

ENHANCING VETERAN ACADEMIC SUCCESS:
VOICES OF CSUS STUDENT VETERANS ON THEIR COMMUNITY COLLEGE
EXPERIENCE AND TRANSITION TO UNIVERSITY

A Project

Presented to the faculty of the Division of Social Work

California State University, Sacramento

Submitted in partial satisfaction of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

by

Rebecca Collette

Nestor Davila-Carranza

SPRING
2014

ENHANCING VETERAN ACADEMIC SUCCESS:
VOICES OF CSUS STUDENT VETERANS ON THEIR COMMUNITY COLLEGE
EXPERIENCE AND TRANSITION TO UNIVERSITY

A Project

by

Rebecca Collette

Nestor Davila-Carranza

Approved by:

_____, Committee Chair
Francis Yuen, DSW, ACSW, Professor

Date

Student: Rebecca Collette
Nestor Davila-Carranza

I certify that this student has met the requirements for format contained in the University format manual, and that this project is suitable for shelving in the Library and credit is to be awarded for the project.

_____, Graduate Coordinator _____
Dale Russell, Ed.D, LCSW Date

Division of Social Work

Abstract
of
ENHANCING VETERAN ACADEMIC SUCCESS:
VOICES OF CSUS STUDENT VETERANS ON THEIR COMMUNITY COLLEGE
EXPERIENCE AND TRANSITION TO UNIVERSITY

by
Rebecca Collette
Nestor Davila-Carranza

The survey used in this study was designed to better understand challenges student veterans face when transferring from community college to CSUS. Researchers focus specifically on three factors: administrative processes, behavioral health access, and student veteran organizations. Participants were student veterans enrolled at California State University, Sacramento (CSUS), and were primarily undergraduates aged 25-34 who had transferred from community college to CSUS. Among participants, 63% were male and 59% had deployed to a combat zone. Study results from 70 veteran student surveys identified key challenges affecting student veterans in the following areas: transferring credits, faculty and peer interaction, orientation, accessing financial aid and G.I. Bill benefits, and class registration. Researchers found the most useful services identified by participants at both community college and CSUS were priority registration, full-time veteran representative on campus, and access to counseling services. Findings indicated a positive correlation between student veterans' satisfaction levels during

community college and ratings of helpfulness of community college veteran representatives, suggesting that these representatives play an important role in the academic experience of the veteran. Researchers found that participants valued many skills developed during military service, such as flexibility, reacting productively under stress, and working well with others. Further, results indicated that student veteran dropouts could be largely attributed to mental health challenges such as poor coping skills, mental health reasons, alcohol and drug use, and cultural adaptation problems. Researchers make recommendations that challenge community colleges and universities to be “veteran-friendly” campuses.

_____, Committee Chair
Francis Yuen, DSW, ACSW, Professor

Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researchers would like to give special thanks to Dr. Francis Yuen, the advisor of this study, for his help, support, and commitment to the completion of this project. The researchers would also like to thank the CSUS Veteran Success Center Director, Jeff Weston, and his staff, for their ongoing support and contributions during this study. In addition, researchers would like to acknowledge Dane Collette for his assistance and support in the writing process. Rebecca Collette would like to thank her friends and family for their patience and encouragement during this time.

Nestor Davila would like to give a special thanks and recognition to God first. To Sonia Davila, Omar Davila, Carlos Luna-Davila, and Eric Lopez-Davila for all the support afforded to him through trials and tribulations. Nestor would also like to thank the Davila family for being his moral compass in life, always steering him in the right direction. Their encouragement and support has been vital in achieving his dreams. Thank you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Acknowledgements.....	vi
List of Tables	x
List of Figures	xi
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of Collaboration	3
Statement of the Research Problem	3
Background and Need.....	5
Purpose of the Study	6
Research Questions	8
Theoretical Framework.....	8
Significance to the Field	10
Definition of Terms.....	11
CSUS Student Veteran.....	11
Community college.....	11
University.....	12
Coping Skills.....	12
Veteran Certifying Official/veteran representative.....	12
Higher Education	12

Limitations	12
2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	14
Historical Perspective	15
Characteristics of the Veteran Population.....	17
Administrative Processes and Veteran Friendly Campuses	21
Behavioral Health Access	31
Student Veteran Organizations	39
Summary	50
3. METHODOLOGY	53
Study Design.....	55
Sampling Procedures	55
Data Collection Procedures.....	56
Instruments.....	57
Data Analysis	60
Protection of Human Subjects	61
4. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS	63
Overall Findings.....	65
Specific Findings	69
Satisfaction and Understanding Levels.....	69
Satisfaction and Helpfulness.....	70
Obstacles Encountered.....	72
Services Utilized	74

Additional Findings	76
Satisfaction and Obstacles Encountered	77
Coping Skills.....	77
Knowledge of Student Veteran Dropouts	79
Top Reasons Reported for Student Veteran Dropouts.....	81
Characteristics and Skills of Veteran Representatives.....	83
Levels of Understanding	84
Group Differences.....	85
Gender Differences	86
Summary	87
5. SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION.....	88
Summary of Study	88
Implications for Social Work.....	93
Recommendations.....	96
Limitations	98
Conclusion	99
Appendix A. Consent to Participate in Research.....	101
Appendix B. Student Veteran Survey.....	103
References.....	113

LIST OF TABLES

Tables	Page
1. Correlation tests between variables for overall obstacles encountered, satisfaction, understanding, and helpfulness.....	71
2. Means calculated for frequency of obstacles encountered by participants in specific areas of community college.....	75
3. Community college services utilized.....	76
4. CSUS VSC services utilized.....	76
5. Frequency distribution of military coping skills developed by participants.....	78
6. Frequency distribution of reasons for veteran dropouts.....	81
7. Frequency distribution of veteran representative characteristics.....	83
8. Paired samples t-test of significant difference in overall understanding levels before and after community college.....	85

LIST OF FIGURES

Figures		Page
1.	Participants' current level of academic study at CSUS	66
2.	Participants' age.....	67
3.	Participants' combat experience	68
4.	Participants' branch of service.....	68
5.	Participants' knowledge of veteran dropouts.....	80

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In 2011, the Veteran population in the United States topped 22.6 million, of which over 2.2 million were women (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2011). Roughly 15% of the whole population, or over 3.3 million veterans, have been declared disabled and are receiving government compensation for injuries obtained during their military service (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2011). Three years later, the number of veterans returning home keeps rising, and every day a new wave of veterans transition from military service to the civilian sector. A large portion of the veterans will transition into the work force. Military service members will fill in the ranks of constructions workers, real estate agents, police officers, security guards, business owners, and many more occupations corresponding to the education and training they received in the military. Patriotism, sense of duty, love of country, and selflessness are among the main reasons women and men join the Armed Forces. Additionally, the educational benefits offered to military members remains a compelling reason for young people to serve in our nation's armed forces and many veterans will pursue higher education as they transition out of service.

Floridians make up nearly 7 percent (1.5 million) of the total veteran population and the Lonestar State of Texas is home to another 1.6 million (California Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012). However, the largest concentrated population of veterans resides in the state of California, which has over 1.8 million veterans living in any one of its 58 counties (California Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012). The population of veterans

in each state translates to a corresponding percentage of the total Veterans Affairs Budget, meaning that California receives the largest percent of the VA budget compared to other states. The current submission for budget approval to the United States Congress for fiscal year 2014 (FY14) is estimated at 152 billion dollars (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013). In FY13, over 20.8 billion dollars was dispersed to the State of California to help meet the needs of its veteran population, of which nearly 1.4 billion dollars was used for educational benefits (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013).

California Department of Veterans Affairs (2012), reports that approximately 92,449 veterans live in Sacramento County alone. From this population, approximately 800 student veterans attend California State University, Sacramento (CSUS), according to the Veteran Success Center (VSC) on campus. Of this subgroup, 85% have transferred from one of California's community colleges. Many veterans have managed to transition from the military to a community college environment, and after meeting all the eligibility requirements of a four-year university like CSUS, have successfully transferred to continue their education.

In California, once a high school graduate misses their initial opportunity to enroll in a four-year university for reasons such as low GPA, financial hardship, work, or family obligations, then registering to attend a four-year school is no longer an option. Instead, the student is funneled to a community college where he or she must complete approximately 70 transferable credits in general education and meet the specific standards demanded by the four-year university before transferring. Many military service men and women looking to pursue higher education in the state of California face

the very same obstacle of having to first go through community college. By default, two-year institutions have fewer resources available for student veterans, making the transition to college that much more challenging.

Statement of Collaboration

This study was conducted through the collaboration of researchers Rebecca Collette and Nestor Davila. Nestor was the lead writer for chapters one and five, while Rebecca conducted the data analysis and took the lead on chapter four. Both researchers worked equally on chapters two and three. All subsequent revisions of the five chapters were worked in equal collaboration, while editing and formatting was primarily accomplished by Rebecca. Although each of the researchers took the lead on different aspects of the project, all chapters and sections were jointly crafted with the involvement of both researchers.

Statement of the Research Problem

Because of a lack of on-campus, veteran-specific resources, veteran students seeking higher education through four-year colleges in California experience great frustration when transitioning from community colleges across the state. Knowledge and understanding of Veterans Affairs and the numerous educational benefit program requirements is crucial to the success of veterans looking to transfer from community colleges. Studies indicate that during the transition to college, student veterans experience problems with school policies that complicate enrollment and at times, require intervention by a student veteran representative on their behalf (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Directly related is the lack of a link or communication system between community

colleges and universities. Veterans are not strangers to receiving new orders, picking up their belongings, and moving on short notice, but a point of contact at their new location and a direct link to the old one are critical in setting up the veteran for success. A second problem area lies in qualifications for staff who deal with the large array of needs in serving student veterans. Researchers acknowledge that community colleges in California already have G.I. Bill Veteran Certifying Officials (VCOs) who assist veterans in navigating the tricky waters of transitioning educational benefits by ensuring correct processing of all financial obligations. Despite the significant benefit these officials provide to student veterans, the fact is that they may not be able to recognize or meet the needs of veterans struggling with social and emotional challenges during this significant transition. The third area that could affect student veterans' academic success is Student Veteran Organizations (SVOs) or other veteran to veteran interaction in the form of mentorship, support, and social gatherings. Veterans report significant benefits from connection with veteran peers and mentors (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009). This could be in the form of a peer mentorship program led by the SVO, leadership opportunities within the organization, or increased social interaction and participation in the community through the local community college's SVO. In general, student veterans are, by nature or by training, self-reliant, self-sufficient, and able to adapt and overcome many challenges in order to complete their goals. However, a lack of resources for veterans at the community college level can make the transition more difficult, and could impede student veterans from completing their academic goals.

Background and Need

As of 2013, California did not have a set standard for community colleges to serve their student veteran population. Transforming community college campuses in California to become more veteran-friendly would help alleviate the transition from military to college for the veteran, easing their navigation through administrative paper work. The term “veteran-friendly campus” refers to community colleges individually identifying and removing barriers, actively easing transition of the veteran, and educating the service member about available benefits (Lokken, Pfeffer, McAuley, & Strong, 2009). The State of Minnesota has contributed to making campuses more “veteran-friendly” by mandating that its colleges and universities provide adequate space for veteran offices where the needs of its student veterans can be properly addressed (Lokken, Pfeffer, McAuley, & Strong, 2009). In order to further ease transition for student veterans who are ready to transfer to a four-year university, community colleges must establish communication with their veteran representative counterparts on California State University (CSU)/University of California (UC) campuses. These professionals could streamline the transition process through registration assistance, credit certification, individual counseling, and referral to VA services. Hiring professionals and properly training staff on veteran-specific needs would greatly improve the quality of service to student veterans.

Student organizations provide a setting for learning, reflection, and provide an environment to support the transition from the military to campus (Summerlot, 2009). Veterans’ organizations can also enable a smooth transition for the service member from

campus to campus, as veterans report feeling better understood and better able to trust fellow veterans. As previously stated, 85% of all student veterans at CSUS have transferred from a community college. This fact should underscore the importance of identifying which areas, in that transition, need improvement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to better understand the challenges faced by student veterans transferring from community colleges to CSUS in order to recommend improvements. A vast majority of veterans seeking higher education in California will enroll at one of its community colleges before transferring or being eligible to transfer to a four-year university. These student veterans are a unique population. Combat exposure is one of many factors that identify their uniqueness, and they require different resources than their non-veteran counterparts (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008). Some studies indicate that up to 30% of veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan have received mental health diagnoses (DiRamio & Spires, 2009). The Department of Defense (DoD) Task Force on Mental Health (2007) also indicates that 27% of veterans returning from deployment suffer from depression, 24% report alcohol abuse, and 43% report problems with anger (DiRamio & Spires, 2009). These problems create challenges for veterans that can jeopardize their academic success. Meeting veterans' unique needs means having a veteran-centric support system. If these needs are not met, rates of academic success will continue to decline. Since many veterans begin their higher education at community colleges, the veteran-specific services there and during transition to university are critical to ensuring academic success and lower dropout rates. Veterans

looking to pursue a higher education will continue to be deterred from reaching their educational goals. As the home state to the biggest veteran population in the nation, California's best choice is to lead the way by providing adequate academic transition services to the men and women striving to contribute positively to society by furthering their education.

With the purpose of improving academic success among student veterans, researchers will study services received during the transition from military duty to community college, and from community college to university. CSUS has a population of over 30,000 students. From this sampling frame, the study will concentrate on the 800 students identified as veterans of the United States Armed Forces. Focusing on veterans who are pursuing higher education at CSUS will allow researchers to identify veterans' inherent personal strengths, their challenges during the transition to higher education, and to identify and make recommendations to community colleges from the student veteran perspective.

In order to capture the student veteran perspective, researchers will administer a survey to assess the need for veteran-specific service improvements. This strategy will allow student veterans to identify barriers in the area of transitioning from community college to a four-year university, to document levels of understanding of the VA and California's education systems among student veterans, and to assess the helpfulness of the veteran representative at the community college. Over 800 veterans currently attending CSUS will be provided the opportunity to complete the online survey. Researchers will measure challenges encountered and coping skills utilized, and will

inquire into current resources that student veterans find useful. As a result of the study, researchers expect to identify specific needs of veterans transitioning from community college to four-year university, to make recommendations on specific processes, and to highlight changes needed in order to make the transition as seamless as possible.

Researchers hope to challenge community colleges and universities to strive for “veteran-friendly” campuses.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do student veterans’ community college experiences relate to their levels of understanding of the school/VA system (VA educational benefits, CA community college system, and CSU/UC system)?
2. Do student veterans’ levels of satisfaction toward the community college campus, culture, faculty, peers, and staff correlate with ratings of helpfulness of the veteran representative?
3. What unique obstacles do student veterans encounter during community college and how often are those obstacles encountered?
4. What services provided through the CSUS Veteran Center does the veteran suggest would be useful at the community college level? What services were utilized at the community college level?

Theoretical Framework

Researchers chose the following two theories as a conceptualizing framework for this study: Schlossberg’s theory of adult transitions and the Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory. Researchers will describe the background and main aspects of these perspectives,

and then they will provide an explanation for their application to the purpose of this study. First, Schlossberg's Transition Model (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995) identifies four factors that affect an individual's ability to cope with a transition period: situation, self, support, strategies. These factors indicate the circumstances surrounding the individual, the individual's experiences and personal perspective, outside support including family and friends, and preexisting coping mechanisms that the individual has developed. Schlossberg's transition theory effectively illustrates how individually developed coping strategies can allow for better understanding of adult transitions. It depicts a framework that allows transitions of all types to be analyzed. In the development of her theory, Schlossberg attempted to answer the question: "Since people react and adapt so differently to transitions and since the same person can react and adapt so differently at different points in life, how can we understand and help adults as they face the inevitable but non-predictable transitions of life?" (Schlossberg, 1981). This theory succinctly relates to student veterans in their adult major life transition from military service into higher education, and provides the lens from which to view their ability to adapt and develop specific coping mechanisms that allow them to make sense of the transition.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory defines the broader ecological environment as a set of nested structures or systems, beginning in the center with a microsystem and expanding toward the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and finally the chronosystem (1994). The microsystem consists of an individual's pattern of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relationships, while the mesosystem describes connections

or relationships between the individual and one or more microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The exosystem also describes connections, but the distinction is that they are links between two or more microsystems not including the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Macrosystems refer to the broader culture in its beliefs, collective knowledge, resources, customs, opportunities, and risks (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Finally, chronosystems encompass change or consistency over time in both person and environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The ecological perspective employs a useful framework from which to discuss the factors affecting student veterans. The student veteran's support network, social roles, and behavioral patterns interact with both the broader culture of the military and that of the college campus. The connections established and broken between the entities that provide services to students and specifically to veterans at a college can have a large effect on that individual's experience and subsequent success. The ecological framework provides the avenue to effectively analyzing gaps, broken processes, and missing links between systems at the micro, meso, and macro levels.

