I’ll do my homework. Then I won’t have to take it home. I won’t have to worry about balancing, doing work at home, whereas it’s already done.

The academic transition Neville experienced has not been too challenging. The classes have been a bit of a mixed bag of results for him as he shared, “Some of the classes are a little bit more difficult, like calculus is a lot harder. I’ve gotten better grades here than when I was in high school taking pretty much the same general education classes.”

There were other academic differences he has had to get used to as Neville described one in particular, “It’s just pretty much if you don’t do well on an exam there’s no homework to make up for the rest of it.” Neville successfully navigated the academic transition by being more focused as he explained, “I’ve been a little bit more proactive in
my studying while I’ve been a student here. That and wanting to have a higher GPA; it’s easier to use that in negotiation tactics with a job or an internship.”

While the academic transition went smoothly for Neville the military versus college transition was much more of a challenge. Neville shared the differences in structure:

I mean there was obviously big differences, throughout the day it is pretty much however you want to do it. You don’t even have to go to classes if you don’t want to. . . . you don’t even have to show up, whereas in the military you have somebody watching over your shoulder constantly.

Neville stated the biggest difference, in his opinion, involved group projects. In the military, it was one’s job to complete group projects and everyone was “kind of like minded, trying to get the same thing done.” At NTU, everyone is on different schedules making it challenging to find time to get together to work on the project. Neville was careful to point out, “It’s not intentionally pulling the rope in a different direction. They’re going to class so they can’t meet to do the work.” Eventually, Neville overcame this challenge as he stopped “worrying [emphasis added] if they were going to do their portion” and just focused on what he had to do.

The social transition Neville has experienced at NTU has been rather smooth. One reason for this is his chosen major mirrors the military in many ways as Neville explained, “A lot of our professors are either former tradesman, former workers there, or superintendents, and former foreman so kind of similar people I guess would be the best way to describe it.” He went on to explain those associated with the program, such as
advisors, “know what to expect.” The similarities to the military of those he interacts with has helped Neville in his social transition to NTU.

In regards to his institutional interactions, Neville has not had any negative experiences that he is aware of. “If it’s negative [student interaction], it’s not something that’s been brought to my attention.” Neville does not go out of his way to share his veteran identity. Student introductions, or ice-breakers, during class usually reveal his veteran identity. Although Neville does not go out of his way to identify as a veteran, in his words, “it’s kind of obvious.” Neville shared the reason he believes it is obvious, “I have two full sleeves worth of tattoos so it kind of gets brought up in the conversation at some point.” Neville was involved in NTU’s student veteran organization, but he can no longer fit it into his schedule as he is attempting to graduate in three years and works.

**Orientation Experience.** Neville attended NTU orientation. He listed talking to his advisor, getting registered, and walking around campus as helpful activities. While there were helpful aspects of orientation for Neville, he had issues with it as well. When discussing the issues he had with orientation, Neville shared, “It’s a whole day long thing. You come down here, get walked around campus by current students that are getting paid to do it, and that’s pretty much it.” Neville was never directed to the VSC during orientation. Another issue was the fact that “it’s more for students just graduating high school than it is for, you know, veteran students or nontraditional students.” Being the type of individual that seeks out answers on his own, Neville shared, “For the most part, I kind of had things figured out when I got here.”

**Student Services Utilized.** Neville was aware of some of the resources the he would need at NTU before arriving on campus. He shared that he knew what he needed
to do to utilize his educational benefits before he even separated from the Marine Corps. “I knew what I had to do from my TAPS [military transition assistance program] class and from talking to people in this [VSC] office. That was while I was on deployment.”

The certificate of eligibility for his Post-9/11 GI Bill was completed while he was still in the military, and he “came in here [VSC] to drop off my certificate of eligibility and fill out the paperwork I was responsible for” when he got to campus.

The process of using his Post-9/11 GI Bill at NTU involved filling out paperwork, or going online, every semester. Neville learned he had to complete the certification every semester “when I filled it out the first time; they [VSC] told me that I had to fill it out every semester.” After learning the process, he has had no problems. Neville shared that he has not had any problems with the payment of his Post-9/11 GI Bill once he was provided accurate information regarding the disbursement dates.

The only thing I had a problem with was when I first started using it I did not know that it was going to be paid at the end [emphasis added] of the month. It was definitely a shock for me. I was expecting to get paid at the beginning of the month for the month that was going to happen. I had to figure out how to pay for everything in September with only the money I got for half of August. The GI Bill is going fine once I realized when I was getting paid. Everything was on time.

While he has never been paid late, Neville did point out that the reason for that might be because he is very proactive in completing his certification paperwork every semester. “I’ve never been late with my paperwork. I’ve always turned it in probably a couple of months ahead of the beginning of the semester.”
The certifying official at NTU is in the VSC. There is not a division in the financial aid office that is for veterans. The certifying officials at NTU referred Neville to other scholarship opportunities in addition to his GI Bill including AmVets (American Veterans), the Pat Tillman Foundation scholarship, and others “that are available specifically for veterans as well.”

Other resources Neville has utilized or sought out include financial aid and career services. He had a problem with this past year’s Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) that required him to go to the financial aid office in person to address it. Whether the problem involved Neville filling it out wrong or something else, his financial aid information was two years old. The information, and subsequent award, was based on when he was last on active duty.

By heading to the financial aid office, Neville learned that FAFSA could be appealed. He then shared this with the VSC. The VSC has been a valuable resource in numerous ways because, as Neville explained, “A lot of the students in here [VSC], if they know something they generally share it. Once they share it, and once the certifying officials know about it, then pretty much everybody in the office knows about it.”

Neville has also utilized NTU’s career services program which notifies him of employers attending career fairs and allows him to “pick a top 10 that notifies them that I’m planning on coming to talk to them.”

Summary

In chapter four each research participant’s words were unpacked, meaning examined or “not treated as self-evident, transparent, unambiguous—during the interview itself as well as later, in the analysis of interview transcripts” (Kohler Riessman, 1993, p.
The narrative allows for this unpacking through the ability to ask the participant’s what it is their language means (Kohler Riessman, 1993). According to Blaise, the narrative provides the opportunity to “speak their language, negotiate their streets on their buses and turn our keys in their locks” (as cited in Clandinin & Connely, 2000, p. 54). Scrutinizing each participant’s background, process to college, transition to school, orientation experience, and the student services utilized will assist to make meaning of how they describe their transition as well as how they view specific services and programs. Chapter five will provide an analysis of how student veterans view their transition to becoming a college student.
CHAPTER V

Analysis

The purpose of this research study was to examine how student veterans transition to becoming a college student, as well as what aspects of orientation and support services are most beneficial in facilitating this transition. Chapter five communicates the findings from the data collected from six student veterans regarding their process to college, transition, and views of services and programs offered. The following research questions were used to guide the study and analysis (a) How do student veterans describe their transition? (b) How do student veterans describe the formal orientation process? (c) What specific services do student veterans utilize or seek out? At what point did they become acquainted with the resource(s)? To what degree was it beneficial to them?

Student Veterans Description of their Transition

When the participants discussed and described their transition to college several key areas were revealed. These areas included: the application and credit transfer process, academics, and socialization during their transition. All of these areas will be reflected upon to create an order for these events and help make meaning of them. This will allow for a deeper understanding of how these student veterans describe their transition.

Application and Credit Transfer Process. Every student veteran in the study identified as a veteran during the application process to college. Four of the participants indicated that by identifying as a veteran they had their application fee waived. While three of the participants mentioned that was why they self-identified, Peter stated, “They even waved the application fee, which was a bonus.”
All of the participants transferred in prior credits from other schools, military training, or active duty service. Aston transferred in credits from the American Military University which went smoothly. He did not, however, submit his JST for assessment and evaluation because, “I have plenty of electives so I didn’t need them.” Five of the participants either believed it would not be worth it to transfer in their military credits or did so only to have received elective credits. Earl was one that did not believe submitting his JST would be worth the effort because, “I was artillery and there’s not a lot of real world applications with artillery.” After RHU’s DVA Coordinator convinced him to change his mind, he shared, “I ended up getting a lot more [credit] than what I thought.” Peter shared that he had his Community College of the Air Force transcripts submitted, but most of the credits came in as electives because, “they’re not related at all” to his degree program.

The two participants attending NTU received no credits for their military training as NTU has a policy stating they do not accept such credits. Carlton, who earned his Associate degree from the Community College of the Air Force, shared, “[NTU] is not going to take any of my credits.” Neville explained that regarding his “JST, they didn’t accept anything that I had on there.” He was, however, able to receive at least some credits for his active duty service, sharing, “They only gave me eight credits.” Overall, Neville shared the prevailing attitude of the participants related to their military credit assessment and evaluation when he stated, “I didn’t expect anything.”

**Academic Transition.** All of the participants had differing descriptions of their overall academic transition. Aston shared that “I was able to do just fine.” For Earl “it was a totally different world when I came to school.” Peter professed to not know why
he was succeeding at school stating, “I really don’t understand why I’m doing as well as I am. It’s just one of those things.” For Bob, it was a matter of just trying to “keep my head above water as far as the academic side goes.” Carlton discussed the challenging major that he picked and the difficult coursework that it entailed. Neville shared at NTU there was less opportunity to make up points in a course if he did not do well on an exam.