Significance to the Field

This study will allow researchers to discover important information regarding the attitudes and behavior of student veteran participants. The current literature on this topic is lacking in the area specific to veterans' academic success in community college. Having identified that the majority of student veterans at university have transferred from community college, it is evident that student veterans' most vulnerable period is their time spent at community college. Another reason for student veterans' vulnerability during this academic transition is the fact that many of them are in the midst of a

significant life-transition as well. Having just ended their military service (a significant and unique, adult-life experience), their transition to civilian life is often filled with big changes. Community colleges catch veterans at this vulnerable time, making research of this specific area significant, relevant and important.

With this study, the researchers' goal is to use findings to enhance services provided by veterans' centers on community college campuses. Researchers, and the broader community, can use this information to better educate the service providers, faculty, and staff who interact with veterans on a daily basis and to provide empirically-based material to assist veterans in achieving their academic goals, reduce their dropout rates among their academic standing.

Definition of Terms

CSUS Student Veteran: A person who is eligible to receive a form DD 214, a certificate of release of discharge from Active Duty in the United States Armed Forces, and who is enrolled in a CSUS degree program during the 2013/2014 academic year. An individual is eligible to receive a Form DD 214 after completing 24 continuous months of Active Duty, or the full period of service to which the individual was called to Active Duty. Individuals must be discharged under conditions other than dishonorable.

Community college: Two-year non-residential academic institution used for the purpose of pursuing an associate's degree, or used as a stepping stone to fulfill all necessary requirements to transfer to a four-year institution.

University: Four-year, government funded, accredited educational institution designed for instruction and examination of students in many branches of advanced learning, and authorized to grant academic degrees.

Coping Skills: Any behavioral tool as identified on a questionnaire by self-report used to overcome obstacles in a community college system.

Veterans Certifying Official/veteran representative: A community college employee whose positional responsibility is to assist veterans with benefit counseling, interpretation of institutions and VA policies, military transcript evaluation, and advising services.

Higher Education: Any post high school education pursued by military student veterans in academic institutions, encompassing both community colleges and universities.

Limitations

A limitation of using this specific population is that researchers will not be able to generalize to the larger population of all veterans in higher education due to the focus on California State schools, specifically CSUS. Differences in types of community colleges and universities, levels of on-campus services provided to veterans, and levels of state-provided services to veterans are all examples of this limitation in generalizability.

Because the survey population is inherently limited to only those student veterans who have successfully transitioned to a university, researchers will be unable to collect the perspectives of those who did not successfully transfer out of community college into a four-year university. This limitation will potentially skew researchers' data analysis to reflect more positive experiences than would be reported by the larger student veteran population. Researchers believe findings will instead reflect a balanced perspective of

student veterans who have successfully continued their education at a four-year university, but who likely still encountered and overcame challenges along the way. In addition researchers will include opportunities for student veteran participants to document second hand knowledge of veteran dropouts and their perception of the reasons behind fellow student veterans not being able to complete their academic goals. This question should give insight into the population of student veterans who could not be reached by surveying only CSUS students.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into veterans' perspectives on the transition from community college into university, to ease this potentially tumultuous transition period and ultimately, to increase the number of veterans who succeed academically. Because the U.S. government has offered educational assistance to veterans since the years immediately following World War II, it is important to look at the historical context surrounding such benefits (Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011). The inherent value in educating veterans should be discussed from a historical perspective. In addition, investigating the unique characteristics of the veteran population will allow us to validate the need for specific resources. To narrow the focus of the current study, researchers will discuss three major themes that have emerged through the process of reviewing the most current literature on military veterans in higher education systems.

The first theme that emerges from the literature as a common problem area for veterans in higher education centers on the tricky administrative processes and the lack of "veteran friendly campuses". Some examples of challenging situations include applying for Department of Veteran's Affairs (VA) benefits, gaining college credit for military training and experience, and feeling welcomed on the campus and supported by staff and faculty.

The second theme from the literature review is as a common problem among veteran students is poor access to behavioral health services. Integrating a referral process

within a pre-existing Veteran Center and educating staff and faculty to recognize and appreciate the mental health challenges that veterans face could allow veterans to achieve greater academic success.

The third major area that could benefit from change is found in Student Veteran Organizations (SVOs). Based on the literature, veterans report significant benefits from connection with veteran peers and mentors. This could be in the form of a peer mentorship program led by the SVO, leadership opportunities within the organization, or increased social interaction and participation in the community through the local community college's SVO.

Addressing these three areas is the focus of this study. The following literature review will detail several studies in each of the three areas that will highlight the needs and solutions that serve as the foundation for the current study.

Historical Perspective

Although this nation has historically provided benefits, compensation, and assistance to veterans after wartime, it was not until after World War II that educational benefits became part of that assistance with the passage of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, or the "GI Bill" (Olson, 1974). This legislation is, in large part, credited with the re-formation of the middle class following World War II and was seen as the solution to the impending post-war unemployment problem (Lackaye, 2011). Although the original GI Bill was a great leap in the furtherance of veteran assistance, it has taken much effort and revision to maintain, especially through the Vietnam conflict. Vietnam veterans received only half as many benefits relatively speaking, as WWII

veterans, which forced them to pursue employment while attending college. Boulton argued that this was mainly due to the overall negativity of the Vietnam War and the subsequent lack of scholarly research (2005). In short, Boulton believed that the political and social climate was to blame more than mental health issues such as PTSD (Boulton, 2005). While mental health was (and remains) a crucial issue needing attention, a systemic approach to the obstacles faced by Vietnam veterans in pursuing education proved more effective. Boulton sought to change the public's perspective toward veterans from the stereotypical "emotionally and physically crippled" veteran, to that of a capable and honorable service member. Coming alongside today's military veterans by honoring them and supporting them through a difficult transition into higher education could prove to be the solution that is not only most effective, but also the solution which bolsters veterans' morale by recognizing their inherent personal strengths.

After recognizing the obstacles which Vietnam veterans faced in seeking education, many changes brought the level of educational assistance to where it is now. The most recent iteration of this assistance is the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008, more commonly known as the Post 9/11 GI Bill. It not only covers tuition and books, but also provides veterans with a housing stipend to offset living expenses while they are full-time students. In the first year following enactment of the bill, over five-hundred-thousand veterans applied for eligibility determination, and more than three-hundred-thousand actively used the benefit to attend classes (Steele, Salcedo, & Coley 2010). One of the great successes of the GI Bill was to increase the number of veterans pursuing higher education after military service. Their ultimate

academic success and degree completion, however, is dependent upon their experience during the transition and while attending higher education.

Characteristics of the Veteran Population

The general population of veterans may seem to blend into any college campus, but it is important to realize their distinctiveness. First, they are typically older, having already had military careers of varying lengths. A vast majority are transfer students from community colleges, or have at least transferred credits for college courses completed during military service (O'Herrin, 2011). A study by Patrick Murphy in 2011 investigated the needs of student veterans in higher education. He determined that, as a population, student veterans consider themselves to be vastly different from the general student population. Murphy attempted to learn about, firsthand, the overall experience and recommendations of veterans at a specific higher learning institution. Although the name of the school was not included in the study, it was cited as a publically-funded, coeducational, doctoral-granting, residential university with an educational history that reaches back 100 years (Murphy, 2011). Additionally it was located in a metropolitan area in the Southeastern United States - in the center of a group of ten other 4-year colleges and universities (Murphy, 2011). The purpose of the study was to determine 1) how military veterans view their college experience, 2) how military veterans attempted to have their needs met, 3) to see what college resources were available to meet needs of military veterans, and 4) to determine what needs were not being met during their higher learning experience.

One of the issues Murphy researched was that although universities were well-suited to serve the more traditional “right-out-of-high-school” student, they were not necessarily ready to serve the student veterans on campus. In order to better understand the attitudes of student veterans, Murphy interviewed and analyzed the personal experiences of 13 Post-9/11 G.I. Bill veterans, revealing a multitude of collective needs for this particular university (2011). He used a purposeful selection method to pick participants which included contacting the university’s veteran liaison. With institution approval, the veteran center on campus was able to provide a list of all current student veterans as well as those who had recently attended. The list contained a total of 1,920 names, of which 363 had utilized the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill. Since recipients of this educational benefit can include dependents, this number was further narrowed down to only those with prior military experience. After contacting the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill student veterans via email, the final list yielded 14 candidates willing to participate, of which 13 actually participated in the interviews. The selection of the veterans reflected ethnicity and gender variables of larger military demographics.

In order to employ a direct source of data (rather than extracting data from survey instruments), Murphy used a qualitative research method and collected data using semi-structured interviews with pre-formulated questions. Answers were open-ended and expanded upon by probe questions used at the researcher’s discretion. Other strategies involved verbatim transcription and participant verification of researcher interpretations. Murphy analyzed data using a computer search function of the verbatim transcriptions, identifying themes from participant responses.

Many findings in Murphy's study were pertinent to this research study. First, the top ranked theme from Murphy's study stated that veterans in college possess a much higher level of maturity than traditional students. This solidifies the idea that veterans view themselves as separate and unique from their larger cohort. Second, participants pointed out that having a knowledgeable and compassionate veterans' liaison on campus made college a more successful experience for them. In total, nine other key themes were identified. Researchers found that student veterans desired the following at their campus: anonymity, treatment as adults, a veterans' center for transition assistance, camaraderie, administrative help, better marketing of available services, college credit for military training and experience, and a stake in guidance of their futures in college (Murphy, 2011). Murphy gathered from his findings that veterans perceived themselves to be much more mature and goal-focused than the general student body. The veteran participants had a unique worldview and foundation that caused them to look at their higher education in a serious way. Although the campus had some shortcomings in serving the veteran population, the overall tone of the students indicated that problems could be alleviated with a proper veteran representative - highlighting the importance of that position. Future research suggested broaching the subject of "blending in" as it was a main theme that emerged from the study. Some limitations in the study were procedural in nature, revolving around participants' failure to rank themes or select top themes. The findings may not be generalizable to all military student veterans, due to geographic limitations, but can certainly be used to guide policy and procedures in other higher learning institutions.

Most veterans have completed deployments to a combat zone, and many of those have experienced trauma as a result. Larick and Graf present an intriguing article that sheds a positive light on combat experiences (2012). Most literature paints a negative light on combat experience, focusing on negative results such as PTSD and mental challenges, but understanding these experiences from the opposite (positive) side could be revolutionary (Larick & Graf, 2012). “Positive psychology and strength-based approaches that focus on personal strengths in counseling have been shown to help clients achieve emotional satisfaction, overcome life challenges, and find greater meaning in life (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).” Literature points to a post-traumatic growth, or PTG, as the possible positive outcome of traumatic experience. Trauma could serve to stimulate personal or social transformation in the areas of appreciation of life, personal strength, relating to others, spiritual change, and new possibilities (Tedeschi & Tedeschi, 1999). Common post traumatic growth could manifest in the areas of prioritizing what is important in life, being better able to appreciate each day, and being better able to handle difficulties. Larick and Graf’s study focused on the positive experiences associated with trauma, and focused on personal strengths and personal growth as an avenue for prevention and treatment of mental health problems.

This resiliency in military veterans propels them past obstacles, but it also leads them to pursue a more meaningful post-service life. PTG is the reason some veterans pursue higher education, and their perspectives could shed light on what should be done to make the transition from community college to university as seamless as possible.

Administrative Processes and Veteran Friendly Campus

Some of the most difficult waters that veterans pursuing higher education must navigate are school registration and enrollment, accessing and claiming GI Bill benefits, and receiving credit for their military training and experience. In addition, these processes can be made even more difficult on campuses that are either unwelcoming or inaccessible to veterans. Services provided to veterans at the California State University (CSU) and University of California (UC) should be offered at the community college level as well. Because student veterans encounter challenges that traditional students may never experience (especially with regard to successful enrollment), every campus in California (ideally, the country) should have a veterans' resource center available, staffed by qualified personnel who understand the unique needs of student veterans. The three studies cited in this section provide background and highlight findings that solidify the importance of this particular need for veterans attending community college.

A study published in 2010, by Karen Persky, focused on student veterans in the community college setting. According to Persky, two significant factors have positively impacted the United States overall standard of living (2010). One of those factors is the G.I. Bill, which, since implemented, has educated a vast number of veterans who otherwise would not have pursued a higher education. The second factor is the community college, which strategically opened the door to educational opportunities for many citizens looking for upward mobility. The purpose of Persky's study was to identify the needs of community college student veterans and to examine programs and services

that are vital to serving the student veteran population (2010). She focused on answering three main questions:

1. What do veterans perceive their needs to be at the community college?
2. What programs and services are currently in place at the community college to address the needs of veterans?
3. What recommendations can be made for improving the veterans' community college experience?

According to the study, the body of research on the education of returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans is limited and empirical research on the topic of student veterans in community college is also lacking.

Persky's study was field-focused, taking place at a Midwestern community college. All participants were current students, faculty, or former students of the college. She selected participants using criterion and chain sampling, and the site was chosen because it was a large community college serving approximately 1,300 veterans. The five groups in this case study included current student veterans, administrators, faculty, staff, and former student veterans. To be eligible, student participants had to be U.S. military veterans currently enrolled in study at the community college. The faculty involved in the study had to be current faculty with demonstrated interest and involvement in veterans' education. Administrator participants had to be current employees of the college holding high-level administrative positions.

Persky gathered data for this qualitative study using semi-structured interviews. An open-ended format facilitated the exploratory nature of the research. Researchers

asked participants to elaborate on their answers to open-ended questions, allowing for a more flexible interview process and detailed individual responses. The tools used in this study included a qualitative case study, observations, field notes, document reviews, a focus group, and a pre-interview demographic questionnaire. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours.

The findings that emerged as a result of the interviews were categorized as follows:

1. Credit streamlining
2. Streamlining of programs and services
3. Faculty, advisor, and counselor training
4. Difficulties encountered by veterans
5. Factors that constitute a veteran friendly campus

The findings included perspectives from student veterans, faculty and staff. For the purpose of this research, the findings in Persky's study relate specifically to researcher's first focus area, the need for training for liaison, faculty, and staff in veteran-specific needs to better streamline administrative processes and create a veteran friendly culture on community college campuses (2010).

According to Persky (2010), the most mentioned need was to have a central space where students could obtain information regarding benefits, programs, and resources specific to veterans. Second, she found that easing the process of transferring military education and training into college credits was of significant importance to student veterans. Interestingly, participants attributed their trouble with credit transferal directly

to ineffective academic advising. Participants also stated that teaching faculty and counselors to recognize PTSD and related mental health issues was important. Because of this specific mental health need, participants emphasized the importance of a veteran-specific approach to counseling and advising. They also voiced concerns over the classroom environment, expressing the need for better management of anti-military bias. Persky's (2010) findings have at least three implications:

1. Community colleges that are veteran friendly campuses will project a better image and attract more veterans coming out of the military or looking to expand their education
2. Attracting veterans to community colleges through student veteran specific services is a way that colleges can increase enrollments, improve retention, and increase graduation rates
3. Financially, student veterans will bring G.I. Bill funding to the institution

Single case study was the primary limitation to this study, which means that the findings are limited in their generalizability. A second limitation rests in the potential for researcher or participant bias due to qualitative research methods.

Another study that focused on administrative processes and campus culture was conducted by Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell in 2009. When a business is looking for innovative ideas to increase productivity, satisfaction, and services to their clients, a common practice is to survey customer satisfaction levels and recommendations. A successful business takes the results and works on making those improvements, so they can better serve customers. Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell used the same concept in

their 2009 study. In an effort to better serve the growing population of student veterans in college, their study focused on the transition of combat veterans to college students. The authors highlighted the experiences of several service members who returned to campus and integrated into college life after serving in the armed forces. The purpose of this study was to identify how administrators could acknowledge and support veterans as they returned to campus, and to contribute towards efforts to standardize service to veterans on college campuses across the nation. Their combat experience makes them a unique population with needs that are different from non-service-veteran college students. The researchers' goal was to help college campuses adopt some of the recommendations made by the study's student veteran participants.