While each participant had different descriptions of the overall academic transition, a theme that emerged was the military versus college transition. Five of the participants discussed the fact that the structure of the military environment was missing from the college setting. Aston stated, “I wouldn’t say there are any similarities.” Earl shared, “It was actually quite the opposite of boot camp.” He continued, expressing that he “wasn’t scared, per se,” but the lack of structure, or schedule, was a significant change. He had no one telling him where to be and no one making sure that he went to class. Peter lamented the fact that at RHU it was a challenge to locate a campus map whereas in the military they told you when to go to the dentist. Bob did not attend RHU right after his separation from the military. In the intervening two years he worked full-time at a factory. This helped him transition to the less structured college environment because he already had that structure when he made his academic transition as he shared, “I mean, not the same sense of daily activities, but the same sense of, okay from 9-11 I’m doing this specifically, and from 11-2 I’m doing this specifically. My life has sort of a similar structure.” Neville expressed frustration with the lack of structure regarding group projects at NTU versus in the military. “Probably the biggest difference would be group projects. Here it is sometimes like pulling teeth. When you are in the military, it’s your job to do that group thing.” Neville also created his own structure in a sense. After
his first semester at NTU, he worked when not in class. In regards to the military
structure that was lacking in college, Neville shared, “Structure . . . I’ve kind of made my
own, I guess.”

Three of the participants described the gap in their education as an issue during
their academic transition to college. Aston had not graduated from high school, only
achieving his GED so he could enlist in the Army. This fact, in addition to the time that
had elapsed since he had done school work, was discussed by Aston. “It had been a
while since I’d taken a math class. Obviously, it had been at least 13 years since I had.”
Earl expressed a similar sentiment stating, “I took Chemistry my sophomore year of high
school. I haven’t had an English class in like six years.” He even revealed that “I forgot
what an adverb was.” Bob shared that he had not been in an academic setting for nearly
10 years and that “this semester was my first math class in eight years.” A major concern
for Bob was if he would be able to get caught up enough in certain classes to do well.
Peter and Carlton did not express similar concerns. Peter had recently completed his
Community College of the Air Force degree so he had been going to school prior to
enrolling at RHU. Carlton also had been taking courses at Embry Riddle while on active
duty in the Air Force before enrolling at NTU.

Social Transition. Five of the participants lived off campus, while Neville did
not directly address his current living situation. Four of the participants were adult
learners with dependents. Aston is 29 and lives off campus with three kids that he is
responsible for taking care of. Aston does, however, live close to campus, and he
expressed, “It doesn’t really affect anything. I’m able to come over here rather quickly,
and use the library, all that kind of stuff.” Earl is 24 and lives in an apartment off
campus, but he did live in a residence hall his first year at RHU “just to do it.” He met a group of friends in the residence halls, but they all ended up leaving the school for one reason or another. Peter is 43, has a family and children, and lives on 16 acres off campus. He focused on being a part of where he lives as opposed to being into anything on campus. Bob is 27, married with two children, and lives 10 miles away from campus. He works full-time and stated that his time on campus is less than 10 hours per week. He shared that he, “couldn’t even tell you half of the buildings on campus.” Carlton is 30, married with a two-year-old, and rents a place in town. He stated that it is difficult to get involved after regular business hours. Five of the participants work. Peter did work part-time at the MVAO, and Bob actually works full-time on third shift in a factory. Two of the participants, Bob and Peter, spend very little time on campus, and they only go there when necessary.

Five of the participants revealed that they have not had any problems in their interactions with faculty and staff at their institution. Aston reported no problems in any of the offices that he had been to. Peter had heard of professors that might not have been friendly towards veterans or military members, but he has never personally had any issues. Bob shared that “I have actually been surprised” as he thought he might experience professors that would be less than helpful towards veterans. He summed up his experience with faculty and staff at RHU stating, “I wouldn’t say there has been any issues with it.” Two of the participants indicated strong or positive support from faculty. Earl received strong institutional support from one of his English professors. “She made sure to explain things if I, if I, you know if I was confused and stuff like that.” He also
described a Chemistry professor as “great.” It was another English professor that really provided institutional support for Earl as he shared his interactions:

I had an English class where all of my papers were written about the DVA. The guy [professor] was not a veteran. He was not typical . . . he wasn’t this hard core conservative type guy that might look fondly on me because of what I’ve done. He was fantastic. He asked me questions when I wrote papers. He wanted to know more. He just wanted to know more. He was generally curious about the, the plight of the veteran even though it didn’t necessarily pertain to him.

Neville also shared that he had positive experiences, for the most part, due to his chosen major, Construction Management. “One of the nice things about Construction is it’s pretty similar to the military.” Carlton reported mixed results when interacting with faculty at NTU. He shared that some professors “go out of their way to help you” while others make things more difficult because one is a veteran. According to Carlton, “That has been an interesting transition, an interesting experience,” and he stated that “it can be kind of sporty.” A professor that he does research with has been a positive support system for Carlton, while another professor dismissed him, and his experience, solely because he was an Air Force veteran. Carlton shared that “some people, ahh, get wrapped up in it politically, and that’s unfortunate.”

In regards to institutional interactions with students, five of the participants reported no problems. Earl has not had any negative interactions with students at RHU, and he offered an explanation, “I think that has a lot to do with the . . . our just sheer numbers here really.” It is not often that there is not at least one or more veteran or military member in a class. Peter has had no problems dealing with “the kids in class.”
As to how he interacts with them, Peter shared, “I talk to them kind of like they talk to each other. They kind of open up a little bit, and you make friends with them.”

Only one of the participants was involved in an RSO. Earl shared, “I’m in a fraternity now, because I didn’t know anybody when I came here. I needed some people to hang out with.” It was family support from his sister that led Earl to his fraternity. “My sister has a boyfriend who was in the same fraternity. She told me to come out here, so I did, and I joined last year.” While it was his sister who steered him towards his fraternity, Earl chose to join it “because there was a lot of military.” Nearly 50% of the fraternity’s members were veterans or military members, which, according to Earl, “definitely helped.” After the friends Earl had made during his first year in the residence halls left RHU, he was able to find a social network and support amongst his fellow veterans.

One of the study’s participants had been previously involved in an RSO. Neville stated, “I was involved in the student veteran organization, but now I don’t really have the time for it because I am trying to graduate in three years instead of four.” Another participant looked into joining an RSO, the men’s rugby team. Aston shared, “I was interested in joining a few [RSOs], but it would have been way too much time, which I just wouldn’t be able to do.”

None of the six student veteran participants will go out of their way to say that they are military veterans. Aston shared, “I don’t really go out of my way to say it. I just don’t see a need.” His self is associated with areas inside and outside of RHU now as he is attempting to leave his military self behind. Peter does not announce his veteran status, but shared that it does come up in class. “A lot of times they’ll look at you and like, it’s
just the old guy, the old vet.” Bob revealed that first day of class ice-breakers often serve to expose his veteran identity. He also shared that “a lot guys when they get out, they don’t want anything to do with the military.” For Carlton, his age difference usually results in being asked questions that reveal his veteran identity. Neville began to describe his feelings toward identifying as a veteran, “It’s not something—” before he changed course and discussed the fact that ice-breakers are also the reason people know his veteran identity. He did return to his original thought by stating, “Outside of that, I don’t let everyone know.” The fact that both of Neville’s arms are fully covered in tattoos often times results in questions in which he discloses his veteran identity. Much like Bob, Neville shared his feelings about veterans and their military self. “I think most cases, people, once they get out, they want to be out.”

Only Earl shared a somewhat differing viewpoint. He did identify as a veteran but only when it was necessary or appropriate. He professed a strong desire to be part of a group, and shared, “I've always just enjoyed being a part of something.” This was evident in the fact that he was on sports teams in high school, joined the Marine Corps, joined a fraternity, and is going to school to be a paramedic where he will “probably be working out of a firehouse.” Earl avoids being a veteran with his hand out for things based solely on his military service. He does not believe he is owed things because he is a veteran.

**Student Veterans Description of the Formal Orientation Process**

The student veteran participants were asked to talk about the formal orientation process they participated in as they transitioned into their university. Orientation
Orientation Attendance. Four of the participants participated in orientation while one that did not attend wished that he had. Two of the participants that attended were under no obligation to do so. Due to the number of credits Bob transferred in to RHU and Earl’s age, neither had to attend orientation but did so anyway believing it would be beneficial. Peter did not attend but stated if he could do it again he would. He felt it would have helped with the differences he experienced in the structure of the military versus college. Two of the participants believed that they knew the things they needed to and did not need to attend. Neville did attend, and the experience confirmed his own feelings that he had things figured out prior to arriving on campus. Aston did not attend and believes he has done well without it.

Three participants stated that meeting with their academic advisors and registering for classes was the most helpful part of orientation. Carlton shared that talking to his academic advisor was “pretty much the most useful part,” and Neville stated, “Talking to the advisor and getting registered was helpful.” Two of the participants talked about campus familiarization being helpful. Learning about campus, the layout, and the location of buildings were most helpful to Bob. Neville stated, “It was nice to walk around campus.” Along with learning how to register for classes and meeting with his advisor, Earl highlighted connecting with the DVA Coordinator as a benefit of attending orientation. How the participants viewed the benefits of orientation varied. When asked if orientation was helpful, Carlton replied, “Not really.” Neville responded in similar fashion when asked what was helpful at orientation sharing, “Not a lot actually.” Earl
learned things he would not have known if he had not attended and seemed alone in his evaluation of orientation stating, “I learned what I needed to learn.”

All four participants who attended orientation revealed that nothing identified them as student veterans, nor was anything veteran-specific mentioned. Each of the participants, aside from Neville who was uncertain, stated that they had indeed self-identified as veterans on their application. Earl stated that “nothing designated me as a veteran or anything like that. They just treated me as a new student.” As to anything veteran-specific being mentioned, Neville revealed that “no one prompted me to come here [VSC] on orientation day.”

The age difference between the student veterans, the orientation leaders, and the other orientation attendees was also an issue for all four participants. Two of the participants specified that being grouped in with younger students right out of high school and being told what to do by them was an issue. Earl specifically did not enjoy being told what to do by a “kid” who had not been deployed or had any of the life experiences Earl did. Bob also did not appreciate being grouped in with students straight out of high school, or the fact that the program was geared towards them. “I [was] the oldest person there.” As an adult learner and a student veteran, he did not find the program helpful. Carlton and Neville objected to the age difference in regards to the fact that the program content was geared towards younger students. Carlton shared, “It was very awkward. It is underwhelming for, for people that are not 18 or 19-years-old coming out of, coming out of high school.” The content of the program, overall, was not as helpful as it could have been in Carlton’s opinion. He discussed the issues he had with the content. “They could have talked about things like housing. They could have talked
about things like, normal PCS [Permeant Change of Station] or moving stuff instead of talking about dorm life and, and that kind of thing.” Neville shared Carlton’s feelings that orientation focused on new students fresh out of high school. Neville also took issue with the fact that “I spent all day here to actually talk to my advisor for probably a half an hour.” And while he stated campus familiarization as helpful, it was not without its issues as Neville shared, “It’s not like any of the places he ended up taking me were relevant to where I was going for my classes for that first semester.”

**Specific Services Student Veterans Utilize and Seek out, the Point They Became Acquainted with Them, and the Degree They Were Beneficial to Them.**

Student veterans were asked about the specific services that they utilized and sought out, as well as at what point they became acquainted with them, and how beneficial they were to them. The two key areas that emerged were financial aid and all other institutional resources, specifically tutoring. These themes developed from the narratives and experiences of the student veteran participants.

**Financial Aid.** All six participants are either using or have utilized the Post-9/11 GI Bill educational benefit. Peter used his Post-9/11 GI Bill for his “first semester or two” before switching to a DVA employment benefit called Voc Rehab. All the participants have sought out and utilized their institution’s veterans office. Three of the study’s participants became acquainted with their educational benefits prior to leaving the military or shortly thereafter. Aston applied for his benefits soon after his separation from the Army. Earl had his Post-9/11 GI Bill ready to go while he was still on deployment with the Marine Corps. Neville shared, “I did it [initial certification] right before I got out.” Five of the participants became acquainted with their respective
veterans offices on their own. Bob discovered the MVAO through a Google search. He
described what happened next, “I figured out where it [MVAO] was, and then it was as
easy as coming in here and asking the questions.” Neville shared that he became aware
of the VSC via the telephone. “I called this, the place I work at now, the Veterans
Success Center, when I applied [to NTU].” He then added that “no one [at NTU]
prompted me to come here” or at least “not until after I had already been there [the
VSC].” Carlton also shared that he became acquainted with the VSC by calling it. “I’d
actually contacted the veteran office prior to coming here and talked to the boss here.”
Only Earl learned about the office, specifically the DVA Coordinator, during his
orientation.

Five of the participants found their veterans offices and the Post-9/11 GI Bill
process beneficial and reported no problems. In regards to the process, Aston shared,
“The actual process of requesting the use of benefits every semester, it’s really simple
here.” He has had no issues and has never been paid his benefits late. Peter is using Voc
Rehab which has a few more requirements than the Post-9/11 GI Bill and reported that
“I’ve had zero problems with it.” The additional requirements of Voc Rehab include:
meeting fact-to-face with a DVA counselor, reporting his grades to the DVA, and he must
have DVA approval for his degree program. The DVA counselor is located in a town that
is approximately 25 miles away from RHU. The process has been smooth as the DVA
actually makes campus visits to accommodate the students utilizing Voc Rehab. Peter
stated that “they [DVA] really go above and beyond to come here [MVAO] and be
available” which he found beneficial. Bob shared that the MVAO has provided him with
step-by-step guidance regarding his educational benefits and “as far as simplicity, I
havent't had any problems.” He has found the office beneficial and said, “I’ve had zero problems as far as educational benefits.” Carlton reported that the NTU certifying official is located in the VSC. The VSC also collaborates closely with financial aid, and an advisor is at the VSC once a week to discuss “other types of benefits through them” available to veterans. He has experienced no problems with the VSC and shared that “there’s plenty of financial aid for all of our veterans here. I don’t think anybody is in a financially strained situation.” Neville discussed the benefits processing stating that he has to fill out documentation every semester and has experienced “no problems” and that “I don’t think anything’s ever been late.” Only Earl has experienced problems with his benefit disbursement. “My first semester they were really late.” While it was primarily due to a software overhaul, it did still cause issues for Earl. He was living in the residence halls that semester and incurred late fees due to nonpayment. Eventually, “I got paid everything that I was owed” and RHU took “a lot of pity” on him, and he was able to settle the bill. Everything has been reliable since then as Earl shared, “That was the only semester that it’s been an issue.”

**Other Institutional Resources Utilized.** In addition to veterans offices, several other institutional resources that the participants utilized were discussed. Five of the student veterans indicated that they have sought and utilized tutoring. Aston has used the Math department’s tutoring services. Earl has also utilized tutoring sharing that “every major, or department, within a college has their own specific tutoring. I’ve seen tutors for a couple of different things.” He has also used two organizations that RHU offers for academic support. “We have two different organizations . . . the Gurus and the Geeks. The Gurus have one person who can teach you multiple subjects. The Geeks are more of
an IT.” Earl has used the Geeks to fix his laptop and the Gurus for tutoring. He became aware of the Geeks and Gurus at orientation. Peter has also used tutoring and shared, “At RHU they have what they call the Writing Studio.” English majors volunteer at the Writing Studio and assist students with writing and presentations. Peter shared that “I’ve used them a couple of times.” Bob revealed that “I have gone to tutoring.” He discussed how he became acquainted with RHU’s tutoring services. “I found out about it . . . they sent people out into our class, gave us a handout.” Carlton has a math tutor that is paid for by NTU. He learned about this resource through the VSC.

Only Aston and Bob mentioned utilizing their academic advisors. Aston was directed to his advisor by Admissions when he called during his application process. Bob discussed meeting with his advisor to keep track of the progress he is making towards his degree. Neville shared that he uses “their [NTU] career program.” He also has had to seek out the Financial Aid office “because of this current year’s FAFSA.”

Every participant stressed that their specific veterans office was their primary resource and where they go to handle issues or seek accurate information. When asked about where he has sought support for any issues he has had, Aston replied, “Coming here to the Military and Veterans Affairs Office.” When discussing which offices he sought assistance from, Earl replied, “Pretty much just this one [MVAO].” Peter shared that “I haven’t really had a whole lot of interactions with any other offices [other than the MVAO] on campus.” Bob shared that “I’ve handled everything that I’ve needed in this office [MVAO] here.” When discussing specific services that he utilized and the VSC, Carlton stated “As far as support for the individual, NTU has it handled.” Earl summed up the feelings of the student veterans in this study regarding their veterans offices when
he shared if you “don’t know where to go, start here [MVAO],” and Carlton referred to the VSC as a “one-stop shop.”

Summary

Chapter five consisted of a reflection and analysis of the stories the participants told during the interview process. The research questions guiding the study were explored, the participants’ experiences were negotiated to make meaning of them, and then they were compared. The analysis conducted in this chapter will allow the readers to compare and contrast the participants’ responses. In chapter six a discussion of the presented narratives and analysis will be shared and recommendations for faculty, student affairs professionals, and fellow students will be suggested and discussed.
CHAPTER VI

Discussion

Chapter six will summarize the study, the presented narratives, and the analysis of the life events the participants experienced as they made the decision to attend college as well as their transition to becoming college students. Suggestions for faculty, student affairs professionals, and fellow students will be provided to assist in making meaning of the issues student veterans face as they transition to higher education. This narrative study examined “the sequence of stories in an interview, and the thematic and linguistic connections between them” (Kohler Riessman, 1993, p. 40). This allowed how the participants constructed important events to be shared (Kohler Riessman, 1993). The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of how student veterans describe their transition, how they describe the formal orientation process, what specific services they utilize or seek out, when they became acquainted with the resource(s), and to what degree they were beneficial to them. With these storied texts, we can better understand what other student veterans might experience as they transition to becoming a college student.