The qualitative study included a total of six women and nineteen men who were interviewed. Of this group, twenty-four were enrolled, full-time, at one of three public research universities and one was enrolled at a four-year, regional university. Out of those who participated in the study, only two experienced more than a single deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan. Nine participants had prior college experience before entering the armed forces. Service members currently on active duty were excluded from this study, but National Guard and Reserve members were allowed to participate. Participants were individually interviewed by one of three researchers, who asked them to look back at their college experience and reflect on obstacles encountered and services they found useful during their college experience. Researchers then identified themes among participant responses and used them to make recommendations for improvements.

Results revealed that motivation to join the service varied among all participants, from sense of duty after the September 11 attacks, to long family traditions of military service. Three of the participants had made their decision to join the military as early as grade school. Another major motivating factor was the availability of financial support for veterans who wanted a higher education. Regarding obstacles encountered by veterans, results confirmed problems with VA payment of educational benefits. National Guard participants in the study reported fewer problems with their college experiences. One potential explanation could be that the National Guard employs educational officers, who help with school-related problems and anticipate discrepancies that veteran Guardsmen may experience. Another common theme that emerged from study results was reference by participants to what they called “veteran-friendly campuses”. The study referred to such campuses as places where specific programs and people exist to assist veterans with their transitions from military to campus life. Participants also highlighted a need for student veteran orientations that specifically focus on resources available to student veterans on campus. Another area of concern was behavioral health. Many veterans reported having anger problems after military service, stating “it just doesn’t take much to get sparked off and go.” Anger issues could indicate transitional or adjustment difficulties or they could be symptoms of PTSD. Results of the study also highlighted the need for an SVO. Almost every participant spoke about the need to identify with other fellow veterans on campus, further highlighting this study’s third focus area: SVOs and veteran to veteran interaction.

Recommendations made by the researchers included acknowledging that student veterans with military combat experience are a population with special needs and campuses should collaborate with student veterans to better serve those needs. Also, in order for campuses to be “veteran friendly”, authors proposed instituting policies and guidance pertaining to the activation and deployment of student veterans who are currently in the Reserve or National Guard. Student veterans would also benefit from maintaining communication with their respective colleges while activated or deployed. To meet the requirements for “veteran-friendly campuses”, institutions should train staff and faculty on student veterans’ issues and needs. In addition, periodically surveying student veterans on satisfaction levels could provide a continual opportunity for growth and improvement of veteran services. Another consideration brought to light by the study was that female student veterans had different experiences than their male counterparts and that they might need additional services. The study’s researchers recommended implementing behavioral health and mental health services on campus. Finally connecting incoming veterans with other experienced student veterans – either by peer mentorship or in SVOs – could help meet some of the behavioral health needs of student veterans.

One limitation in the study was the small number of participants. The study did not specifically address the community college experience for student veterans since it only contained participants from universities. Similar to other types of colleges across the nation, community colleges are also experiencing increasing numbers of student veterans every semester (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009). Community colleges typically

have less monetary resources than four-year universities and this translates to fewer resources available to enrolled students. Focusing on the potentially more vulnerable transition from military service to community college, the current study seeks to expand on the findings and implications specific to the college administrative processes and services that are cited in Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell's 2009 study.

A third study that focused on administrative obstacles veterans encountered during college was conducted by Capps in 2011. Capps' tried to identify the motivations behind goal accomplishment in student veterans at a community college. Understanding the unique characteristics of the student veteran population, Capps discussed various barriers to successful goal completion in an academic setting. Among the barriers identified in Capps' study were rehabilitation appointments, ongoing medical review board disputes, physical setbacks, mental health problems, and an intense awareness of not fitting into the normative culture, or being a "non-traditional student". Capps implemented a discussion of the theories of persistence as they related to services provided to student veterans in order to better predict success rates among this population. In addition, she pointed out the importance of the cooperation between the student services department and the academic services department in addressing these difficulties.

The study's purpose was to document factors influencing student veteran motivation despite obstacles and challenges encountered during the transition from military service to the civilian educational environment. Capps asserts that community colleges play an important role during student veterans' transition because student

services, academic support services, and academic advising strategies employed by the community college have an impact in motivating persistence to goal completion in the academic setting. Fifteen student veteran participants made up the sample population in both parts of the study. These 15 participants accounted for 25% of the total student veteran population who were receiving veteran educational benefits at that selected community college. This group provided a representative sample based on age, number of years in service, and previous college attendance. The selected community college was a rural school in the mid-western U.S. with a main campus and four extension centers in the surrounding area.

Capps' exploratory study consisted of a researcher-developed questionnaire with demographics, open and closed-ended questions regarding college experiences, and an invitation to participate in a future focus group. The focus group was the second part of the study, allowing researchers to further clarify and evaluate the influence that college support services had on goal completion of student veterans. Capps' analyzed the qualitative data by translating transcriptions of interview questions into categories and topics, and then relating them back to the research question. Analysis identified four main topics of concern to veterans.

First, the topic of the actual transition itself (from the military into college) pointed toward some factors which enable an easier transition: veteran tuition benefits, veteran representatives at the college, other military students, and good teachers and staff. Many obstacles indicated on the questionnaires referred to student veterans' a lack of knowledge and information about the GI Bill, the numerous rules and regulations of the

transition processes, and the amount of paperwork involved in registration. These obstacles seem common and point toward a need for better educated staff, informational assistance, and a streamlined process for these veterans during their transition. Veteran representatives, transition courses, and veteran resource centers can all play a major role in addressing those areas of need. Second, the topic of motivation to complete educational goals pointed toward two main motivators: personal drive and family support. Capps' third topic, college academic services, covered some recommendations from the student veterans on programs the college could offer to be of more assistance to them. Among these recommendations were an established network to link up with fellow veterans at surrounding colleges, wireless card for internet access, assistance with childcare expenses, and tutoring available specifically for veterans. Fourth, regarding student veteran support services, the most popular and overwhelmingly agreed-upon recommendations were that colleges should have SVOs and available professional counseling for veterans. The former speaks to the need for camaraderie, while the latter speaks of a need for mental health services in a confidential and accessible setting.

While covering a wide range of issues, these three studies by Persky, Ackerman (et al), and Capps all hone in on the importance of streamlining the administrative processes that involve student veterans. All three studies highlighted the need for improving the skills of staff and their knowledge of VA educational benefits and financial assistance. These three studies also indicate that veteran representatives, veteran transition (or orientation) courses, and veteran resource centers can all play a major role in addressing the difficult administrative process. In addition, the need to promote

“veteran-friendly campuses” also emerged as a common theme. By way of a general definition, campuses can be considered “veteran-friendly” when there are programs and staff in place to assist veterans in making the transition from military to campus life. The possibilities and opportunities for developing creative solutions to the problems and challenges of administrative processes involving student veterans are limited only by the resources and ideas of the college leadership who take an interest in the veteran population. The studies also touched upon the need for mental and behavioral health options for veterans, as well as the importance of involvement in SVOs on campus. These areas will be addressed in the following sections, with further detail found in additional recent studies pertinent to this research topic.

Behavioral Health Access

As stated in the previous section detailing the characteristics of the student veteran population, student veterans have unique needs that stem from military culture, maturity, age differences, and exposure to the traumas of combat or service during war. In the next study reviewed, researchers sought to determine whether the unique experiences of student veterans resulted in “invisible wounds” above and beyond those experienced by their civilian counterparts. The second study addressed in this section explored the nature of the overall post-deployment adjustment period for veterans in order to better comprehend the complexity of their transition from military life to the college campus.

Serving the student veteran population across California’s community colleges presents challenges for both the recipient – who may need services not currently offered

on campuses –and administrators and staff who may be unaware of what services are needed to better serve the student veteran population. Barry, Whiteman, and Wadsworth attempt to shed some light on this challenge affecting veterans and educational institutions (2012).

The purpose of Barry et al's study was to determine the degree to which PTSD symptoms, among military affiliate students, are associated with rates of problematic drinking, alcohol-related consequences, and academic performance (Barry et al., 2012). Specifically, Barry looked at the side effects of the invisible wounds of war (PTSD, Depression, Maladaptive coping skills) and how they can affect student veterans in the classroom environment. Student veterans who were exposed to combat showed a higher risk of engaging in maladaptive coping strategies (alcohol abuse, street drugs, smoking) than that of their civilian counterparts. New reports indicate that one-in-three military personnel who participated in Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom will experience PTSD, depression, or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). Because student veterans are more likely to have to deal with invisible wounds than their civilian student counterparts, their chances of success in higher education are further obstructed. One alternative solution highlighted in the study involved properly screening incoming student veterans. Screening by a licensed professional for biological, psychological, and social stressors could identify preventative strategies, thus increasing student veterans' rates of academic success. More importantly, screening could be the critical, first step in developing a safety net for student veterans.

The study was longitudinal and it expanded over three academic semesters, looking at the adjustment among military and civilian students in higher education. The sample size included 250 students; 78 veteran students exposed to combat (64 male, 14 female), 53 veteran students not exposed to combat (40 male, 13 female), 38 Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) students (30 male, 8 female), and 79 civilian students (19 male, 60 female). Recruitment for participation took place in both private and public school settings at both two-year and four-year higher learning institutions – all located in a single Midwestern, US state. In total, 16 higher learning institutions that met the criteria of eligibility (being accredited, having VA benefits and administrative headquarters) participated in the study. All active military service branches were represented in the study (Barry et al., 2012).

Participants received electronic invitations to participate in the study. By replying to the email, students indicated willingness to participate in the survey and were granted access to the survey. Prior to start of survey, participants agreed to informed consent. All information gathered was kept anonymous, and participants also received a fifty dollar honorarium for their participation. In order to assess combat-related trauma exposure, student veterans were asked to identify if they had been personally exposed to traumatic situations related to war within a ten-year period. Examples included witnessing death due to war, tragic events, decomposing bodies, maimed soldiers, physical abuse, torture, and rape. In order to assess for posttraumatic stress, student veterans were asked to complete Weathers et al's 1993 PTSD checklist (civilian version). Both veteran and civilian students reported on seventeen items covering symptoms of PTSD. In order to

assess problem drinking, participants completed the four-item CAGE questionnaire, covering the following four areas:

1. Told by others to cut down on drinking
2. Annoyed by others' criticism about drinking
3. Felt bad or guilty about drinking
4. Ever had a drink first thing in the morning

Participants also answered questions regarding the consequences of drinking alcohol, and provided their grade point average from the previous semester. Other instruments used in this study were an Education Degree Behavior Self-Efficacy Scale assessment, an Academic Motivation questionnaire, and a Persistence/Voluntary Drop-out Scale to measure academic persistence.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine exposure to combat-related trauma. A series of hierarchical ordinary least squares multiple regressions were performed to examine associations between PTSD, problems with alcohol, academics, and function of group and combat exposure. Results indicated that across all groups PTSD was positively associated with both drinking problems and alcohol-related consequences. The study found that there is sufficient evidence that alcohol use is correlated to PTSD, but it is not definitive that combat exposure leads to alcohol abuse. PTSD was also linked to lower academic achievements, greater academic motivation, and lower academic persistence. Findings indicate that the current higher education system is not equipped to deal with the specific needs of student veteran populations, nor are proper assessments being conducted on incoming military veteran students to assess their

particular needs. More research is needed in this area to highlight veterans' risk factors, and to ensure a smoother transition from military to student life. Limitations in the research included possible selection bias as a result of recruitment methods used by participating universities. In addition, participants may not have been representative of the full spectrum of military-affiliated students. Other limitations included a possible ethnic bias due to the study's white majority representation among participants. Also, monetary honorariums may have influenced response rates, thus influencing findings.

Another study that highlights the need for behavioral health access for veterans in higher education was performed by Zinger and Cohen's in 2010. They conducted qualitative research using structured interviews in order to address the gap in empirical literature on Iraqi and Afghan conflict veterans' adjustment to college and factors which would lower attrition while contributing to academic success (2010). The authors focused on veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan due to the nature of these recent and current conflicts. Service members of these conflicts were often exposed to longer, more frequent deployments – a factor which could have increased their vulnerability to combat stress. Other unique factors of these conflicts that contributed to increased vulnerability were overall unpredictability and the lack of a recognizable front line (Usher, 2006). The purpose of the exploratory research by Zinger and Cohen (2010) was to better understand the nature of the overall adjustment period for veterans post-deployment, and to learn about their transition from military life to the college campus. The subject population consisted of 10 part or full-time student veterans enrolled at Queensborough Community College (QCC) in New York. One participant was female and the rest were male. Ages

ranged from 21 to 32, participants represented the US Army and US Marine Corps. Veterans participated by responding to flyers posted throughout the campus. The research design was qualitative, using recorded structured interviews. This method was used in order to generate hypotheses and to obtain details about veterans' emotional lives, perceptions, and thoughts. Line-by-line coding was used to identify themes and categories from the verbatim transcripts.

Themes identified by this study centered around reasons for enlisting, experiences in the military, post-deployment experiences, emotional issues, personal relationships, social functioning, maladaptive coping mechanisms, self-destructive behavior, post-deployment reflections on sense of self and world, personal goals, experience at QCC, and QCC veteran support services utilized. Some changes that occurred to these veterans after military service consisted of “coping with PTSD symptoms, depression, physical injury, lack of structure in civilian life, difficulties with personal relationships and social functioning” (Zinger & Cohen, 2010, p43). Some experienced being targets for negative public opinion about conflicts from both theaters, while others felt discomfort at the reverence and gratitude they received from civilians. Only a few veterans in the study used maladaptive coping mechanisms after returning from war, but all reported a shift in their sense of the world, their self, and their personal goals. Zinger & Cohen effectively illuminated the experiences and challenges facing young veterans post-war: emotional ups and downs, difficulty reconnecting with friends and family, and a new meaning to life experiences and learning. The study itself could be used as a tool to educate staff and faculty at colleges about the realities of war and coming home. Major themes that

emerged from the study at QCC were that participants felt overwhelmed, had difficulty concentrating, and felt different from their civilian peers at college. Varying negative and positive experiences with college offices were also captured in this study. Negative experiences that student veterans encountered included feeling alone in the administrative process and needing more guidance and help. Positive experiences included attending a helpful veterans club, and making good connections with counselors in the counseling department.

Zinger and Cohen's discussion reiterates the needs of the student veteran. Some need help dealing with administrative challenges and mental health problems, while some require assistance with adjustment to civilian academic life and alienation from civilian peer students. These needs point toward a requirement for adaptive and increased services for veterans on college campuses. An important recommendation the researchers provided included establishing a centralized office for student veterans' activities called a veteran center. It would be staffed by student veterans in an effort to dispense critical information to other student veterans, assist them with paperwork, provide them appropriate referrals, and it would be a place for refuge and networking. A veterans' group that meets on campus could provide additional opportunities for veterans to get support. College counselors should be required to be culturally competent on veteran-specific issues due to their pivotal role in the students' adjustment to civilian life. Sensitivity training should be provided to both students and faculty to promote appropriate and healthy reactions to and interactions with combat veterans. Campus health and counseling officials should be trained to recognize PTSD symptoms and to

provide resources for treatments such as cognitive therapy, exposure therapy, Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), and group therapy. Finally, national PTSD hotline flyers should be posted around campus, making it easy for veterans to seek help with PTSD.

Limitations to this research include restricted generalizability due to the small sample (10 participants), the focus on a specified sample of only veterans who returned from the Iraq or Afghanistan conflicts, and the use of only one community college. The implications of this research to the field of social work are to inform educators, mental health professionals and administrators of the needs of the student veteran population in policy formation, program development, and restructuring efforts for existing programs to better serve veterans.

The behavioral health implications of these two studies on the student veteran population are significant. Barry's findings indicated a positive association between PTSD and both drinking problems and alcohol-related consequences. The study argues that there is sufficient evidence that alcohol use is correlated to PTSD, although there is no proof of a causal relationship. PTSD was also shown to be linked to lower academic achievements, greater academic motivation, and lower academic persistence. Barry's study also asserts that the current higher education system is not well equipped to deal with the needs of student veteran populations, and that the proper initial assessment of student veterans' needs is lacking. Zinger and Cohen identified several areas of improvement that community colleges and four-year-universities should consider. First, a veteran's center, staffed by knowledgeable student veterans, could dispense critical

information, assist with paperwork, provide appropriate referrals, and be a place for refuge and networking. An on-campus SVO would provide opportunities for leadership and camaraderie. College counselors should be better trained regarding veterans' issues because they are the first line of assistance during the students' transition out of the military. Sensitivity training should be provided to students and faculty to promote appropriate interactions with combat veterans, while health and counseling officials should be trained to recognize PTSD and other mental health symptoms. Finally, national PTSD hotline flyers should be made easily accessible around campus.

Student Veteran Organizations

Several recent studies have shown the important roles that Student Veteran Organizations (SVOs) play for the student veteran population. Camaraderie, support, and expertise from a fellow veteran could ease the transition from military culture into the civilian culture of an academic environment. In addition, the organizations can provide opportunities for social interaction, leadership, friendship, and can be a less threatening way to open up to someone about individual struggles at home or in school. Providing a safe environment where a veteran feels understood and supported could be the mechanism that keeps the student veteran moving toward academic success.

In 2011, Barnes conducted a non-experimental quantitative study in order to identify existing programs and practices in Texas institutions of higher learning (IHL) that contributed to veterans' successful transitions from the military into higher education, and their academic persistence to graduation. He recognized the emergence of the "non-traditional student," who seeks higher learning after a time of employment or

life-experience following high school completion (Barnes, 2011). Among this group of non-traditional students who begin their post-secondary education at a more mature age, there is a population of veterans who chose to pursue higher learning after military service. Although the broader category of non-traditional college students should have their particular needs addressed, student veteran populations stand out with high drop-out rates from IHLs that stem from difficult transitional experiences and potentially unaddressed mental and physical health challenges (Barnes, 2011).

Barnes' purpose in this study was to address the role that IHLs can play in supporting student veterans, assisting with their transition from the military into higher education and ultimately contributing to their persistence in the academic environment. He specifically sought to identify current practices employed by Texas IHLs in assisting veterans' transition to student life and persistence to graduation. The study measured the dependent variables of transition and persistence. He defined "transition" as any event or non-event resulting in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles occurring over a period of time between life phases. "Persistence" was defined in this study as a student enrolling in an IHL and remaining until degree attainment. He based his study on certain theories, such as Schlossberg's transition theory which identified eight areas for addressing successful adaptation to the IHL environment among non-traditional students. Among these eight areas, four stand out as particularly applicable to student veterans:

1. Tailoring services, education, and skill development to adult students
2. Providing one-stop shopping for campus services
3. Providing support groups and social or mentoring opportunities

4. Providing counseling and peer support services

His main research questions centered on identifying the transitional needs and persistence needs of veterans from the perspective of the Veteran Certifying Officials (VCO) and identifying the current programs and practices at Texas IHLs that address those needs. The non-experimental survey was administered to 149 Texas VCOs employed by IHLs across 35 four-year public institutions, 35 four-year private institutions, 54 two-year public institutions, and 25 two-year private institutions. Barnes' survey tool was based on the Veterans Programs and Services Survey (VPSS) developed by Cook and Young (2009), and consisted of forced choice questions of dichotomous and multiple option answers with an opportunity to provide additional information in an open-ended format. Surveys were distributed online via Survey Monkey, an online survey tool. Questions allowed for the collection of data measuring transition and persistence as a frequency count in order to determine what activities were taking place on campuses. Researchers used SPSS to analyze data for both the two-tailed t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Open-ended questions were evaluated for suggestions not already found in current literature. Researchers compared groups based on the independent variables and institution type, while measuring the dependent variables of student veteran transition and persistence.

As far as programs and practices were concerned, results indicated no significant differences based on institution type. Public, private, two-year and four-year institutions all displayed similar levels of transition and persistence programs and practices. Other results indicated 84% of institutions surveyed awarded college credit for military training

schools and military experience and 80% offered tutoring and academic advising, but only 49% had veteran specific programs and practices in place. Researchers found that 87% of institutions surveyed provided counseling for combat veterans, but only 31% offered access to on-campus counseling. Of the IHLs surveyed, 68% had an active SVO, but only 32% had a designated gathering place specifically for veterans.

This study had geographic limitations, being that it only looked at IHLs in Texas. It was also perspective-limited because the study only surveyed VCOs and not students themselves. In addition, the study did not examine the effectiveness of veteran transition and persistence in programs and practices; it only looked at the availability and types of programs developed in response to those areas. Researchers found that IHLs could provide improved services to the student veteran population by using school enrollment forms to identify veteran status. In addition, researchers recommend that schools develop events tailored to student veterans, such as veteran-specific orientation and transition courses. Veteran-specific social and academic opportunities such as a Student Veterans Advisory Council, a peer mentoring program, and other student veteran clubs and organizations were also identified as potentially beneficial to student veteran transition and persistence.

The next study highlighting the need for SVOs was Diamond's 2012 study. Using Schlossberg's Adult Transition Theory, Diamond conducted a study to describe the transitional experience and emergent transitional stages of military students enrolled in community college. The research questions focused on military students' description of their transition experience from the military into higher education, and the transitional

process that military students exhibit when acclimating to an academic environment.

Diamond's study identified themes in four areas:

1. Appreciation for the military
2. Environmental acclimation
3. Perceptions of academic environment
4. Articulation of the future for them personally

The author then tied these themes back to the Adult Transition Theory stages to provide an explanatory theory, called the Adaptive Military Transition Theory, which seeks to provide strategies in handling the myriad of challenges the student veteran faces during their transition from the military into an academic environment.

Diamond's study used a two-phase, mixed methods design with an explanatory strategy to identify and document emerging categories and themes. First, she used a quantitative profile survey instrument to test the transition process and identify the Transition Theory stage of each participant. Participants were members across all branches of the U.S. Armed Services, to include Reserves and National Guard, and enrolled part or full-time at a single community college located in a Northeastern state. The study utilized 436 email addresses collected from three sources to conduct the quantitative survey, and then followed up with qualitative in-person interview session with individuals who self-selected to participate. Among all volunteers for the interviews, only 11 participants were identified as exhibiting the necessary stage transitions for a comprehensive analysis, and the author conducted the interviews with these 11 individuals. The participants were asked a variety of question types, including open-

ended questions to encourage narrative thought. Using inductive analysis, recurring phrases and experiences were coded and organized into themes for constructing the new theoretical model.

Findings from Diamond's study helped identify the obstacles faced by the student veteran population during stages of adult transition. Findings point toward methods in which current support programming and initiatives could be altered to improve college success rates among active service members and veterans enrolled in higher education. The first theme noted the appreciation for the opportunity the armed services provided, from career enhancement and educational benefits to cultural exposure and pride in service. The second theme, environmental acclimation, accounted for the myriad of challenges documented by the participants during the role change from service-member to student. The pressure of academics, the change in routine, coping with injuries and fear of failure were all factors in acclimation. The third theme, perceptions of the academic environment, encompassed understanding self, professors' opinions and perceptions of classmates. Learning the culture, norms, and differences (between themselves and their new cohort) caused self-reflection and a created a need for military camaraderie in the new environment. Finally, the fourth theme was about figuring out the next step after education, also called articulation of the future. Two important considerations from the study came to light. First, participants who found involvement in para-military organizations during transition found that their involvement helped ease stress. Second, they repeatedly referenced age and maturity differences between themselves and their non-military classmates.

This study recommended four items for implementation at the community college level.

1. A voluntary peer mentoring program for new student veterans could mitigate stress during the transition process
2. Military transition courses should be provided to advise and counsel military students
3. Intentionally developing a military cohort model in order to provide camaraderie for students during academic study would allow for a sense of connection and belonging
4. Training the staff, faculty and administration at the school to recognize the psychological, physiological, and social constraints of the military student population would be helpful in supporting them

DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell (2008) also confirmed the need for SVOs, among other needs that veterans bring to campuses. They conducted a multi-campus study interviewing 25 students who served in Iraq, Afghanistan or both. Their purpose was to answer the question “What needs do veterans bring to campus?” and to document findings that will help IHLs organize their approach in contributing to veteran academic success. The authors contended that most literature on veterans in higher education has focused on academic achievement and mental health, with less attention on the aspect of transition. In response, the study was conceptualized using Schlossberg’s Adult Theory of Transitions. Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman define transition as “any event, or nonevent, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions or roles” (1995, p.

27). Transition, whether anticipated or not, can be stressful. Schlossberg's research indicates that transition is a process of step-by-step change, consisting of experiencing events during a specific timeframe, and that it requires the individual to adjust multiple aspects of their life. Schlossberg's research thus suggests that transition can be managed, and that an individual can be assisted through the process. In order to inductively develop key themes based on individual stories, the authors used grounded theory as their approach to this study. Their goal was to capture the student veterans' perception of their experiences, and then to draw meaning from these perceived thoughts and feelings.

DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell's 2008 study participants were six women and 19 men, enrolled full-time at a university (three separate institutions were used), who had recently transitioned from active duty service in either Iraq or Afghanistan conflicts (from 2003 to 2007) to the IHLs studied. Participants were Reservists and National Guardsmen representing the Army, Marines, and Air Force. Non-proportional quota sampling and snowball sampling were both used in this study. Interviews followed an "active interviewing" semi-structured protocol, creating a balance between scripting and storytelling. Open-ended questions facilitated the telling of each unique story. Analysis included pattern coding, a technique used to group segments of data (in this case experiences, events and relationships) into categories and then into themes.

The authors organized the findings, or themes, into the transition framework found in Schlossberg's theory using the categories of "Moving In", "Moving Through", and "Moving Out" of the military, and then "Moving In" to the academic arena. For applicability to the current study, the themes from "Moving Out" of the military and

“Moving In” to the academic environment are significant. During the transition out of the military, DiRamio’s study found themes around a transition program, returning home, and academic preparation. During the transition into college, the study found themes such as connecting with peers, blending in, faculty, the campus veteran’s office, finances, students with disabilities, mental health, and PTSD. Although age differences are not much different between young veterans and non-veteran students, the level of maturity that comes from wartime military service is seen to be of significance to the veterans in this study. For this and other reasons such as camaraderie, connecting with other veterans was important to the study participants. The need to blend in surfaced as a theme due to veterans’ desires to move forward with life, not wanting to address awkward questions from classmates, or feeling ostracized by peers because of differing political views. Blending in can be seen as a coping mechanism against pressures to talk about their war experience with people who may not care about them and just want to hear a “cool” story, and against being identified as an outsider, either politically or socially. Veterans in the study also described ambivalent relationships with faculty members. A few participants provided examples of a strong connection to their professors, while others described being publicly ostracized or humiliated by a faculty member. These descriptions point toward the importance of properly educating faculty members on the strengths of and challenges facing the student veteran population and the significance of faculty’s role in an individual veteran’s academic success. Campus veterans’ offices also play a pivotal role in a veteran’s academic journey. While veterans’ offices are required to handle the financial paperwork associated with the VA educational benefits, most of

the study participants voiced a desire for the office to handle other transitional issues. The current study is an effort to elaborate on methods for handling these types of transitional needs by giving a voice to the veteran students who have made the transition and can look back to identify what was missing as well as what was successfully provided to them. Finances was another important theme identified in this study. Notable, was the fact that GI Bill benefits are not sufficient for veterans to attend school, full-time, without working. In addition, GI Bill payments were often paid late, causing financial difficulties for students who had to pay tuition costs upfront. Physical and mental health issues also emerged as a theme for student veterans in this study. Campuses need to be ready to deal with issues such as handicap parking, learning aids for physical disabilities, and symptoms related to mental health challenges like PTSD, which is especially common among veterans of recent conflicts. The need for education and processes that integrate a multipronged approach to surmounting these challenges is paramount. Veteran centers on campus should step up to the plate when it comes to confronting these issues and developing solutions. A coordinated effort with the veteran centers at the forefront could make a lasting, positive impact on the success of this nation's veterans.

As the authors of this study assert, assistance with financial aid is not enough: "Not only does this not adequately meet the veteran's needs, it does not align with calls for inclusiveness and community" (DiRamio, p 92). In addition, their answer highlights the need for a comprehensive and holistic system: "A successful holistic strategy for working with this emerging student population is both intentional and purposeful, including identification of each student-veteran and follow-up in order to provide

ongoing services” (DiRamio, p92). The authors suggest that this holistic approach would include the specific elements of financial aid, counseling, student organizations, disabilities offices, academic advising, faculty, and institutional research. They suggest that efforts should be centered on giving students a voice in their own education and an active role in their transition to college. The glue that would hold this approach together is the “transition coach”, who would help the veteran address administrative hurdles, offer academic advice, and provide emotional support through the transition. The most likely and beneficial candidates to serve in this role would be other veterans. The authors advise that training be provided for advisors and faculty who will be working with student veterans. For example, the campus disabilities office could provide training on specific challenges for disabled veterans. Other training should be focused on the process for referring veterans to mental health or counseling services. One way to confront the issue of alienation is to connect veterans to peers and to nurture camaraderie through robust SVO on campus: “A visible, campus-based SVO could provide opportunities for veterans to meet with students who have had similar experiences while also serving as a point of connection to the campus” (DiRamio et al, 2008, p95). This crucially important point is one of the three main areas researchers are addressing in the current study. Finally, campus administrators should make efforts to collect data on the veteran populations on their campuses and they should student veterans’ progress in academic success in order to continually provide evidence for improving and maintaining successful changes at the administrative level.

Among the three studies synthesized in this section, many recommendations were given regarding SVOs. Barne's study concluded that veteran-specific social and academic opportunities like a Student Veterans Advisory Council, a peer mentoring program, and other student veteran clubs and organizations could be beneficial to student veteran transition and persistence during college. Diamond found that a voluntary peer mentoring program for new student veterans could mediate stress during the transition process. She also recommended the intentional development of a military cohort model in order to provide camaraderie, a sense of connection, and a sense of belonging for veteran students. DiRamio's study delved into the methods of implementing SVOs on campuses. For reasons such as age difference and maturity between student veterans and non-veteran students, connecting with other veterans was important to the study participants. In order to give student veterans an active role in their transition to college, a fellow veteran could be assigned as a "transition coach" to help with administrative processes, offer advice, and provide support. DiRamio asserts that SVOs can confront issues of alienation by connecting veterans to peers and providing camaraderie through SVO activities.

Summary

The three main areas of concern for student veterans that researchers would like to address in this study are:

1. Improving administrative processes to establish veteran-friendly campuses
2. Providing access to Behavioral Health Services
3. Building robust Student Veteran Organizations (SVOs)

Navigating through registration, enrollment, and accessing GI Bill financial benefits can be difficult in and of itself, let alone when accompanied by the challenges presented to veterans on a campus that is unwelcoming or inaccessible to them. Every campus should have a resource center available – with a qualified staff – to meet the unique needs of its student veteran population. While covering a wide range of issues, three studies (Persky, Ackerman et al, and Capps) detail the importance of streamlining administrative processes involving veterans. A need to improve the knowledge and skills of staff on the subject of VA educational benefits and financial assistance exists and must be addressed. Veteran representatives, veterans’ transition (or orientation) courses, and veterans’ resource centers can all play a major role in addressing veterans’ administrative needs. “Veteran-friendly campuses” are campuses where programs and staff exist to assist veterans with the transition from military life to campus life; this should be the standard for campuses across the country.

Student veterans have unique needs that stem from their experiences in military culture, age and perceived maturity differences, and combat exposure. The behavioral health implications of these two studies (Barry, 2012; Zinger & Cohen, 2010) on student veteran populations are significant, finding positive associations between PTSD and drinking problems, alcohol-related consequences, lower academic achievements, and lower academic persistence. Initial assessment of student veterans is a starting point that can allow campuses to begin serving their veterans more effectively. Recommendations in the behavioral health realm include:

1. Establishing a veterans’ center staffed by student veterans

2. Providing an on campus student veterans' group or SVO
3. Train counselors on veteran's issues, PTSD and other mental health symptoms
4. Educate the campus about the national PTSD hotline

Finally, the importance of SVOs must not be understated. Camaraderie, support, and expertise from a fellow veteran can help ease the transition from military culture into civilian life. SVOs can provide opportunities for social interaction, leadership and friendship, and can be a safe environment where veterans feel understood and supported while they tackle the challenges of completing a college degree. Many recommendations were given regarding SVOs. Veteran-specific social and academic opportunities, a Student Veterans Advisory Council, a peer mentoring program, student veteran clubs and organizations, a military cohort model, and a "transition coach" were all ideas that could be creatively implemented to make established SVOs more robust. SVOs could help mitigate stress during the transition process, provide camaraderie, a sense of connection, a sense of belonging, address administrative processes, offer advice, provide support, and confront issues of alienation by connecting veterans to peers and providing opportunities through SVO activities.