All six of the participants are white males attending one of two institutions in similar geographic locations. A lack of diversity in regards to gender and race, as well as the location of the universities might limit the breadth of life events the student veterans are able to provide to the research. These factors limit the generalizability of their perceptions and the experiences of the individuals and is important to keep in mind as the results of the study are discussed.
Student Veterans Description of Their Transition

This study looked at six student veterans’ experiences of moving into college. At the time of the interviews all of the participants had moved through their transition and were successfully navigating higher education as college students. Aspects that student veterans described during their transition include: the credit transfer process, military versus college structure, gaps in education, living arrangements, and faculty/staff interactions. All the participants shared stories of the impact that these factors had on their transition.

Many student veterans enter college with the expectation of having earned college credit for their military training and experience. The credit transfer process is often confusing and frustrating to the student veteran as there is no uniform method of awarding college credit for military training and experience. The participants of this study discussed credit evaluation, but they did not find it confusing. This is likely due to the fact that the institutions of these students were very upfront in the information they provided to them prior to beginning school. The participants of this study either did not expect their military training and experience to count as college credit due their specialty in the military, or the policy regarding military training and experience was clear to them prior to enrolling.

As student veterans enter college, especially those coming directly from the military, there is an expectation or anticipation that the college environment will also be structured. Moving from a rigid structure with little opportunity for autonomy to the less structured college environment was an issue for most of the participants of this study. While it was noted as a challenge by the participants, they were able to overcome it by
utilizing various strategies. Discipline, mental toughness, and experience were traits that assisted the student veterans in managing their less structured situation. Strategies such as employment, involvement in fraternities and organizations, or maintaining a strict schedule enabled the participants to create their own structure to combat the more autonomous, less structured college environment. By using what they learned in the military, the student veterans in this study were able overcome this issue during their transition to college student.

The participants of this study shared that they perceived their transition to college as different from their traditional-aged peers; identifying that their interactions with others, their focus on academics, and their age were some of the major differences. Mainly this perception stems from them being more closely aligned with an adult learner perspective. The participants lived off campus with their partners or families, and were years removed from the general student body population, thus aligning them with the descriptors often used for adult learners. The student veterans of this study shared characteristics with adult learners including much larger gaps in their education, had different interactions with the faculty and staff, lived off campus, had different life experiences, had increased responsibilities, and in most cases defined involvement on campus differently.

The research related to student veterans in transition makes it clear that this student population is unique and has specific needs. If we look at the participants’ transition through Schlossberg’s (1984) lens, we see that the situation of those in this study impacted their sense of self, support, and strategies during this transition. By viewing the six participants of this study as students in transition we can identify how
their situation, self, support, and strategies influenced not only the experiences of their transition but how they managed it.

**Credit Transfer Process.** All of the participants transferred credit earned from either prior college, military training, or active duty experience. One student felt frustration over the policy and process of transferring his military training credits. This student felt frustration because NTU has a blanket policy of not accepting credits earned from military training. This policy is transparent and readily available on their web site to all who are looking into applying at NTU. While this participant felt frustrated during the application process that he would not receive credit for any of the training he received through the Air Force’s challenging space and missile program, he still chose to attend NTU. This illustrates the benefit of institutions being up front and transparent about their credit transfer policies and providing accurate information. Being aware of, and understanding, NTU’s credit transfer policy regarding military training was a tremendous benefit to the participant as he understood his situation prior to enrolling and was thus better able to develop strategies to cope during his transition.

Two participants identified that they believed transferring in their military credits was not worth it. Due to their specialty in the military they believed that their training and experience would not transfer, or apply, to their degree program. This belief led to the participants not initially reaching out to have their JSTs evaluated for credit. The institution was upfront and transparent about how military training and experience would be awarded—health credit and elective credit—it was the students’ assumptions that led them to not ask for assistance by having their military experience and training evaluated.
With knowledge of RHU’s credit transfer policy in hand, and the fact that he had transferred credits from another university as electives, Aston did not have his JSTs evaluated. He did not need any more electives. Earl, on the other hand, reached out and gained clarification regarding the evaluation process after meeting the school’s DVA Coordinator. Thanks to the support of RHU’s DVA Coordinator, he did have his JST evaluated and received more credits than he thought he would. The DVA Coordinator’s support and understanding of the student veteran’s unique circumstances and situation helped Earl gain additional credits he might not have otherwise received thus vastly changing his situation.

Two of the students had indifference towards having their military credits evaluated. The students attending NTU experienced frustration and indifference as the institution has a clear policy of not accepting credit for military training. In both instances, however, this was not a deterrent to the students attending the school. Being near family, as well as having one’s desired program, trumped the fact that these two students would not be receiving any credit for their military training. For the students at RHU that transferred in military credits, the process was smooth although nearly all of the participants’ credits came in solely as electives. The fact that NTU provided clear, accurate, transparent information as to their policy regarding military credit and experience on their web site for all potential applicants to read and understand was the reason that this process went smoothly for the NTU participants. These students were able to weigh NTU’s policy along with other factors in their decision to attend college. This removed any potential barriers and uncertainty to the participants transition, to developing a degree plan, and becoming a college student.
A student’s situation and strategies are both impacted as a result of how the transfer, assessment, and the ultimate awarding of military credits is handled. The NTU students, while frustrated and indifferent, both handled their situation due to the fact that they had access to the information of NTU’s military training credit policy prior to applying to the school. These students, while frustrated and disappointed in said policy, were able to make a plan for their college path. Their path included knowing what classes they needed to take, how long it might take to graduate—which is critical when one considers the 36 months of benefits students utilizing the Post-9/11 GI Bill have, and how to best build their schedule each semester. The RHU students had transparent and accurate information as well as support from the MVAO and DVA Coordinator while navigating their situation, as she emphasized the importance of having their military training and experience evaluated. The access to accurate information and institutional support assisted the student veterans in this study as they navigated their transition.

Military Versus College Structure. Five of the participants discussed the fact that the structure they had encountered in the military was missing in the college environment. While in the military, the participants had individuals telling them when to be to work, what to do, how to do it, when to go to the dentist, and where to be and at what time. The rigid environment provided great structure, and everyone operated under the same conditions. These conditions created a routine, and the participants knew what was expected of them every day. Once in the college setting, the participants found themselves in an environment where no one set the same standards or enforced the stated expectations. Those in positions of authority, for the most part, did not care if you went to class, did your homework, or pulled your own weight in a group project. Similarly,
their college peers operated on their own agenda and timeline. The values, structure, and ideals that were once part of the participants' everyday life in the military were nowhere to be found in their life as a college student. The college environment was nothing like the military to the participants, either in the form of rigid schedules, common missions, or being told what to do, when to do it, and having someone watch over you to ensure it got done.

In this study one of the participants found support amongst his fellow veterans as he joined a fraternity. This student veteran changed his situation so that he had the support of his fellow veterans, similar to his military structure. Additionally, the fraternity set expectations of him related to grade point average (GPA) and involvement in the organization and on campus which helped him have a more defined situation. The GPA requirement gave him the structure and rules he needed to ensure that he got his work done. If he did not meet the required GPA, he could not go on trips with his fraternity brothers or participate in activities. It was his way of taking the common mission concept and experience he had learned from the military and, along with his discipline, creating some structure and rules to assist him in coping with his new situation.

Two of the participants changed their situation by combining a rigorous work schedule with their academic schedule to gain a sense of control. They created their own structure, similar to what they experienced in the military. This helped their situation and provided them with strategies for managing their time and ensuring that the things that needed to get done did indeed get done. What these participants were really doing was combining what they had learned in the military, the strategies, the transferrable skills,
and the discipline with the autonomy that they were developing as they navigated a less structured environment and applying them to their current situation, to develop their own structure. By creating their own routines and structures, the participants of this study highlight the fact that the student veteran is equipped to be successful as a college student. This student population, as was the case in this study, are often mature adults, self-motivated, self-directed, able to adapt and overcome challenges, and goal oriented—in other words, the ideal college student.

For one participant, it was easier to shift from the military mindset to a more civilian like one. In his case he wanted to be more accepted by his peers; he did not necessarily want to stand out as a veteran or member of the military, but as a regular college student, especially as he was assigned to complete group projects. This student modified his sense of self to better cope with his transition to becoming a college student. The military versus college structure is markedly different. This study’s participants found ways to modify their situation, implement strategies, and even change their self to adjust and manage their transition. It is important for institutions to understand the difference in cultures student veterans might be experiencing. By being aware of where they are at in their transition, schools can assist student veterans in finding strategies to cope.

**Gap in Education.** As participants discussed the aspects of their academic transition the gap in their education was a primary focus. There were, at times, significant gaps between educational experiences for the participants in addition to the fact they were often times not the most motivated students to begin with. The lack of a
strong educational foundation combined with large gaps between schooling presented obstacles for many of the participants as they transitioned to college.

Three of the participants described the gap in their education as a challenging situation during their academic transition. The gap in the student veterans’ education ranged from six to 13 years. Not all of the students identified themselves as strong or dedicated students in high school further destabilizing their academic foundation. One participant had earned his GED for the sole purpose of enlisting in the Army, and another participant identified that he had forgotten what an adverb was. The common theme amongst most of the participants was that they did not apply themselves or put forth much effort in high school. This coupled with the gap in one’s education impacted how the participants viewed themselves as they entered the college.

Four of the participants fit in the adult learner category as defined in the literature (Benshoff, 1993; Cross, 1980; Ely, 1997). The other two participants are 24 and experienced three to four-year gaps in education due to their military service, and thus would also be considered as adult learners because of this time away from school. Due to this time away from school, adult learners often have additional needs in the different areas, but specifically the areas of reading and math have been the most prevalent (Ely, 1997). It is interesting to note that the participants of this study also identified specific issues with English and math.