Researchers' objective for this current study is to build upon the existing literature outlined above, and to conduct a study that gives a voice to student veterans on their experience of transition through two-year community college and into four-year universities in an attempt to provide practical applications and recommendations that campuses across the country will be able and willing to implement.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

With the end of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the beginning of Operation New Dawn, and the drawdown of Operation Enduring Freedom, more troops are returning home. The number of veterans transitioning from military service is expected to rise as these operations come to an end. As the most populous state in the U.S., California can expect to support a large population of veterans who come home seeking to transition into higher education, vocational schools, or a variety of jobs compatible with veterans' military training and experience. These veterans may have additional needs, but they will also contribute to the economy in California by spending their wages and paying taxes, especially as they draw funding from federal programs such as the GI Bill. This study's design was descriptive in nature, and was implemented using a structured questionnaire with a mix of qualitative and quantitative questions. The researchers' goal was to determine challenges faced by California State University, Sacramento (CSUS) student veterans during their time in community college, as well as to identify the strengths they relied on as they navigated this life transition. This qualitative study gathers insight on student veterans' community college experiences and how those experiences relate to their level of understanding of the California education system and VA educational benefits. Researchers looked at how satisfied student veterans' were with the community college campus, culture, faculty, peers, and staff, and then correlated that satisfaction level with ratings of helpfulness of their veteran representative on campus. The study documented the frequency and type of obstacles encountered by student veterans during

community college. Finally, it reported on which services – provided through the CSUS Veteran Success Center (VSC) – participants found helpful and would have benefitted from during their community college experience. Researchers used Survey Monkey, an online survey tool, to keep all data confidential and fully comply with ethical considerations during and after data collection. All data was analyzed and categorized using the Survey Monkey tool, Microsoft Excel, and Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), a software package used for statistical analysis.

The study took place at CSUS – a public, 4-year, California university with a student population of 28,811 as indicated by the CSUS data collection center (2013). The university is located in Sacramento, California, surrounded by Yolo, Solano, Sutter, San Joaquin, Amador, El Dorado, Placer, and Contra Costa counties. As of 2013, the student body was composed of 77% undergraduates with an average age of 23 years, and 23% graduate students with an average age of 31 years. At 57% of the total student body, females made up the majority on campus. Ethnically, the student body was composed of 37% white (non-Hispanic), 21% Asian/Pacific, 22% Latino, 11% other, 6% African-American, 2% foreign, and 1% American Indian (Sacramento State Office of Institutional Research at <http://www.csus.edu/oir/>).

The researchers used Survey Monkey, an online survey tool, to distribute the survey and to safeguard and maintain the confidentiality of both the data and the participants. VSC staff assisted researchers by distributing the survey link to students via email. All participants who chose to click the link in the email were directed to the secure survey site on Survey Monkey, where the first item was an informed consent form.

Participants had to answer “yes” to the informed consent question before being allowed to participate in the rest of the survey. Participants who answered “no” were not allowed to move forward. After agreeing to the informed consent (Question 1 on the survey), participants proceeded to the rest of the survey. At any time, students were allowed to cease participation by closing the browser without answering any further questions. At no time during the survey was any personally identifiable information (PII) of participants collected.

Study Design

The study design was descriptive in nature using a structured questionnaire (See Appendix B) with a mix of qualitative and quantitative closed-ended questions. The survey instrument was designed to determine challenges faced by CSUS student veterans during community college, and to identify students’ strengths during the transition. There were multiple choice questions and Likert-type statements designed to measure student veterans’ opinions of their experiences at community college with regard to satisfaction levels, levels of understanding, levels of helpfulness of veteran representatives, and frequency of obstacles encountered.

Sampling Procedures

Researchers used non-random purposive sampling procedures and selected participants based on meeting criteria for the study. Participants were restricted to CSUS student veterans, and further restricted to those willing to participate in the online questionnaire. Participation was restricted to currently enrolled students at CSUS who were military veterans or current members of the U.S. Armed Forces, including active

duty, reserve and National Guard. Students in the ROTC program were excluded due to their preparatory status with respect to the military.

The survey invitation email included a link, which took responders directly to the questionnaire in Survey Monkey. The first question was comprised of the informed consent participation instructions with options to either participate or not. Participation was voluntary and participants were advised that at any time participation could be terminated.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection plan was implemented via online questionnaire in collaboration with the CSUS VSC. VSC staff facilitated distribution and administration of the questionnaire and adhered to necessary PII protection measures. This process allowed researchers to be inclusive of all of CSUS's approximately 800 student veterans. The survey was initially distributed via email and participants received one additional email reminder during the period the survey was available. The study was intended to collect information about student veterans attending CSUS and their experience transitioning to college campuses. The study was not designed to explain causal relationships using the information collected, nor was it meant to assess the participant for any mental or mood conditions. Student veteran survey respondents were the sole source of the data collected and no third parties or outside agencies provided information on behalf of, or about the student veteran.

Instruments

The following section outlines the structure and content of the survey questions and briefly describes the questions based on the dependent and independent variables that will be used in measurement and analysis. Question 1 served as an informed consent question. If participants agreed to participate in the survey, they were directed to answer the rest of the questions. If participants did not agree, the survey was terminated. Questions 2 through 7 were demographic in nature, allowing the researchers to differentiate between gender, military branch of service, age group, level of academic study, and length of time elapsed between military service and start of higher education. Questions 8 through 10 were designed to differentiate between veterans with community college experience and those without, giving researchers an independent variable to analyze for overall contributing factors to experience. Questions 11 and 16 were intended to measure levels of understanding regarding VA educational benefits and the California educational system both before and after community college. Questions 12 and 13 were designed to identify whether or not the participant had a veteran representative during community college, and, if so, to assess that representative's level of knowledge and helpfulness to the student veteran. Questions 14 and 15 measured the type and frequency of obstacles encountered, and the student veterans' satisfaction levels regarding the community college's services to student veterans. Question 17 was designed to measure the community college's strengths and identify services that were useful to the student veteran during their time at the community college. Questions 18 and 19 asked the participant to provide third-party knowledge of key areas where fellow student veterans

may have experienced difficulties that led to them dropping out of college. Those questions were designed to have minimal risk to the participant by asking for third party knowledge as opposed to directly asking about first-hand, personal experience. In addition, this provided researchers with information regarding student veteran dropouts, which would not otherwise have been collectable from a pool of participants who did not drop out of college. Gathering direct, firsthand data from veterans who dropped out of community college not only presents a logistical challenge in locating those individuals to survey them, but that data would likely focus on community college experiences that were only from a negative point of view. Data collection from the current pool of participants allowed researchers to focus on some positive aspects while allowing for student veterans to recall challenges they had overcome during the process of transitioning from community college to CSUS. Question 20 was designed to identify services available through the CSUS VSC that the student veteran felt would have been helpful during community college as well. Question 21 was designed to capture the veteran's opinion on qualifications and skills needed for a veteran representative to be successful and helpful to student veterans. Question 22 was used to identify coping skills developed during military service that the student veteran found useful during their transition from military service into community college, and then into CSUS.

To meet the research objectives, researchers tailored the study's measurement instrument to assess satisfaction levels and resources available for student veterans on college campuses across California. Guided by the purpose of the study and the findings

of the literature reviewed on this topic, the researchers created content validity for the survey. This type of validity was achieved by the following actions:

1. Using a Table of Specifications (Yuen, 2010)
2. Developing draft items to measure
3. Refining items
4. Organizing items into a draft survey
5. Pilot testing the survey for structure and content using staff members at the CSUS VSC
6. Systematically editing the survey based on pilot test results

The pilot test further ensured face-validity for the survey, while the Table of Specifications and item development ensured each item measured a specified domain. The survey was not tested prior to this study because the researchers designed the questions specifically for this research.

The survey utilized in this study was constructed with the intent to collect self-reported data. Although self-reports of behavior, opinions, and attitudes are prone to biases, there are currently no other effective methods to measure constructs such as level of satisfaction, level of understanding, and ratings of helpfulness. As a result of using self-report measures, the survey questions may have elicited an estimation of behavioral frequency rather than a more accurate count response desired by the researchers. These assumptions will be reflected during the analysis of the survey results.

Data Analysis

This study collected data by means of an online questionnaire. Researchers tested for significant correlations and significant differences among demographic groups with respect to levels of satisfaction, levels of helpfulness of community college veteran representatives, and levels of obstacles encountered during community college. Appropriate descriptive and inferential statistics were used to test for correlations and differences. Tests used included Pearson's r , independent t -tests, and other parametric and non-parametric statistics. Testing for significant correlation using ordinal level data is a non-parametric approach to analysis. The highest level of statistical analysis available to be used in this study is Pearson's r . Pearson's r produces a correlation coefficient that is either positive or negative and that has a numerical value between -1.0 and 1.0 (Weinbach & Grinnell, 2010). The sign of these tests indicates the direction of association between the independent (X) and dependent (Y) variables. If Y increases when X increases, the correlation coefficient is positive. If Y decreases when X increases, the correlation coefficient is negative. A correlation coefficient of zero indicates that there is no tendency for Y to either increase or decrease when X increases (Weinbach & Grinnell, 2010). These analyses tested for regression (prediction) between two ordinal Likert-type scales. They measured the extent to which frequency of obstacles encountered by student veterans correlated with student veterans' levels of understanding of the VA educational benefits and California's educational system. For example, will participants who have a high frequency of obstacles encountered also have a low understanding of the VA and California education system? The analyses also showed to

what extent students' level of satisfaction at community college (on a scale of 1 to 5) correlated to levels of helpfulness of the veteran representative reported by the students (on a scale of 1 to 5). This particular correlation allowed researchers to assess whether students who have a high level of satisfaction at community college also report a high level of helpfulness from their veteran representative. In order to analyze which unique obstacles student veterans face during community college as well as which services (provided by the VSC at CSUS) they found useful, researchers used a frequency distribution. The frequency distribution served as a way to identify the top obstacles and top services.

Protection of Human Subjects

With respect to social work and ethical considerations in research, this study on student veterans at CSUS complies with the standards for human subject testing. A Human Subject Protocol Application (HSPA) was submitted to the CSUS Institutional Review Board, who approved the research for student veterans at CSUS. Ethical safeguards for the research included close monitoring to avoid physical and psychological harm, invasion of privacy, deception of research participants, and fabrication of findings. All respondents were asked to read and subsequently give their informed consent as Question 1 prior to answering the remainder of the survey. Respondents were also informed about confidentiality, the purpose of the study and its benefits, the qualifications and educational status of the researchers, research expectations for the participant, possible negative effects, assurance of the opportunity to cease participation at any time, and how to contact the researchers to ask questions. The

signed consent form minimized psychological harm and potential invasions of privacy that might have been experienced as a result of testing.

This study involved student veterans revealing personal information, such as asking student veterans to recount obstacles encountered during community college, to identify reasons for fellow student veterans dropping out of community college. Concerns over invasion of privacy were mitigated by the inclusion of an informed consent form. Disclosing precursory information about the nature of the survey questions to the student veteran participants prior to the start of the survey allowed participants to determine if they wanted to proceed with the survey or decline participation. Finally, this research study promoted diversity, adhered to the values and ethics of social work, and protected human rights in keeping with the core professional values of the National Association of Social Work.

Chapter 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to collect data from student veterans transferring from community college to CSUS – about their challenges and needs during transition – in order to recommend improvements that would help California community colleges become more “veteran friendly” campuses. This chapter will present data analysis on the study’s three focus areas in which student veterans experienced challenges during transition to higher education. These three areas are:

1. Knowledge and understanding of the administrative processes of the community college system/VA education benefits
2. College staff qualification and abilities in handling student veteran mental and behavioral concerns
3. Student Veteran Organizations (SVOs) and veteran-to-veteran interaction

The questionnaire used for this study has 22 items (see Appendix B). Three questions (numbers 11, 14, & 16) in the study questionnaire are related to the first focus area: student veteran knowledge and understanding of community college and VA administrative processes. These questions asked participants to rate their level of understanding before and after community college. They also asked participants to rate how frequently they encountered obstacles during their transition from community college to CSUS.

The study’s second focus area is on community college staff’s ability to address veterans’ concerns regarding mental and behavioral health. Questions 12 and 13 asked

participants whether their college had a veteran representative and subsequently, to rate the helpfulness of that representative. Question 19 addressed a potential gap in community college staff's ability to provide specific student veteran services by asking participants about reasons their fellow student veteran acquaintances dropped out of college. Question 21 specifically identified the desired characteristics and skills that student veterans would like to see in their community college's veteran representative, attempting to identify if mental and behavioral health needs were reported.

The third focus area of this study, SVOs and veteran-to-veteran interaction, was addressed in question 17, which allowed student veteran participants to specify the specific services at their community college's veteran resource center that they found useful. The question also allowed participants to articulate – in their own words – what services were useful to them. Question 20 also related to the third focus area, allowing student veterans to indicate if veteran organizations, veteran functions, and veteran office space were important factors in their transition from their community college to CSUS. The question also allowed participants to expound on any other areas they found useful.

These three key focus areas aim to provide clarity and insight on the challenges facing student veterans in higher education. More specifically, for student veterans who have made the transition from a community college to a four-year university, these key areas seek to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent do student veterans' community college experiences relate to their levels of understanding of the school/VA system (VA educational benefits, CA community college system, and CSU/UC system)?

2. Do student veterans' levels of satisfaction with the community college campus, culture, faculty, peers, and staff correlate with how helpful they found their veteran representative?
3. What unique obstacles do student veterans encounter during community college and how often are those obstacles encountered?
4. What services provided, through the CSUS Veteran Success Center, do student veterans suggest would be useful at the community college level?

In this chapter, the researchers present analysis of results from the online survey using a combination of parametric and non-parametric methods of statistical analysis. Researchers tested for significant correlations and significant differences among demographic groups with respect to levels of satisfaction, levels of helpfulness of veteran representatives, and levels of obstacles encountered. Appropriate descriptive and inferential statistics were used to test for correlations and differences. The key areas mentioned above guided the survey and were used to highlight certain components of the research questions. The results begin with overall findings, which summarize student veteran participants' demographics, and are followed by specific findings which address the four key research questions. Additional significant findings are reported in the section entitled: Specific Findings.

Overall Findings

From the participating sampling of 81 students, 80 agreed with the informed consent and participated in the survey. Of those 80, only 70 completed the survey. The 10 who did not complete the survey answered some, but not all of the required questions.

Most of the 10 incomplete respondents stopped the survey after the demographic portion was completed. Due to the high volume of completed surveys (N = 70) researchers chose to exclude all incomplete responses from the study.

The following numbers are provided, based on the 70 participants who completed the survey. Female participants comprised 37.1% of the total participants (n = 26), while the remaining 62.9% were male (n = 44). The education-level of respondents reflected mainly Undergraduate students (77.1%, n = 54), with 18.6% Graduate (n = 13), 1.4% Post-graduate (n = 1), and 2.9% other (n = 2) (Figure 1).

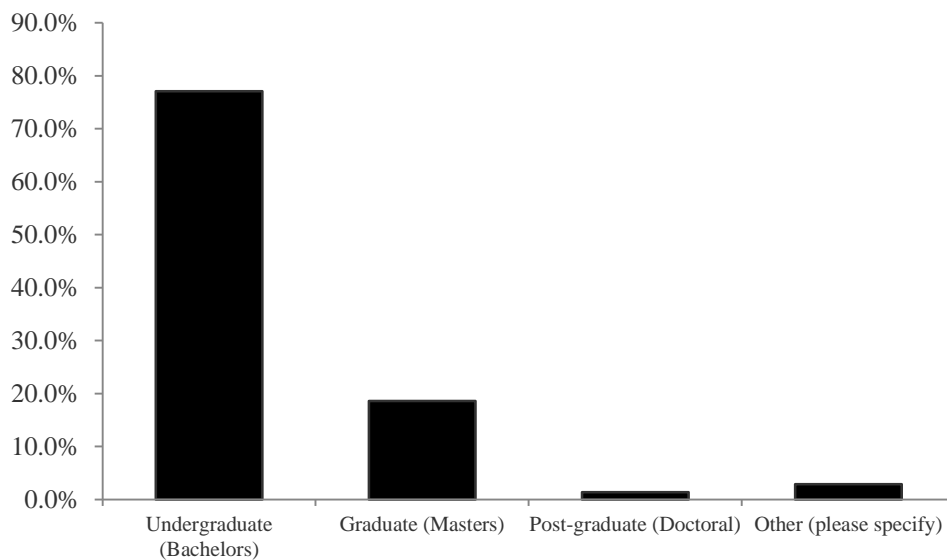


Figure 1. Participants' current level of academic study at CSUS.

The median age group for participants was between 25 and 34, which accounted for 70% of participants (Figure 2). The total age range fell between 18 and 64 years of age.

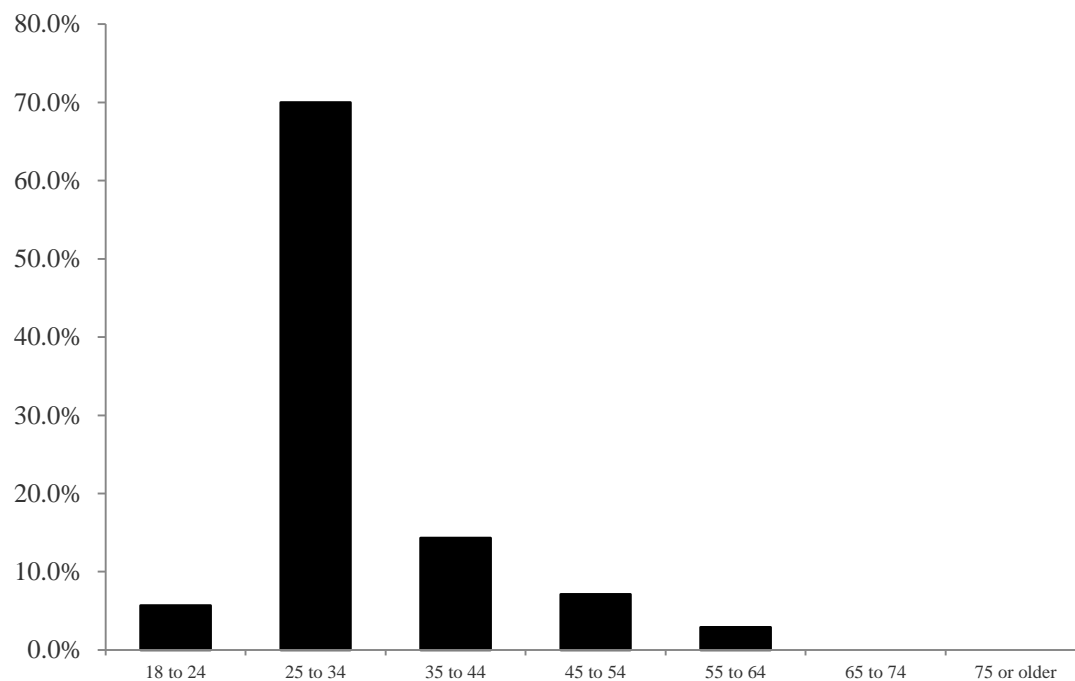


Figure 2. Participants' age.

The median lapse in time between military service and entering higher education was less than 1 year, which accounted for 60% of the participants. The percentage of student veteran participants who had transferred to CSUS from a community college was 84.3% ($n = 59$). The median length of enrollment at community college was 3-4 years. Among participants, 44.1% attended community college for 1 to 2 years ($n = 26$), 42.4% attended for 3 to 4 years ($n = 25$), and 13.6% attended for more than 5 years ($n = 8$). The

majority of participants indicated receiving a degree from their community college prior to attending CSUS (54%, $n = 32$).

Among student veterans surveyed, 58.6% ($n = 41$) indicated that they had been previously deployed to a combat zone (Figure 3).

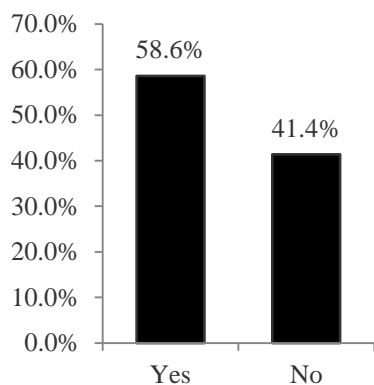


Figure 3. Participants' combat experience.

Nearly half of the participants served in the Army while approximately one third served in the Air Force (Figure 4). The remaining participants were a mix of Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard veterans.

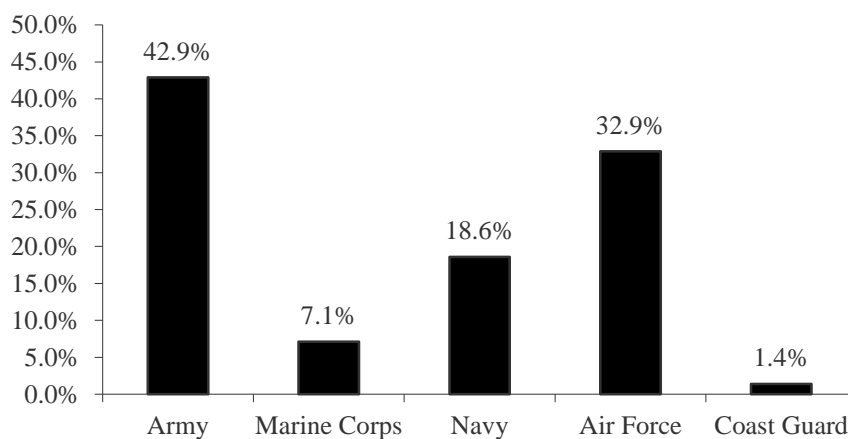


Figure 4. Participants' branch of service.

The study was made up of a diverse population, and there was no exclusion due to gender, ethnicity, age, reservist or active duty status, or disability.

Specific Findings

Researchers' first focus is on answering the primary research questions. The first section will address the satisfaction and understanding levels of student veteran participants. The second section will address research question two; regarding satisfaction and helpfulness of the veteran representative in their respective community college. Section three will address the obstacles encountered by student veterans during their time at community college. The fourth section will address services that student veterans utilized at the community college and at CSUS which they found helpful.

Satisfaction and Understanding Levels

In order to answer the question "To what extent do student veterans' community college experiences relate to their levels of understanding of the school/VA system?" researchers used multiple response variable sets to calculate overall ratings from the survey questions that allowed multiple responses. One of these questions addressed satisfaction levels for five different aspects of student veteran participants' community college experience:

1. Feeling welcomed
2. Interactions with staff
3. Navigating VA education benefits
4. Interaction with faculty/peers
5. Freedom of expression

In creating a multiple response variable set, researchers first calculated an overall value for satisfaction level using mean scores. This enabled them to perform correlations between other multiple response questions. Pearson's Correlation Coefficient was used to assess the relationship between overall satisfaction level at community college and overall understanding of the community college and VA administrative processes before and after community college (Table 1). There was a positive correlation between overall satisfaction level and overall understanding level before community college ($r = .551$, $n = 56$, $p = .000$). There was also a positive correlation between overall satisfaction level and overall understanding level after community college ($r = .688$, $n = 56$, $p = .000$). Overall, there was a positive correlation between satisfaction levels and understanding levels before and after community college. Student veterans who reported high levels of satisfaction with their community college also reported having a higher level of understanding of the community college and VA administrative processes before and after community college.

Satisfaction and Helpfulness

In order to answer the second research question "Do student veterans' levels of satisfaction toward the community college campus, culture, faculty, peers, and staff correlate with ratings of helpfulness of the veteran representative?" researchers used the overall satisfaction level and the overall helpfulness rating for the veteran representative to perform a correlation test. Of all the student veteran participants who attended community college ($n = 59$), 62.7% indicated that their campus had a designated full-time student veteran representative ($n = 37$), and 37.3% indicated either not having a veteran

representative or not being sure if their campus had a veteran official ($n = 22$). A Pearson r -coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between overall satisfaction levels at a community college and overall ratings of helpfulness of the veteran representative (Table 1). There was a moderately strong positive correlation between the two variables, ($r = -.493$ $n = 35$, $p = .002$). Overall, there was a positive correlation between satisfaction level and helpfulness rating by student veterans. Student veterans who reported high overall satisfaction levels at their respective community colleges also reported high ratings of helpfulness of their veteran representatives.

Table 1

Correlation tests between variables for overall obstacles encountered, satisfaction, understanding, and helpfulness.

		Obstacles Encountered	Satisfaction Level at CC	Understanding Before CC	Understanding After CC	Helpfulness of Vet Rep
Obstacles Encountered	r	1	-.435**	-.215	-.230	-.270
	p		.001	.111	.088	.111
	n	56	56	56	56	36
Satisfaction Level at CC	r	-.435**	1	.551**	.688**	.493**
	p	.001		.000	.000	.002
	n	56	56	56	56	36
Understanding Before CC	r	-.215	.551**	1	.539**	.416*
	p	.111	.000		.000	.012
	n	56	56	59	59	36
Understanding After CC	r	-.230	.688**	.539**	1	.551**
	p	.088	.000	.000		.000
	n	56	56	59	59	36
Helpfulness of Vet Rep	r	-.270	.493**	.416*	.551**	1
	p	.111	.002	.012	.000	
	n	36	36	36	36	36

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

r=Pearson's r , p=significant value, n=frequency

Obstacles Encountered

In order to answer the third research question “What unique obstacles do student veterans encounter during community college and how often are those obstacles encountered?” researchers compared means of frequencies of obstacles encountered to determine the top challenge areas for veterans in community college. Participants answered this question using a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = never, 2 = rare, 3 = occasionally, 4 = often, 5 = all the time) signifying how often they encountered obstacles in seven different areas. From the mean score (M) calculation (Table 2) researchers were able to identify the top three obstacles encountered:

1. Credit transferring (M = 2.63, SD = 1.543, n = 34)
2. Faculty and peer interaction (M = 2.07, SD = .998, n = 54)
3. Orientation (M = 2.04, SD = 1.136, n = 49)

Among respondents, 67.4% answered that they had encountered obstacles during credit transfer, 68.5% answered that they had encountered obstacles during faculty and peer interaction, and 61.2% answered that they had encountered obstacles during orientation. Two additional obstacles that followed closely behind the top three were obstacles to accessing financial aid or G.I. Benefits (M= 1.90, SD = 1.015, n = 52) and obstacles to class registration (M = 1.89, SD = 1.123, n = 56). The obstacles with the lowest calculated means were in accessing health services (M = 1.68, SD = .900, n = 25) and mental health services (M = 1.50, SD = .834, n = 24). Question 14 was designed to

allow participants to articulate – in their own words – any additional obstacles encountered. The results yielded themes in the following areas:

1. Under-qualified or under-trained staff and veteran representative
2. No veteran representative on campus
3. Administrative obstacles
4. Non-resident tuition fees
5. Childcare
6. Inability to access mental health access when needed

In addition to addressing obstacles encountered, researchers also used answers from question 17 to answer the research question “What unique obstacles do student veterans encounter during community college and how often are those obstacles encountered?” Question 17 allowed student veterans to indirectly give feedback about additional obstacles encountered at the community college level. Although the question was geared to assess what services were useful to student veterans, the trend that emerged from fill-in-the-blank answers was dissatisfaction with services. With the exception of two respondents (who indicated scholarships and early registration as helpful services) common themes were unhelpful veteran representatives, “horrible counseling services”, lack of connection with veteran representative, and having to learn through interactions with other student veterans.

Table 2

Means calculated for frequency of obstacles encountered by participants in specific areas of community college.

	Orientation	Credit Transfer	Financial Aid and GI Bill	Class Registration	Mental Health Services	Health Services	Faculty Peer Interaction
N Valid	49	43	52	56	24	25	54
N Missing	21	27	18	14	46	45	16
Mean	2.04	2.63	1.90	1.89	1.50	1.68	2.07
Std. Dev	1.136	1.543	1.015	1.123	.834	.900	.988

Services Utilized

In order to answer the fourth research question, “What services provided, through the CSUS Veteran Success Center, do student veterans suggest would be useful at the community college level?” researchers examined two related questions pertaining to services that student veterans utilized on campus at community college and at CSUS. Researchers used a multiple response question where student veterans could select all that applied, to indicate services that were useful to them. From the responses, researchers were able to identify the top useful services. First, researchers reported on community college top services (Table 3):

1. Priority registration (30.2%, n = 49)
2. A full-time veteran representative on campus to assist with veterans’ needs (18.5%, n = 30)
3. Access to counseling services (14.8%, n = 24)
4. Having a veteran resource center (14.8%, n = 24)

Among respondents, 90.7% considered priority registration to be a useful service, 55.6% indicated that having a full-time veteran representative on campus was useful, and 44.4% indicated that having both counseling services and a veteran resource center was important to their academic success (Table 3).

Table 3

Community college services utilized.

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	n	Percent	
Made Veteran Feel Welcome	20	12.3%	37.0%
Provided Priority Registration	49	30.2%	90.7%
Provided Veteran Orientation to Campus	11	6.8%	20.4%
Provided Veteran Resource Center	24	14.8%	44.4%
Provided Full-time Veteran Representative	30	18.5%	55.6%
Provided Counseling Services	24	14.8%	44.4%
Had a Veteran Recruitment Advertising Process	4	2.5%	7.4%
Total	162	100.0%	300.0%

Second, researchers reported on top CSUS services offered to student veterans that made their experiences better (Table 4):

1. Priority registration (18.4%, n = 67).
2. A full-time dedicated staff at the Student Veteran Success Center (13.2%, n = 48)
3. Staff who were friendly and knowledgeable about student veteran-specific issues (12.6%, n = 46)

Among respondents, 95.7% indicated that priority registration for veterans was a useful service, 68.6% indicated that having a full-time, dedicated staff to address student

veterans' needs was useful, and 65.7% indicated that it was helpful having staff who were both friendly and knowledgeable about veteran-specific issues (Table 4).

Table 4

CSUS VSC services utilized.

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Computer Access	27	7.4%	38.6%
Free Printing Services	26	7.1%	37.1%
Priority Registration	67	18.4%	95.7%
Access to VA Related Resources	23	6.3%	32.9%
Full-time Dedicated Staff	48	13.2%	68.6%
Friend Staff	46	12.6%	65.7%
Veteran Organizations	22	6.0%	31.4%
Veteran Functions	17	4.7%	24.3%
Staff who were Knowledgeable on Veteran Issues	46	12.6%	65.7%
Designated Office Space	42	11.5%	60.0%
Total	364	100.0%	520.0%

Additional Findings

In addition to the four research questions proposed in Chapter 1, results indicated other significant findings with implications to the student veteran population. Researchers conducted analyses to incorporate these additional areas of concern that relate to the three primary focus areas in this study: 1) administrative processes, 2) behavioral health, and 3) student veteran organizations. Additional findings are presented in the following sections: Satisfaction and Obstacles Encountered, Coping Skills, Knowledge of Veteran Dropouts, Top Reasons Reported for Student Veteran Dropouts, Characteristics and Skills of

Veteran Representatives, Understanding Levels, Group Differences, and Gender Differences.

Satisfaction and Obstacles Encountered

In order to address the relationship between overall levels of satisfaction and frequency of obstacles encountered, researchers used a correlation test. A Pearson r-coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between overall satisfaction levels at a community college and overall frequency of obstacles encountered (Table 1). There was a negative correlation between the two variables ($r = -.435$, $n = 56$, $p = .001$).

Overall, there was a negative correlation between satisfaction level and frequency of obstacles encountered by student veterans. Student veterans who reported high overall satisfaction levels at their respective community colleges also reported low frequencies of encountering obstacles.

Coping Skills

In order to assess the highest indicated coping skills that participants developed during their military service, researchers used a frequency distribution calculation (Table 5). From the responses, researchers were able to identify the top coping skills:

1. Flexibility, or the ability to adapt and overcome challenges (11.1%, $n = 58$)
2. Reacting productively under stress (10.9%, $n = 57$)
3. Working well with others (10.6%, $n = 55$)

Table 5

Frequency distribution of military coping skills developed by participants.