The gap in education that many student veterans experience certainly impacts their situation. In addition to finding themselves in a new, less structured environment, some of the participants of this study were forced to overcome academic barriers due to the gaps in their education. They were forced to look for strategies and support to assist
them in overcoming these academic needs. The participants of this study shared many times that they took the initiative to seek out tutors, writing assistance, faculty, and fellow veterans to ensure that they were successful. It can be concluded that the student veteran is goal-driven and will strive to be successful. Adult learners often feel that they need more help than traditional-aged students, are less prepared academically, and do not have strong study skills (Solomon & Gordon, 1988). While the student veterans did not necessarily believe that they needed more help than their classmates, they were aware that they needed additional help outside of the classroom and sought it out appropriately.

By understanding each student veteran’s situation, institutions can better meet students where they are at in their academic development as well as their transition.

The two institutions were selected because they had a strong reputation of providing support for the student veteran population. The institutions are clearly meeting these participants where they were at during their academic transition and helping them succeed. In addition to this, the student veterans in this study sought out and found resources that they deemed necessary and valuable. The fact that they were accommodating and available is important for institutions to consider. Making sure information about resources is accurate and that they are accessible will ensure that this student population has the resources available when they most need them.

**Living Arrangements.** The living arrangements of the student veteran participants was a key aspect discussed when sharing descriptions of their transition. Five of the study’s participants lived off campus, while the final participant did not discuss his living arrangements. The living arrangements and personal responsibilities of these five student veterans made it difficult to be involved in activities on campus or
 campus life. Difficult, at least, in the sense of where traditional involvement is concerned. Often, institutions focus on their definition of involvement which, while important to many students, does not fit the definition of involvement many student veterans have. For example, if one were to ask Peter about his involvement, he would discuss his activity in the community where he purchased his 16 acres after a 20-year wait. Aston expressed gratitude for his part-time job at the MVAO as it allowed him work enough to get assistance from the state for daycare. This in turn, allowed him more time to focus on his academics while his children were in daycare. Aston was then able to be fully involved with his children when they were with him.

Perhaps difficult is the incorrect word to use in this context. Institutions should realize that student veterans often times do not participate in the campus community, not because it is difficult, but because they do not value it. They have prioritized other areas to focus their involvement on. The demands and responsibilities of being an adult learner living off campus lowers one’s enthusiasm and capability to partake in activities, groups, or events on campus (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Gregg et al., 2016b). These demands and responsibilities force us to consider the fact that the student veteran’s involvement in the campus community looks very different than their traditional-aged peers.

The student veteran population shares many characteristics with adult learners; they have unique responsibilities and demands on their time not found in the traditional-aged student population. Institutions should strive to find ways to connect student veterans to campus allowing them to engage in experiences that will assist them in developing new social networks and transition to a college student identity. They need to engage in activities that facilitate a connection to the college culture so that they become
familiar with an environment that they have not been exposed to before. The key is for institutions to be intentional and to ask this student population what it is they need and want to accomplish this.

Anticipatory socialization is the process that occurs as an individual learns and understands the norms, values, and behaviors of a new environment through specific experiences (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). The veterans support office at both the institutions in this study provided the opportunity for the participants to engage in new experiences that included: interacting with support staff to better understand the college environment, connecting with and sharing knowledge with fellow veterans, and working with staff and fellow veterans towards a common goal. As student veterans transition out of the rigid military structure they shed their social networks and, in some instances, identity (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). As they transition to college, this student population will connect with and develop new social groups and identities in this less rigid setting. Veterans support offices and student veteran organizations assisted the participants of this study to create and develop some of these norming behaviors by connecting them with new social groups, and assisting them to develop their identity to include college student. By connecting and interacting with the supportive staff at their institution’s veterans offices and fellow veterans this study’s participants were able to witness, understand, and learn the norms, values, and behaviors of their new college setting.

Five of the study’s participants work, which they described as actually helping them in their transition in various ways. Four of them work, or have worked, part-time in their respective veteran’s offices, and they have been exposed to fellow veterans who
have helped facilitate their social and academic transition in ways that their living
arrangements might not have otherwise allowed. “It is hard to create community when
the number of options in college life generate a system in which no one is in the same
place at the same time” (Nathan, 2005, p.38). The one-stop shop veterans offices in this
study provided a location where many student veterans move in and out of the space at
the same time. These offices are a location where student veterans, including the
participants of this study, have created a community space for themselves. They have
adapted this resource to fit what they need by getting involved with their student veteran
organization or the office, utilizing the space to connect with staff and other student
veterans, and even maximizing the benefits of working in this office by increasing their
knowledge and understanding of the campus environment.

Different living arrangements, different majors, and diverse responsibilities and
interests are just some of the options that make it difficult for students to connect with
one another without a concerted effort. Intentional programming and a one-stop shop
veterans office are ways to address the student veteran’s social, financial, and academic
needs. By providing veteran-specific information, the chances of student veterans
transitioning to becoming a college student connecting with their student veteran peers,
and ultimately the campus community, is increased due to the common need to visit this
office.

The experiences of the students in this study indicate that there is no need to try to
fit the proverbial square peg into a round hole and force student veterans to attend new
student orientation with no veteran-specific aspects or get them into leadership positions
in RSOs. The participants of this study did not see value in these activities and many
would not willingly engage in them. It is a waste of time and resources to place expectations and priorities on a student population that do not fit. Institutions need to provide opportunities to connect and engage in the campus community that student veterans would participate in such as programming and interaction that included their families and fellow veterans. Other such opportunities might include: veteran-specific orientations, potlucks or family events, and providing resources valuable to them such as financial aid, tutoring, and academic advising in their veterans office at least one to two times a week.

**Faculty/Staff Interactions.** From the time student veterans apply to an institution to their first class, interactions with faculty and staff occur early and often in their transition to college. At a military friendly school, there is an understanding of the student veteran, the culture they have come from, and the unique experiences they bring to campus. All of the participants had different descriptions of their interaction with faculty and staff during their transition, but all brought with them their military background and experiences. The experiences of the student veterans in this study highlight the importance of having faculty and staff that are empathetic, familiar with, and trained in the needs of this student population.

The participants in this study discussed having professors that understood their military situation and were supportive. Professors were willing to stay after class for assistance, and they often understood the participants’ academic situation and background. They provided support and met the students where they were academically. Most of the student veterans in this study did not self-identify with all of their professors, but due to ice-breakers in class and classmate’s questions, in most
instances, it is safe to say that faculty were aware of their veteran status. The understanding and support that these faculty members showed assisted the participants in successfully transitioning to college academically.

All of the participants reported receiving strong support from staff at their institution’s veteran offices. Both offices are one of the first places the participants contacted and communicated with as they transitioned to college. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) suggest that the best path towards student involvement is connecting them with faculty and peers that are already invested in the institution. The fact that the participants of this study spoke highly of their veterans offices, the fellow veterans they met there, and their interactions with faculty and staff was important in helping them feel connected to their respective institutions.

All of the participants have been involved with their respective veterans offices, and the early connection and support was a big reason why. While this experience was a positive one for the participants, it is a limitation to this study. All six of the participants in this study were found via the directors of each institution’s respective veterans offices and had a close connection to the office. This might account for why they were able to speak in such detail as to their experiences and connections through this office. There is little doubt that the connections, experiences, exposure to resources, and accurate information was more prevalent than if the participants had been found by another method or had they not worked in their institution’s veterans office.

There is a visible presence of student veterans in the veterans offices, and they focus on veteran-specific resources. Many of the staff are veterans themselves, and they have been trained and have an understanding of the military culture and specific needs of
student veterans at both the MVAO and the VSC. While it was not explicitly stated that faculty were trained, the participants comments confirmed that the faculty and staff were, in most instances, understanding and supportive of the unique experiences of the student veteran. Having faculty and staff that are veterans, or that are trained to understand this student population, helps student veterans manage their situation as faculty and staff are able to provide support and direct student veterans to resources that might assist them in their transition (Altman, 2015; DiRamio et al., 2008; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Ryan et al., 2015). The staff provided support to the participants and helped them develop strategies for managing their situation.

**Student Veterans Description of the Formal Orientation Process**

Two themes that emerged when analyzing how student veterans describe the formal orientation process were orientation benefits and issues with orientation. It is important to note that not all of the participants attended the formal orientation offered by the institution. All of the participants that did attend orientation discussed the most helpful aspects of orientation as well as the two primary issues they encountered. The participants were able to connect with people invested in the institution at some point, despite the issues they had with orientation, and are persisting successfully towards their degree.

**Orientation Benefits.** The goals of each of these institutions’ orientations were based on the needs of new, traditional-aged students. According to the participants of this study, the programs focused on connecting with other participants via ice-breakers and games. There was also a focus on connecting participants to campus by conducting tours, discussing activities, Greek life, residence hall life, and addressing exposure to diversity.
There was also an effort to focus on the academic transition as participants met with their academic advisors and registered for classes. None of the participants that attended orientation at RHU were required to attend due to either their age or the fact that they transferred in over 20 credit hours. Two of the four decided to attend orientation anyway, and one wished he would have attended. Both participants attending NTU attended orientation.

The type of program the participants experienced did not coincide with what this student population views as beneficial and important. The participants of this study who participated in the orientation process felt frustration that they had to spend the whole day being paraded around with kids, participating in what they considered to be games, and being exposed to information and resources that they did not deem valuable. While the intent of orientation is to assist in connecting new students to social and academic settings that they might not have been exposed to before, the students in this study felt as though they were not connected to social settings that were pertinent or valuable to them. The participants did find that there was some academic benefit, however, as the program did connect them to their advisors and assist them in registering for classes.

The orientation program was designed with what the department and institution believed were best for the biggest population, that is traditional-aged incoming students. The participants of this study felt as though the program did not meet their needs. One of the participants stated that discussing what he felt was normal moving information as opposed to focusing on residence hall life would have been helpful. Another participant shared that learning the ins-and-outs of his Post-9/11 GI Bill would have been beneficial. Overall, the prevailing sentiment was that the programs were tailored towards 18 and 19-
year-old students. They were not focused on adults or the unique needs of student veterans. The institutional goals of the program did not align with the participants’ goals for the program.

It must be noted that the participants were not asked by the researcher if they had to identify as a veteran when they registered for orientation during the interview process. This would have been helpful to know. It was shared that all of the participants identified as veterans on their application for admission, but there is no way to know if that information was passed along to the department in charge of orientation. Another note of importance is the fact that NTU has implemented a veteran-specific orientation program that was not available when the two NTU participants went through the program.

There were two specific areas the participants mentioned that were helpful in their transition. These areas were meeting with academic advisors and registering for classes and campus familiarization. Three of the participants discussed meeting with their academic advisor and registering for classes as the most helpful aspect of their orientation. The other two participants that partook in orientation identified getting familiar with campus as helpful. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) state that introducing students to student services and assisting them in creating their degree program are often times goals of orientation. The orientations the participants attended were, to some degree, successful in these areas.

**Issues with Orientation.** The dissemination of pertinent and accurate information for this student population was lacking, according to the participants’ descriptions, at the two institutions in this study. Not being identified as a student veteran nearly ensured that there would be no veteran-specific information provided. One
participant at NTU recounted that no one mentioned the school’s veterans office or directed him to it during the program. Five of the participants did, however, seek out their respective veterans office on their own. This seeking of answers independently enabled the student veterans in this study to identify and act upon the accurate information they needed, and obtained, via their veterans office.

The participants who attended the institutions’ formal orientation discussed the age difference between them, the orientation leaders, and other students. They expressed that, in their opinion, these students did not understand their situation nor were prepared to assist them in the ways they needed. For the RHU students the fact that a student younger than them, and more importantly, lacking the life experience of the participants inhibited them from making a connection. In the case of the NTU participants, it was more of the fact that the program material was geared towards the younger audience. They also were unable to make a connection and failed to receive accurate information pertaining to their situation.

While the purpose of orientation is to help the student transition to college, the participants found orientation to be frustrating and not helpful given their specific needs. It is important that institutions not think of higher education as a one-size fits all anymore. There is a great need to recognize different student populations and tailor services and resources to them. There are significant differences amongst populations that need to be addressed in orientation. In the case of the student veteran it would be helpful to ask what their reason for coming to college is. Often times, what this student population hopes to get out of college is much different than other students. Acknowledging these differences, the participants’ veteran status, and perhaps providing
a veteran-specific orientation would greatly improve the chances that student veterans connect with their school and receive accurate information, thus leading to a smooth transition to the institution.

**Specific Services Student Veterans Utilize and Seek out, the Point They Became Acquainted with Them, and the Degree They Were Beneficial to Them**

Financial Aid and tutoring were identified as services that the student veteran participants utilized and sought out. The participants discussed when they became acquainted with these services as well as how beneficial these services were for them in their transition to college. These two services played major roles in their transition.

All of the participants of this study, and nearly every student veteran, attends school utilizing their veteran educational benefits, so it makes sense that the participants would identify financial aid as a main resource for them. These benefits require early and frequent interaction with financial aid. No matter what lens student veterans view themselves through—military, veteran, college student, husband, and so on—they will need to interact with financial aid at some point if they are utilizing their veterans benefits to go to school.

Having information about financial aid on institutional websites, specifically the student veteran page, is critical to assisting the student veteran’s transition and getting their benefits taken care of smoothly. The better designed the website is, the easier it is for the students to find the information they are seeking when they most need it. However, the participants also identified the need to establish a relationship with individuals on campus. The sooner the interaction, the more likely the process will be taken care of without issues. Ideally, the student veteran’s educational benefits would be
certified and in place prior to classes beginning. Three of this study’s participants had their benefits ready to go either prior to, or just after, separation from the military.

According to Tinto, finances are a major factor in an individual’s ability to pursue and obtain their education (as cited in Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Student veterans are unique in the sense that they generally have the financial aspect of their education taken care of via their veterans’ educational benefits. The issue is often times navigating these finances. It is imperative that institutions provide accurate information on their website in regards to who to contact and communicate with regarding the benefit process, address and reinforce this information in a veteran-specific orientation, house the institution’s DVA certifying official in the veterans support office, and conduct outreach to this student population prior to classes beginning and periodically throughout the semester to minimize potential barriers. This will help in facilitating a smooth transition and allow the student veteran to focus on their academics.

According to Schlossberg (1984), it is how one views change that is important. Much like the participants in this study, a change in one’s situation might prompt their initiative to attend school whereas, previously they had no interest. They may also decide to make the change immediately following their time in the military. Institutions need to approach the financial aid process with student veterans as though it is their first time hearing the information. They need to be proactive and sensitive to the unique needs and unique benefits utilized by this student population as well as understand where they are at in their transition.

The gaps in education and lack of educational foundation many of the participants had has already been discussed in detail. True to the description of most student veterans
those in this study were apt to seek answers independently. When they needed academic support, most sought out tutoring. Griffin and Gilbert (2015) found that tutoring is beneficial in assisting student veterans with gaps in their education as they get back in the swing of things academically. This was particularly true with the participants of this study. Tutoring to assist this student population bridge the gap between their high school education and the academic requirements of college is crucial, as is directing the student veteran to these resources.

An institutional culture of understanding the student veteran is critical to helping this population transition academically. Through the willingness of professors to remain after class to answer questions, to adjusting instructional methods to meet students where they were at in their academic development, the military friendly culture of RHU can be seen. NTU, on the other hand, has a smaller population and percentage of student veterans and was seen as more hit and miss in their understanding of military culture by the participants of this study.

Student veterans do not like to ask for help (Vacchi, 2012). It is important to understand this fact when developing efforts to provide tutoring assistance to student veterans. The participants of this study did indeed ask for help by going to tutors and asking for assistance to overcome issues they were having. The key here is that they did not view this as asking for help. The participants that utilized tutoring sought out these resources on their own and thus did not view it as asking for help. They felt as though they sought out answers and solutions independently. The critical factor is that they had access to accurate information regarding how to pursue tutoring. Whether it was fellow student veteran peer tutoring at the veterans support office or tutors handing out flyers in
class, this information was made available to the student veterans to seek out should they feel the need.

The participants of this study often referred to their veterans office as a starting point to access accurate information. Having tutoring available on specific days at the veterans support office, along with current tutoring locations and schedules posted in the veterans support office would serve to reduce barriers, facilitate a successful academic transition, and direct student veterans to resources should they feel the need to seek them out—which they will do if they deem it necessary.

Much like Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, student veterans have two primary concerns as they enter college: ensuring that their school is paid for and knowing what their classes will be. As with the basic needs of Maslow’s Hierarchy, not much else matters to this student population until these two concerns are addressed. Institutions often overwhelm new students with too much information at the initial stages of their transition, or during orientation. By viewing the student veteran through Maslow’s lens, institutions can focus on and provide the basic information and resources student veterans require without inundating them with information they might not retain or feel they need. Subsequent information this group might need can be made available to them through their veterans support office so they can seek it out should they need it. The importance of these two issues was discussed by the six participants of this study.

Implications

The number of student veterans on campus is increasing and will continue to increase (Gregg et al., 2016a). With a 53.6% completion rate for student veterans utilizing the Post-9/11 GI Bill between August 2009 and December 2013 (Cate, Lyon,
Schmeling, & Bogue, 2017) student veterans are entering and succeeding in college, and it is imperative that institutions find ways to best assist this student population transition successfully to college. The following recommendations are provided for faculty, student affairs professionals, and fellow students. These individuals assist, interact with, and play a vital role in the student veterans’ transition. They are vital in providing accurate information, connecting with the institution, and creating a military friendly culture.

**Veterans Support Office.** According to Wilson (2014), having one contact where all student veterans are referred to is not sufficient. A veteran-specific support office would serve as a hub of accurate information for student veterans. Preferably, this office would exist in a stand-alone building, however, this is not always possible. In these instances, having a dedicated office in a central, accessible location is critical to assisting student veterans transition to college. Not only would this location provide accurate information, it would provide a connection to the institution that student veterans, and the participants of this study, did not initially get at their orientation.