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Physical Fitness	31	6.0%	44.9%
Flexibility	58	11.1%	84.1%
Structured Scheduling	46	8.8%	66.7%
Time Management	48	9.2%	69.6%
Communication Skills	47	9.0%	68.1%
Advocating for Self	44	8.4%	63.8%
Selflessness	40	7.7%	58.0%
Military Bearing	43	8.3%	62.3%
Leadership Skills	52	10.0%	75.4%
Working Well With Others	55	10.6%	79.7%
Reacting Productively under Stress	57	10.9%	82.6%
Total	521	100.0%	755.1%

With regard to skills that respondents learned from their military service, 84.1% indicated that developing the ability to adapt and overcome challenges aided them in overcoming obstacles during their transition from the military into higher education, 82.6% indicated that reacting productively under stress was a useful skill in an academic setting, and 79.7% indicated that working well with others has been helpful to them in their college experience. From the data analysis, researchers identified additional copings skills that were helpful in student veterans' success through college (in order of importance):

1. Leadership skills
2. Time-management
3. Communication skills

4. Structured scheduling

Although the least selected coping skill was physical fitness, nearly half of student veterans (44.9%, n = 31) indicated that exercise was important to them. Question 22 was designed to allow participants to articulate – in their own words – any additional coping skills they learned in the military that have subsequently proven useful in their college experiences. The qualitative results yielded themes in the following areas:

1. Integrity
2. Ability to understand complex situations
3. Problem solving skills
4. Communication skills
5. Understanding the meaning of commitment
6. Financial security
7. Maturity

Knowledge of Student Veteran Dropouts

One important aspect that researchers addressed in this study was participants' second-hand knowledge of student veterans who dropped out of community college. Researchers found that accurate statistics on student veteran college dropout rates were not available – probably because this is difficult for colleges to track. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the official, three-year graduation rate for public, two-year colleges is 22% (2010). When taking into account transfer students who will complete at least an associate's degree somewhere else, these numbers improve by around 10% (Institute of Education Sciences, 2009). With no other comparable statistics

available on student veterans in the U.S., researchers must use the national average for all students when assessing the study's findings on second-hand knowledge of student veteran dropouts. The U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs and the U.S. Department of Education both define "graduates" only as those individuals who complete their degrees without breaks in enrollment. Many veterans have breaks in enrollment due to transferring credits from military service, therefore, VA and DoE tracking of graduates automatically fails to count many veterans. In order to address this lack of information, researchers asked participants to identify whether they knew of fellow veterans who dropped out of community college. Among respondents, 47.1% knew of at least one fellow veteran who did not complete their degree (Figure 5).

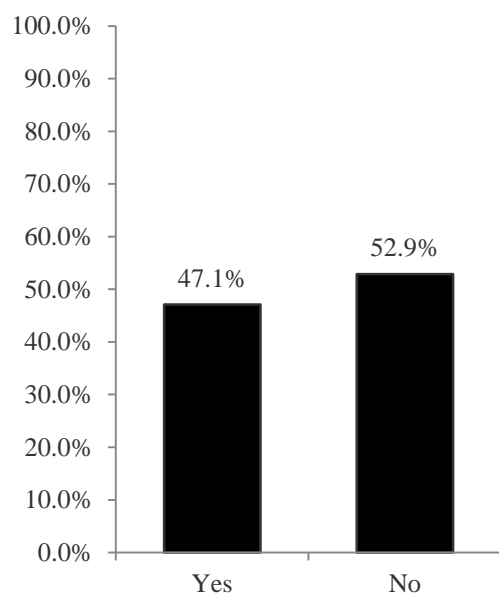


Figure 5. Participants' knowledge of veteran dropouts.

Top Reasons Reported for Student Veteran Dropouts

Additionally, researchers asked participants to select reasons for dropouts among their student veteran peers. Results show the top reasons that participants selected for their fellow student veterans who dropped out. Student veteran participants all equally indicated three separate reasons as the primary explanations for dropouts (Table 6).

Table 6

Frequency distribution of reasons for veteran dropouts.

		Responses		Percent of
		N	Percent	Cases
Reasons For Vet Drop Out	Military Service Reentry	6	5.0%	18.8%
	Alcohol and Drug Use	9	7.6%	28.1%
	Health Problems	6	5.0%	18.8%
	Mental Health	11	9.2%	34.4%
	Financial Hardship	18	15.1%	56.3%
	Poor Coping Skills	18	15.1%	56.3%
	Cultural Adaptation Problems	6	5.0%	18.8%
	Activation in Reserves	6	5.0%	18.8%
	Low Academic Skills	17	14.3%	53.1%
	Family Responsibilities	18	15.1%	56.3%
	VA and CC Bureaucracy	4	3.4%	12.5%
	Total	119	100.0%	371.9%

Among respondents, 56.3% indicated: financial hardship, poor coping skills, and family responsibilities as the top three reasons why student veteran peers dropped out of college (15.1%, n = 18). The fourth reason indicated as a variable influencing student veteran dropout rates was low academic skills (14.3%, n = 17). Among respondents, 53.1% cited low academic skills as a reason for dropping out. Mental health followed in fifth place (9.2%. n = 11). Among respondents, 34.4% indicated mental health was a

reason that a fellow student veteran dropped out. Question 18 was designed to allow for participants to articulate in their own words any additional, second-hand knowledge of student veteran dropouts. The results yielded themes in the following areas:

1. Housing problems
2. Poor budgeting
3. Low academic skills
4. Entering the work force
5. Loss of interest in education

To analyze reasons indicated for student veteran dropouts at community college, researchers identified a number of explanations that relate to overall mental health.

Researchers produced an overall mental and behavioral health factor by combining the following individual factors:

1. Poor coping skills
2. Mental health
3. Alcohol and drug use
4. Cultural adaptation problems

Among respondents, 36.9% (n = 44) indicated reasons in one of these areas – related to mental and behavioral health – as a factor that contributed to student veteran dropout rates. This result implies that a significant number of student veterans reported fellow student veterans who dropped out of community college for reasons relating to mental and behavioral health.

Characteristics and Skills of Veteran Representatives

Additionally, researchers asked participants about characteristics and skills they would desire in a veteran representative at a community college. Of 315 total responses to this question, researchers reported the results as a percentage of specific responses out of the total of 315. Results indicate the top desirable qualities and characteristics of a veteran representative (Table 7):

1. Knowledgeable in VA Ed Benefits (21.9%, n = 69)
2. Have Working Knowledge of VA System (21.0%, n = 66)
3. Have Knowledge of Available Resources (21.0%, n = 66)
4. Serve as Link to CSU and UC (18.1%, n= 57)

Table 7

Frequency distribution of veteran representative characteristics.

		Responses		Percent of
		N	Percent	Cases
VA Rep Characteristics	LCSW	13	4.1%	18.6%
	Counseling Credentials	28	8.9%	40.0%
	Formal Schooling in Mental Health	16	5.1%	22.9%
	Knowledgeable in VA Ed Benefits	69	21.9%	98.6%
	Working Knowledge of VA System	66	21.0%	94.3%
	Knowledge of Available Resources	66	21.0%	94.3%
	Serve as Link to CSU and UC	57	18.1%	81.4%
Total		315	100.0%	450.0%

Results indicated that licensed clinical qualifications in counseling, mental health, and social work were viewed as less important qualities than administrative knowledge of the ins and outs of the education system. Question 21 was also designed to allow participants to articulate – in their own words – what characteristics they desired in a veteran representative. The results yielded themes in the following areas of veteran representatives' characteristics:

1. Knowledgeable in community resources and campus resources for veterans
2. Good personal relationship skills (friendly, approachable, outgoing, selfless, and patient)
3. Insight into veteran's issues
4. Be a veteran themselves

Levels of Understanding

In assessing significant differences of student veterans' levels of understanding of the VA, CSU/UC, California community college, and services available, researchers asked participants to rate their understanding levels on a scale of 1 to 5 in the following areas:

1. VA education benefits
2. California community college system
3. CSU/UC system
4. Community college services available to student veterans

A paired-sample t-test was conducted to compare the level of understanding before community college experience to the level of understanding after community college

experience (Table 8). There was a significant difference in the mean scores for level of understanding before ($M = 2.61$, $SD = 1.061$) and level of understanding after ($M = 3.51$, $SD = .980$); $t(58) = -7.097$, $p = .000$. These results suggest that level of understanding of the VA, CSU/UC, California community college, and services available increased between entering and transitioning out of community college.

Table 8

Paired samples t-test of significant difference in overall understanding levels before and after community college.

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean				
Pair 1	Overall Understanding Before CC	2.61	59	1.061	.138				
	Overall Understanding After CC	3.51	59	.980	.128				

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Overall Understanding Before CC – Overall Understanding After CC	-.908	.983	.128	-1.164	-.652	-7.097	58	.000

Group Differences

An independent-samples t-test was performed to compare the overall frequency of obstacles encountered by student veterans who had deployed to a combat zone and those who had not. There was no significant difference in the scores for combat veterans ($M = 2.09$, $SD = .664$) and non-combat veterans ($M = 1.97$, $SD = .874$). Specifically, the results

suggest that among the sample of student veteran participants, there are no statistically significant differences in regard to obstacles encountered between student veterans who deployed to a combat zone and those who did not. In addition, researchers ran independent-samples t-tests to compare the following variables between combat and non-combat veterans:

1. Overall understanding levels before and after community college
2. Overall ratings of helpfulness of the veteran representative
3. Overall satisfaction level of the community college experience

There were no significant differences between scores for combat veterans and scores for non-combat veterans.

Gender Differences

Researchers performed an independent-samples t-test to compare the overall frequency of obstacles encountered between male and female student veterans. There was no significant difference between the scores for male veterans ($M = 1.96$, $SD = .694$) and female veterans ($M = 2.18$, $SD = .839$). Specifically, the results suggest that, with respect to participants' overall frequency of obstacles encountered, gender was not a significant factor. In addition, researchers ran independent-samples t-tests to compare the following variables between male and female veterans:

1. Overall understanding levels before and after community college
2. Overall ratings of helpfulness of the veteran representative
3. Overall satisfaction level of the community college experience

There were no significant differences between scores for male and female veterans.

Summary

In this chapter, researchers presented data analysis on the study's three focus areas which highlighted student veteran challenges during transition from the military to higher education. These three primary areas are: 1) administrative processes, 2) behavioral health, and 3) student veteran organizations. This chapter contained analyzed results from the study's online survey which tested for significant correlations and significant differences among demographic groups with respect to levels of satisfaction, levels of helpfulness of veteran representatives, and levels of obstacles encountered. Researchers presented overall findings, summarized student veteran participants' demographics, and detailed specific findings that addressed the four key research questions. Researchers followed by outlining additional findings that they deemed significant. The purpose of this study was to collect and analyze data about the transition experiences of CSUS student veterans who transferred from community colleges. Based on these findings, researchers will recommend improvements to California community colleges which will help them become "veteran friendly" campuses.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Researchers designed this study to capture and understand student veterans' experiences as they transitioned from military service to higher education, to measure how satisfied they were with services they received during college, to identify their perspectives on coping skills they used to overcome obstacles in their education, and to identify services that student veterans found useful in community college. The study focused on four research questions designed to measure:

1. The relationship between students' levels of understanding of their colleges and the VA systems and their levels of satisfaction during college
2. The correlation (if any) between student veterans' satisfaction levels and the helpfulness of the veteran representative on campus
3. The types and frequency of obstacles encountered by student veterans
4. The services offered through the CSUS Veteran Success Center that students would have found useful during community college

This study was conducted to capture student veterans' experiences at community college, and to facilitate recommendations and improvements.

Summary of Study

Understanding the complex system that both the Department of Veterans Affairs and local community colleges operate under can be overwhelming for any veteran transitioning from military life to life as a student pursuing higher education. For some student veterans, the whole experience of community college was frustrated by the

difficulties of navigating the system. This study's findings indicated an overall positive correlation between student veteran satisfaction during community college and their understanding levels of the VA and their community college system. Student veteran participants who reported high levels of understanding before and after community college also indicated higher levels of satisfaction with their overall community college experience. This finding suggests that students' overall academic experiences are impacted by how well they understand administrative processes. Additionally, students reported higher levels of overall satisfaction (with their community college experiences) when their veteran representative was knowledgeable and able to address their veteran-specific needs. These two factors – levels of understanding of the administrative systems and adequate VA representation – play a significant role in making community colleges more “veteran friendly”.

Responses to the survey highlighted top areas in which student veterans encountered challenges in their respective community colleges:

1. Transferring credits
2. Faculty and peer interaction
3. Orientation
4. Accessing financial aid and G.I. Bill benefits
5. Class registration

In addition, qualitative responses to the same question indicated student veterans encountered obstacles with under-trained and under-qualified veteran center staff, lack of full-time veteran representative on campus, administrative processes, and in accessing

mental health services. Although analysis of responses to the question on obstacles indicated a lower emphasis on challenges accessing mental health services compared to challenges in other areas, this theme emerged in response to other survey questions. Student veteran participants as a whole ranked their frequency of obstacles encountered in accessing mental health services as lowest of seven possible areas. One student veteran referred to “horrible counseling services” in the open-ended response section of the question about other obstacles encountered. Another student veteran highlighted the fact that he had to learn from other fellow veterans rather than the staff or representative on campus, indicating that his needs were not met by the school. This result indicates a gap in the school’s veteran resources, but also shows veterans’ abilities to adapt and rely on outside sources when they encounter obstacles. In addition, it indicates that veteran-to-veteran interaction is important to student veterans. A low emphasis on mental health and behavioral health services in this study could be attributed to the fact that a lower percentage of participants needed these services, whereas nearly all of them had to deal with administrative processing issues.

The study revealed top services that student veterans found useful during community college. They were:

1. Priority registration
2. Full-time veteran representative on campus
3. Access to counseling services
4. A resource center for student veterans

Findings indicated similarities between services offered by both the CSUS VSC and community colleges that participants found useful. Responses to both questions indicated that student veterans found it useful to have services like priority registration, full-time, dedicated, and friendly veteran center staff (knowledgeable on veteran-specific issues) both during community college and after transferring to CSUS.

Successfully transitioning from community college to a four-year university after military service speaks volumes of the dedication and success that student veteran participants from this study have already achieved. One goal of this study was to identify student veterans' key strengths and coping skills that aided them in overcoming obstacles during their transition to higher education. Specifically, the study addressed useful skills that participants. Participants indicated the following as useful skills developed during their military service (in order of importance):

1. Flexibility (ability to adapt and overcome challenges)
2. Reacting productively under stress
3. Working well with others
4. Leadership skills
5. Time-management
6. Communication skills
7. Understanding the meaning of commitment
8. Integrity
9. Maturity
10. Prioritizing

These responses indicate that student veterans learned valuable skills as a result of their military service, and were able to successfully apply those skills to a new environment outside of the military. This expected result shows some of the positive benefits that military service can bring to an individual's academic success. The same qualities which may cause a student veteran to feel alienated from his peers at community college may in fact be the qualities which allow him to ultimately succeed: maturity, leadership skills, prioritization skills, and the ability to react productively under stress.

Because researchers focused on the population that has already successfully transitioned to a four-year university, collecting data on reasons that student veterans dropped out of community college required researchers to request secondhand knowledge from participants. Secondhand knowledge of fellow student veterans who had dropped out of community colleges yielded a significant result. Almost half of student veteran participants in this study (47.1%) knew of one or more student veterans who, for various reasons, had dropped out of community college. Following were the top reasons affecting dropout rates as indicated by student veterans:

1. Financial hardship
2. Lack of coping skills
3. Family responsibilities
4. Low academic skills
5. Mental health problems

Although survey results indicated that student veterans placed a low emphasis on the need for veteran center staff to be licensed mental and behavioral health clinicians,

findings did suggest that student veteran dropouts could be largely attributed to mental and behavioral health challenges. Researchers calculated an overall mental and behavioral health factor by combining the following individual factors: poor coping skills, mental health reasons, alcohol and drug use, and cultural adaptation problems. The overall mental health factor indicated that a significant number of student veterans dropped out of community college for reasons relating to mental health.

A surprising finding from the study showed that there were no significant differences between combat and non-combat veterans or male and female veterans in the following areas: frequency of obstacles encountered, overall levels of understanding pre- and-post community college, overall ratings of helpfulness of the community college's veteran representative, or overall satisfaction level during community college. The result indicates that exposure to combat was not a significant factor in influencing student veteran participants' overall level of obstacles encountered, whether they gained an understanding of the educational system, or whether they reported higher levels of satisfaction during community college. A lack of differences between gender groups indicated that gender did not play a significant role in affecting a student veteran's satisfaction during community college.