It is also important that institutions have an individual to advocate on behalf of the student veterans. Ms. Wilson, the DVA Coordinator at RHU, is a good example of just such an individual. Ms. Wilson was a wealth of knowledge and information to the participants in this study. When there were questions or uncertainties, they went to her. If Ms. Wilson was unable to assist them, she put them in touch with someone who could. Having this advocate located in the veterans support office was beneficial to the students in this study as evidenced by the fact that she, and the role she played in their college career, was mentioned more so than any other individual.
Preferably this individual would work in a veterans support office, however they may work in another area of the institution with special designation for veterans support. This individual should understand the military credit transfer process, which credits will transfer and which ones will not, and be able to impart that information to the student veteran. This individual should be able to articulate the school’s policy, explain what credits the student can expect to receive credit for, how they will be applied, detail why policies are in place, and what changes might be forthcoming.

It is almost equally important that the institution, or the advocate, be able to explain why students do not receive credit for military training and/or experience. If the educational foundation needed for higher level classes was incomplete, awarding credit in this instance would be putting the student veteran in a challenging position as she or he might not have the foundational knowledge to succeed in more advanced level classes. Placing the student veteran in a lower level course to fill in the knowledge they might be lacking would be in the best interest of the student. Being able to accurately explain why the student veteran did not receive credit for their military training and experience, why they might have to retake a class, and any other questions that might arise is something that this advocate should be able to do in the safe space of a veterans support office.

This is the type of accurate information and transparency student veterans need during the credit transfer process and their transition to college to fully understand their situation. Providing accurate information regarding the military credit transfer process, as well as any other questions, to this student population will greatly improve their situation and strategies for coping with their transition to college student. The advocate
for the student veteran should be surrounded by a staff that is also supportive of this student population.

An ideal staff for the veterans support office would include: a director, DVA coordinator, DVA certifying official, academic advisor/record, academic support/tutor, career services, and mental health counselors. It is not feasible for every institution to staff an office in this manner, but there are ways to address this issue. A core staff of director, DVA certifying official, and academic advisor/record should be minimum staffing.

Cross-training of staff is one way to ensure that other areas of responsibility can be addressed in this office if only a small staff is possible. An alternative, or additional option, is to collaborate with other departments on campus and develop a regular schedule of dates and times individuals representing offices, such as counseling, career services, and so on, will be in the veterans support office. For example, a representative from career services who is familiar with student veterans might be in the veterans support office all day on Tuesday and Wednesday of every week. By establishing this type of collaboration and a having a set schedule, student veterans would be able to have access to accurate information they might need in their one-stop shop, or veterans support office. This would increase the chances that the student veteran might seek out and utilize these resources as well as portray the military friendly culture that is critical to facilitating a successful transition.

The staffing of this hub of veteran-specific information might also be supplemented by student workers. These workers could be part of a DVA work-study program or institution part-time employees. Student staff could assist in office
responsibilities by working with the DVA certifying official to process benefit requests, answering student veteran questions, assisting in planning on-campus and off-campus events, coordinating scheduling, being peer mentors or tutors, and more. Every institution varies in student veteran population and size. It is possible, no matter the student veteran population, to provide the necessary support and resources in a veteran-specific office. Through dedication, collaboration, and cross-training institutions can put in place the necessary culture and resources so as to remove as many barriers as possible to the student veteran and facilitate a successful transition to becoming a college student.

The presence of a veteran-specific support office would also embody the military friendly culture that is critical in assisting this student population succeed. According to Strange and Banning (2001) the nonverbal messages an institution sends are often times more believable than verbal messages. Having a veterans support office in a visible place on campus would send a strong nonverbal message as to the importance of this student population to the university. This could also be used in the Admissions process to promote the support and importance of making a place for student veterans.

Such an office would also be a resource for academic and social support. Student veterans would have the opportunity to connect with fellow veterans either socially or in an informal tutoring/homework session. This was very much the case at the VSC at NTU as the participants recounted that their fellow veterans shared information, assisted with course material that they were familiar with, and gathered together to socialize and do homework at the office. Socialization with peers and mentors can provide information and strategies for the student veteran to cope with their transition (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). NTU has a student veteran population of just over 400 students compared to a
total student population in excess of 40,000 students. This demonstrates that even an institution with a low student veteran population to overall student population ratio can benefit from having a veteran-specific veteran support office.

The presence of a veterans support office is critical to removing barriers for the student veterans successful transition. In the event that an institution does not have or cannot fully staff a veterans support office it should be noted that having a place where this student population can go to get support is of great importance. This might be accomplished by creating a dedicated veterans lounge where student veterans are able to congregate, connect, study, and give and receive support from other student veterans. The student veteran does not like to ask for help and prefers to solve their own issues (Vacchi, 2012). Having veteran-specific support and a hub of accurate information might very well increase the likelihood of student veterans seeking out the information necessary to connect with resources that would help them succeed. Everyone views transition differently. What is important is how one views the change they are facing (Schlossberg, 1984). At the very least, the information would be available in a space that embodies and embraces the military culture and would be available should student veterans view their change as a transition and decide to seek it out.

An additional way for institutions to provide a veteran-specific information hub is to create an online presence. An obstacle for institutions in assisting this student population is that they often do not self-identify as veterans (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). The presence of an online information hub designed specifically for this student population would be one way to address this issue. This resource should include: important points of contact, financial aid data, links to forms that student veterans utilize,
institutional policies, community resources, scholarship information, housing
information, DVA policies and contact information, and more. An interactive online
support site, whether in the form of Google Chat, Desire2Learn, Blackboard,
OneDrive, or another interactive platform would provide the student veteran with a
source for accurate information as well as a safe space to ask questions and seek
assistance and support.

OneDrive, for instance, could serve as a hub for accurate information for the
student veteran to seek out and access. It would also have file sharing that would allow
for the asking of questions, sharing resources, working interactively, or passing along
information. This interactive feature may be utilized for regularly scheduled
informational forums or round-table like events. OneDrive might also be utilized to
conduct tutoring or student veteran organization meetings or recaps. This function would
be particularly useful for student veterans that are enrolled in a distance learning program
at an institution. It would be a way for the student veteran to connect with the school and
her or his peers.

This interactive online presence should be complimented with a thorough,
detailed, accurate web page available to the public. Institutions need to be forthright and
transparent in their communication about which military credits will count and which
ones will not as well as other policies and regulations. Having the institutional policy,
whatever that may be, clearly and concisely stated greatly benefits this student
population. An accurate, detailed web page would be the place to provide this
information so that current and potential student veterans would have access to an
institutions’ policies. The student veteran will seek out and read the information provided to them, and they will follow the rules and act accordingly.

Student veterans are accustomed to following directions and orders. The participants of this study proved that they were willing to seek out and read information available to them, and in turn, follow directions and policies. Providing such an in-depth web page for prospective and current student veterans will serve to provide accurate information as well as reduce and eliminate barriers to their successful transition to college student. By providing them accurate, timely information, institutions will be showing this population how valuable they are as well as providing a smoother and clearer path towards a smooth and successful experience.

The veterans support office should be sure to regularly assess this student population to ensure that the programming, information, and resources they are providing meets the changing needs of their student veterans. The assessment process would assist in offsetting a limitation to this recommendation as every institution and student veteran is different. The veterans support office and ultimately the institution need to identify what it is they need to know to best serve this population; assessment provides the data to do just that. Orientation, student experiences, program offerings, and even recruitment would be better served with the assessment data the veterans support office could provide.

**Student Veteran Organizations/Adult Learners.** The student veteran organization would provide a continuation of the socialization and accurate information initiated by the veterans support office. This type of organization also provides the students with a place to voice their needs and advocate to the institution on behalf of this
population. This was the case at NTU as the student veteran organization there was responsible for securing priority registration for all student veterans.

According to Schlossberg (1984), one of the top factors in handling transitions is social support. The social reintegration and support found by being involved with an institution’s student veteran organization was very beneficial to the participants attending NTU. One of the participant's stated a benefit of being involved in the student veteran organization at NTU was the group aspect of it. While it was a fraternity made up of military affiliated students and not a student veteran organization, a participant attending RHU expressed appreciation for being surrounded by former military peers that could understand and appreciate his deployment and veteran stories. The camaraderie, similarity in backgrounds, and the fact that there is not a language barrier in regards to military jargon plays a large role in social reintegration and feeling connected. These factors can assist student veterans that are transitioning to college build relationships with fellow veterans. This, in turn, provides strategies for creating the social support one might require to further participate in meaningful educational events (Gregg et al., 2016a).

It is necessary to discuss the limitations of a student veteran organization. Often times student veterans do not self-identify, but there is another limitation to the effectiveness of a student veteran organization. A common theme expressed by the participants of this study was that quite often once an individual is no longer in the military, they want nothing to do with it. Phrases communicating this included, once a person is out they want to be out, a lot of folks do not want any association with the service after they separate, and “I’m out of the Army.” These sentiments underline the
fact that many student veterans are looking to leave their military self behind. Everyone views change differently. If a student veteran does desire to leave her or his military self behind, and does not see this change as a loss, they may not see themselves in transition or seek out a student veteran organization.

Many student veterans share characteristics with adult learners. An examination of Maslow’s (1943) Hierarchy of Needs helps to explain the student veteran and adult learner in the college environment. The student veteran and adult learner are often at a place in their lives where their physiological needs are met. Much like adult learners, student veterans often arrive to campus with families, jobs, and off campus homes so their need for food, water, warmth, and so on are generally not an issue (Maslow, 1943). These same characteristics coupled with their life experiences often ensure that their safety needs are also met. It is the belongingness and love needs where adult learners and student veterans are often found. Much like adult learners, student veterans might often find their support amongst family or friends outside of the institution. The student veteran that maintains their military self might require more support than family and friends. This student veteran might seek support amongst their fellow veterans, or in a group setting with camaraderie, in an organization such as a student veteran organization.

A further look at Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs would lead one to believe that the final two steps, esteem needs and self-actualization, most likely cannot be achieved until that connection, or sense of belongingness, is realized (Maslow, 1943). The key is for institutions to have resources such as a student veteran organization and make accurate information regarding it available to student veterans during their transition to college.
With this information in hand student veterans can seek out this social support, much like the veterans support office, if they so desire.

There is often times a much greater focus on the academic piece in regards to the adult learner and student veteran than there is the social piece. There must not be less focus on the social aspect if institutions hope to best assist this student population transition successfully. There is a need to have social support and a focus on social reintegration for adult learners and student veterans as it assists in transition and persistence (Benshoff, 1993; Ely, 1997; Schlossberg, 1984). By having an established student veteran organization, providing accurate information regarding it, and supporting its members and mission institutions can better serve this student population as they transition.

**Veteran-Specific Orientation.** Student veteran participants in this study expressed dissatisfaction with the age difference they experienced between their peers, orientation leaders, and the related program content. According to Wardley, Bélanger, and Leonard (2013), adult learners, and in this case student veterans, are less involved in elements of orientation than their traditionally aged peers. Having orientation leaders similar in age or life experiences will improve the chances of student veterans connecting with the leaders, the institution, and the program content.

There seems to be value in the orientation the participants went through but not value placed in student veterans as a specific student population. According to Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), early interactions with the school might have a significant impact on a student’s involvement at the institution. There is a need for institutions to develop a tie, or connection, to student veterans during orientation. Schools should involve their
student veteran organizations in designing and creating a veteran-specific program or segment. This collaboration and involvement will develop leaders and encourage engagement in facilitating a veteran-specific program.

Schools are indeed missing a valuable opportunity if they do not involve student veterans and their student veteran organizations in the orientation process. Involving and including the student veteran organization and student veteran leaders might encourage a connection to the university, student veteran peer support, assist in learning the ropes, social reintegration, and help student veterans gain insider knowledge from their peers that have experience at the institution. Involving student veteran organizations, shortening the program to align with many institution's transfer orientation programs, and addressing areas of need for student veterans might increase involvement, connection, and effectiveness. The phrase, *it takes a village to raise a child*, can be modified to, *it takes a university to assist a student transition, persist, and graduate*. This statement certainly applies to the student veteran population.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This research sought to build upon the extant literature by examining the experiences of six student veterans at two separate military friendly institutions in similar geographic regions. Future research is needed to build upon this study and ones like it to broaden our understanding of how the student veteran views their transition to becoming a college student. The following recommendations are for future research.

Conduct this study in different geographic regions of the United States. Experiences and how one makes meaning of those life events will certainly be impacted by where they live. Understanding how the differences found in different parts of the
country influence the student veterans transition to college would be beneficial. Conduct this study at different institution types including private schools and community colleges. The results of such a study would help in understanding if the difference in the type of school affects how student veterans transition to college. Conduct this study with a more racially and gender diverse sample. How the experiences of women and different ethnicities differ from the Caucasian, male sample of this study would indeed help in better understanding what student veterans go through in their transition.

Another recommendation for future research is to conduct this study with a sample that has not worked in their institution’s veterans office. Learning how student veterans that have not had access to the intimate inner-workings and knowledge gained from working in their veterans office would be beneficial. Conduct this study with a sample that has representation from each of the branches of service. Perhaps the branches of service not represented in this study have a different transition program for members that separate from the service. Learning how the experiences of student veterans from all the branches of service compare would be helpful in creating a broader, more complete, picture of the student veteran’s transition.

Completing this study utilizing a case study method would also be beneficial. Targeting student veterans, faculty and staff, and institutional documentation relating to the student veterans transition will expand the knowledge and literature on this topic. Finally, conduct this study focusing on health and medical services related to student veterans and their impact on their transition. Medical issues including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury are major issues amongst the student veteran population and an increased understanding of these issues would be helpful.
Summary

This research study utilized a narrative approach. An effort was made to validate the findings by increasing the persuasiveness of the narrative. In order to accomplish this, supporting Schlossberg's transition theory with participant's accounts, as well as examining and considering alternative interpretations of the data was done. Numerous accounts were presented and discussed to support viewing the student veteran as a student in transition. By comparing the student veteran to an adult learner in many instances, alternate interpretations have also been considered. While the student veteran and adult learner populations often overlap, this researcher believes that this study showed that the student veteran is a distinct student population with unique experiences and needs and must be treated as such. Ultimately, the true measure of this analysis will be the student veteran, who can determine if they recognize their experiences and their transition in this study.

This study found that viewing student veterans as students in transition and understanding the likelihood that they resemble adult learners in many ways will provide the foundation for removing barriers, developing a military friendly culture, and assisting this student population transition successfully. It was found that creating veteran-specific services including: a veterans support office, orientation, and a student veteran organization is beneficial to supporting, and connecting, with the student veteran. This support will assist them in developing strategies for coping with the changes they are experiencing as well as helping them improve their situation by emphasizing the importance of this student population.

Another necessary component in assisting the student veteran is providing them
with accurate information. This will allow the student veteran, regardless of how they view their situation, to know what strategies and resources are available, how to access and utilize them, and who to turn to for support. Most importantly, this study found that it is imperative to meet the student veteran where they are at, both academically and socially, in order to best facilitate their successful transition to becoming a college student.
References


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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Introductory Questions

Welcome and thank the participant. Ensure participant is comfortable. Provide the participant with informed consent. Go through the informed consent with the participant and answer any questions that he or she might have.

1. Do I have permission to take an audio of this interview?

I: The following questions will be asked to gather demographic and basic background information about all participants in the study. They will not be used for identification purposes.

1. What is your first name?
2. How old are you?
3. What year are you in college? (First, second, etc.)
4. How do you identify racially/ethnically?
5. What is your current employment status?

Interview Questions – Student veterans transition to college student

6. Tell me about yourself?
   a. Where is home?
   b. What was life like growing up for you?
   c. What kind of a student were you in high school?
7. What branch of the military did/do you serve in?
   a. How long have you been or were in that service?
   b. What made you decide to join the military?
8. Tell me about your transition into the military?
   a. How old were you?
   b. What sorts of things did you experience as you enlisted? Went through basic training?
9. Tell me about some of your experiences in the military?
   a. Did you complete any tours abroad? If so, tell me about them?
   b. What was the most challenging experience you went through? How did you get through it?
10. When did you first decide to attend college?
    a. What influenced your decision?
11. What attracted you to this institution?
    a. What/who influenced your decision?
    b. Did you look at other institutions?
12. Tell me about your application process.
   a. Did you have/choose to identify as a veteran?
   b. Did you transfer prior credits? From where?
   c. Did you earn college credits while in the military?
   d. Tell me about the assessment and allocation process?
13. Did you participate in the institutions orientation process? Tell me about your experiences with that.
   a. Did they know you are a veteran?
   b. Was it veteran-specific?
   c. Did you have an orientation leader/mentor?
14. What parts of your college orientation experience were the most helpful? Why?
15. What parts of your college orientation experience were least helpful? Why?
16. Do you use any veteran educational benefits (federal or state)?
   a. Discuss the financial aid process regarding using your benefits.
   b. Is there a veteran-specific financial aid office? If so, where is it located?
   c. Discuss any issues related to using, certifying, processing, and disbursement of benefits.
   d. Who/where could you turn to for help?
17. Discuss your transition to being a college student.
   a. How is it different from your experience in joining the military? Are there similarities?
   b. Who was most helpful to you during this time?
   c. Who do you lean on when you face challenges in college?
   d. What resources at the institution have you utilized? How did you find out about them?
   e. Share your observations of your dealings with staff, faculty, and students.
18. Do you currently have a job (part-time or full-time)? How does that influence your academic experience in college?
19. What offices do you seek assistance from on a regular basis? Describe in what way they assist you?
   a. How did you find out about this office?
   b. What is your level of satisfaction with this office?
   c. Do you think this office knows about your Veteran status? Why or why not?
   d. What is your level of satisfaction with this office?
20. Have you utilized any services available to you as a student/student veteran (financial aid, academic advising, veterans’ office, counseling, tutoring)?
   a. In what ways did they provide assistance?
   b. What was your satisfaction level with the service and support you received?
21. Are there certain offices that you have identified as Veteran-Specific (or Veteran-Friendly?) Tell me about those offices?
   a. What makes them Veteran specific?
b. Are there other offices that should have a designation for veteran specific? Who and Why?

22. Are there any student organizations that have facilitated your transition?
a. Which ones?
b. What do they provide you as a student? Student Veteran?
c. Why did you connect to this organization?
d. Do they know about your veteran status?

Closing: Is there anything about your experience at ____ that I did not ask you about that you want to share? Is there anything else that you want me to know?

Thank you for your time and for being so forthcoming.