Implications for Social Work

Student veterans entering community colleges across California find themselves in a vulnerable transition period in their adult lives, encountering difficulties in many areas. Serving the student veteran population across the community college system in California requires innovative ideas that can serve as both preventative measures and as a

first response to aid our service members during their transition to higher education. In addition to needs experienced by the general student population, student veterans have unique needs that should not be overlooked.

At the micro-level of social work, practitioners should be educated about the military culture that student veterans have just transitioned from. Knowing the common challenges faced by veterans during this important transition in their adult life could provide practitioners with the skills to more effectively work with student veteran clients. Additionally, knowledge of Schlossberg's theory of adult transitions and the ecological approach could serve as a framework for social workers to develop this understanding (Schlossberg, 1981).

According to the National Association of Social Workers, social work practice is the professional application of social work values, principles, and techniques to help people obtain services, to conduct counseling and psychotherapy with individuals, families, and groups, to help communities or groups provide or improve social and health services, and to advocate for necessary policy change (2014). As a result, social work requires specific knowledge of human development, social, economic, and cultural institutions, and of the interaction of these factors (National Association of Social Workers, 2014). As indicated by this study, student veterans need assistance navigating the complex educational programs offered by the VA and their respective community colleges. They also need assistance accessing mental and behavioral health services and integrating into student life through student veteran organizations. Social work skills

could help bridge that gap, and veteran representatives at community colleges should be properly trained social workers who understand veteran-specific mental health needs.

Many student veterans will adapt and overcome obstacles in higher education in the same way they did during military service, but implementing processes to help veterans better succeed deserves more attention. Social workers and other licensed behavioral health professionals – educated about veteran-specific needs – would bring adaptable and solution-focused approaches to colleges interested in better providing for the needs of their student veterans. Social workers brings skills to the table that would improve current services available to student veterans; they are specialized in integrating and working with complex systems, they are shown to be effective in school settings, and they are effectively trained to understand mental and behavioral health needs.

At the meso-level of social work, this study addresses the processes and services needed to streamline student veterans' transition to community college. Specifically, veteran representatives, as service providers, have the potential to affect student veteran overall satisfaction levels during community college. Representatives can either exacerbate or alleviate specific obstacles in the transition process – thus they have the potential to positively (or negatively) affect student veteran satisfaction levels. Due to the vital nature of the veteran representative, social workers – qualified in multiple areas – would be excellent candidates to fill positions as veteran representatives on community college and university campuses.

Regarding social work implications at the macro-level, practitioners should be aware of the policies and best-practices regarding service to student veterans at colleges

across the nation. States could implement standards of service provision, which would set the baseline for minimal services required by colleges. In addition, colleges could implement local processes modelled after other campuses that are successfully providing services to veterans. Incorporating student veteran feedback into this type of macro-level process would be crucial in ensuring that service provision continued to improve at the user level.

Recommendations

Currently the legislature in the State of Minnesota has laid ground work for other states to emulate (Lokken, Pfeffer, McAuley, & Strong, 2009). Standardizing the way each state responds to their student veteran population in community colleges campuses across the nation could have a positive impact on student veteran academic success. Minnesota has made their community colleges campuses more veteran-friendly by mandating that higher learning institutions provide adequate space for a veteran office that meets the needs of its veterans, and that they hire and train staff on student veteran specific needs (Lokken, Pfeffer, McAuley, & Strong, 2009). This standardization effectively establishes a base-line for veteran services on community college campuses. The same legislation that works for one state may not work for other states. Each state should identify the best, evidence-based practices to serve its student veteran population. From the findings of this study, researchers recommend that states establish standardization as a method to ensure that student veterans at the community college level are offered, at the very least, a baseline level of services. Based on study results, this

baseline for California community colleges should include a mandate for every campus to have:

1. Priority registration for veterans
2. Qualified full-time staff trained on veterans' needs and with good people-skills
3. Mental health access on campus or by referral
4. A designated office space that is adequate and spacious enough to provide student veterans a "safe zone"
5. An active student veteran organization to facilitate veteran to veteran interaction

To meet the needs identified in this study by student veterans, the veterans' office on campus should have minimum staff that includes a veteran representative and a clinical staff (LCSW, or equivalent). Responses to the study's survey question regarding CSUS VSC's services showed that participants found the CSUS services to be useful on many levels. One participant remarked that "The Veteran Success Center was the key to my graduating." Given the positive survey responses about services and staff at the CSUS VSC, researchers suggest that the CSUS VSC model is a good one for community colleges to emulate. The CSUS VSC has streamlined their provision of services to veterans in an innovative and efficient way. Researchers recommend that community colleges interested in strengthening veteran-specific services should look at the services currently being offered at CSUS for student veterans. As more veterans become students in higher education, more federal funds will go to those community colleges and universities.

Researchers recommend further research using a sample population pool that includes student veterans who dropped out of community college. Research indicates that one in three veterans either develops PTSD, depression, or requires some form of assistance with behavioral and mental health (DiRamio & Spires, 2009). Therefore, further research could identify some of the specific effects that mental health conditions have on student veterans in college. Another recommendation would be to conduct a similar study that focused only on student veterans currently attending community college (rather than those in a post-community college setting). When community colleges across the state become more veteran friendly, this may lead to higher enrollment rates and higher graduation rates among the veteran population. Research comparing veteran friendly colleges or universities to more traditional academic institutions could reveal whether these services make a difference to student veteran academic success. Additional recommendations for further areas of research include: identifying the veteran-specific needs of female veterans (vice male veterans), rating the quality of transition services (for entering higher education) by branch of military service, and exploring dropout rates of student veterans in higher education.

Limitations

Although the online survey helped researchers identify several areas where student veterans encountered obstacles and recommended improvements, there were several limitations to the study. The first limitation was related to the sample that participated in the study. Participants who were surveyed had already successfully transitioned from community college to CSUS. Based on this sampling bias, researchers

were not able to directly capture the experiences of student veterans who dropped out of community college, and study results may be skewed to reflect the values and challenges of student veterans who succeeded where others failed. A second limitation was that student veterans at CSUS only represent the Sacramento area and may not be representative of the whole student veteran population across the state of California or the nation. This sampling limitation may mean that study findings are not representative of student veterans in other colleges across the state. These limitations have an impact on external validity, limiting generalizability to other community colleges, or to four-year universities.

Another possible limitation to the study was found with the survey tool used. The survey participants' used has not been tested for reliability, thus it may have skewed findings. The survey tool itself was comprised mainly of closed-ended questions, so participants' responses were often limited. Although researchers provided space for participants to provide additional feedback, a survey tool allowing for more qualitative results overall might have yielded different findings.

Conclusion

This study provides new insight into student veterans' experiences at the community college level. Researchers identified key issues that would ease veterans' transition into higher education and increase student veteran retention, graduation, and transfer rates to four-year universities across the state of California. The theoretical frameworks used for this study was Schlossberg's theory of adult transition and the ecological approach. The research presented in this study focused on identifying the

needs of student veterans, and the resilience they have shown by successfully transferring to a four-year university. Findings in this study indicated that the majority of student veteran participants reported adequate service provision at their respective community colleges. Findings also indicate that, for a large number of these student veterans, satisfaction levels during community college were in congruence with their respective veteran representative's level of helpfulness. Because the levels of service vary from campus to campus across the state, researchers highlighted the implication of this lack of standardized services for the overall experience of student veterans. In general, participants did not indicate that the current system in place to help them to navigate through the community college experience was broken. Rather, they highlighted key areas for improvement with respect to their schools' veteran representatives and other administrative processes. Further research is needed to access firsthand information on student veterans' reasons for dropping out of community college. This would assist in the further development of programs to improve retention rates and veteran's academic success. Based on the core values of social work, further advancement in this area of study is important to continue to improvement of services to this unique population.

APPENDIX A: Consent to Participate in Research

Voices of Student Veterans*** 1. Consent to Participate in Research**

You are being asked to participate in research, which will be conducted by Rebecca Collette and Nestor Davila, who are both veterans and also graduate students in the Division of Social Work at California State University, Sacramento. This study will be supported by the Veteran Success Center at Sac State. The purpose of this study is to assess the experience of Sac State student veterans during their transition from military life to community college, and from community college to Sac State. Specifically, we will be looking at the strengths and limitations in the services provided by community colleges to student veterans.

The study will investigate factors related to the student veteran's experience at a community college (including those without community college experience), and satisfaction levels of services received during their community college experience. You will be asked to complete a survey with questions regarding demographics, your personal experience, knowledge of fellow veterans' struggles, strengths and recommendations for community colleges, and overall satisfaction of services provided to student veterans. The questionnaire may require up to 15 minutes of your time. If you agree to participate please click on "Agree to participate" and begin taking the survey.

It is possible that some of the questions on the survey may make you feel uncomfortable, but you are free to decline to answer any questions or to stop participation at any time. Researchers will practice due diligence to maintain confidentiality, but participation could mean a loss of confidentiality. All records will be kept confidential as possible. No individual identity will be used in any report or publications resulting from the study. Study information will be kept in locked files away from the school site at all times. Only researchers and study personnel will have access to the files.

There will be no direct benefit to participants for completing the survey. However, the information may be helpful in improving services provided to student veterans in community college campuses and in colleges becoming "veteran friendly campuses".

All results obtained in this study will be confidential. Your individual performance will not be reported, only the results of all participants as a group. Information you provide on the consent form and survey will be stored separately. The survey data will contain no

Voices of Student Veterans

personal identifying information about you.

You will not receive any compensation for participating in this research. In the event of an emergency, initial medical treatment would be available at the Sacramento State Student Health Center. However, if you were to require any other medical care as a result of participating in this research, you would need to contact your personal physician at your own expense.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Rebecca Collette at [REDACTED] or e-mail RebeccaCollette@csus.edu, or call Nestor Davila at [REDACTED] or e-mail nsd28@csus.edu.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. By clicking on “Agree to take survey”, you are saying that you understand the risks involved in this research and agree to participate in it.

- Agree to participate
- Do not wish to participate

APPENDIX B: Student Veteran Survey

Voices of Student Veterans

***2. What is your gender?**

M

F

Other

***3. What is your age?**

18 to 24

25 to 34

35 to 44

45 to 54

55 to 64

65 to 74

75 or older

***4. In which branch (or branches) of the United States military have you served? (Check all that apply)**

Army

Marine Corps

Navy

Air Force

Coast Guard

***5. Were you ever deployed to a combat zone?**

Yes

No

***6. How much time elapsed between your end of active service (EAS) and the time you started attending college?**

Less than 1 year

1-2 years

3-4 years

5 or more years

Voices of Student Veterans***7. What is your current level of academic study at Sac State?**

- Undergraduate (Bachelors)
- Graduate (Masters)
- Post-graduate (Doctoral)
- Other (please specify)

***8. Did you transfer from a community college?**

- Yes
- No

Voices of Student Veterans

*9. For how long did you attend community college before transferring to Sac State?

- Less than 1 year
- 1-2 years
- 3-4 years
- 5+ years
- Not applicable

*10. Did you receive a degree from community college BEFORE transferring to CSUS?

- Yes
- No
- Not Applicable

*11. Rate your level of understanding of the following areas before entering community college:

	Not at all	A Little	Average	Above average	Excellent	N/A
VA Educational benefits	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
California community college system	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CSU/UC system	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Community college services that are available for student veterans	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*12. During your time in community college, did your campus have a designated Veteran Representative working full time with the student veteran population?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Voices of Student Veterans

*13. Rate your community college's Veteran Representative in the following areas:

	Service Not Provided	Not Helpful	Somewhat Helpful	Helpful	Very Helpful	N/A
Ability to navigate you through the Veteran-specific education application process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to facilitate the transfer of your military courses/experience into college credits	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increase your understanding of the VA Educational benefits	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Serve as a link to VA Services (healthcare, mental health services, benefits)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Serve as a resource for general information for the school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Link you with proper contact and resources at Sac State during transition period	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Voices of Student Veterans

*14. How often did you encounter obstacles during the following experience/process at your community college?

	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	All the time	N/A
Initial orientation or initial visit to community college	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Receiving credit for military courses at community college	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Financial Aid/GI Bill payments at community college	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Class Registration at community college	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Provision of or referral to Mental Health services at community college	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Provision of referral to Health Services at community college	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interaction with faculty and peers at community college	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other obstacle encountered (please specify)	<input type="text"/>					

*15. Rate your Level of satisfaction in the following areas at your community college:

	Completely Unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Extremely Satisfied	N/A
Feeling welcomed onto your community college campus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feeling comfortable in your interactions with community college staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Understanding how to navigate the VA Educational system	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feeling comfortable in interactions with faculty and peers at your community college	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feeling safe sharing personal opinions and perspectives during class	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Voices of Student Veterans

*** 16. Rate your level of understanding of the following areas AFTER transferring to CSUS:**

	Not at all	A Little	Average	Above average	Excellent	N/A
VA Educational benefits	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
California community college system	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CSU/UC system	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Community college services that are available for student veterans	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*** 17. In what areas did your community college provide services that were useful during your enrollment and your transition to CSUS?**

- Making Veterans Feel Welcome
- Provided Priority Registration
- Veterans Orientation to Campus
- Veteran Resource Center
- Full-Time Veteran Representative
- Counseling Services
- Veteran Recruitment and Advertising process
- Other (please specify)

Voices of Student Veterans

***18. Do you know any veterans who dropped out of community college?**

Yes

No

Voices of Student Veterans

***19. If Yes, indicate the reasons the veteran dropped out. Check all that apply.**

- Re-entered military service
- Alcohol/Drug Abuse
- Health Related
- Mental Health Related
- Financial Hardships
- Poor Coping Skills
- Cultural Adaptation Problems
- Being Activated In Reserves
- Low Academic Skills
- Family Responsibilities
- VA/Community College Bureaucracy
- Other (please specify)

Voices of Student Veterans

*20. What services have been useful for you through the CSUS Veteran Success Center?

Check all that apply.

- Veteran Community Computer Access
- Access to Free Printing
- Provided Priority Registration
- Accessibility to Other VA Related Resources
- Full-Time Staff Dedicated to Veteran Services
- Friendly Staff
- Veterans Organizations
- Veteran Functions
- Knowledgeable Staff on Veteran Issues
- Having a Designated Veterans Office Space
- Other (please specify)

*21. Whether or not you attended community college, what type of characteristics and skills do you think a VA Representative at community college should have? Check all that apply.

- Licensed Clinical Social Worker
- Counseling Credentials
- Formal Schooling in Behavioral/Mental Health
- Knowledgeable in VA Educational Benefits
- Working knowledge of VA system
- Knowledge of Available Resources
- Serve as a Link Between Transition to CSU/UC
- Other (please specify)

Voices of Student Veterans

***22. What key strengths and coping skills did you develop during your military service that aided you in overcoming obstacles during your transition to higher education? Check all that apply.**

- Physical Fitness/PT
- Ability to Adapt and Overcome Challenges
- Structured Scheduling
- Time Management
- Communication Skills
- Advocating for Yourself
- Selflessness/Caring for Wellbeing of Others
- Military Bearing
- Leadership Skills
- Working Well With Others
- Reacting Productively In Stressful Situations
- Other (please specify)

References

- Ackerman, R., DiRamio, D., & Mitchell, R. (2009). Transitions: Combat veterans as college students. *New Directions for Student Services*, (126), 5-14.
doi:10.1002/ss.311
- Barnes, M. (2011). *Meeting the needs of undergraduate veterans: A study of institutional preparedness among postsecondary institutions in Texas*. Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertations. (UMI 3497337)
- Barry, E., Whiteman, S., & Wadsworth, S. (2012). Implications of Posttraumatic stress Among Military-Affiliated and Civilian Students, *Journal of American College Health*, 60:8, 562-573.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1994). Ecological models of human development. *In International Encyclopedia of Education, Vol. 3, 2nd. Ed.* Oxford: Elsevier.
- Boulton, M. (2005). *A price on freedom: The problems and promise of the Vietnam era G.I. Bills*. Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertations. (UMI 3205778)
- California Department of Veterans Affairs. (2012). Snap Shot of California Veterans. Retrieved August 15, 2013, from <https://www.calvet.ca.gov/VetServices/Documents/Demographics.pdf>
- Sacramento State Office of Institutional Research. (2013). Retrieved September 12, 2013, from <http://www.csus.edu/oir/Data%20Center/University%20Quick%20Facts/Fall%202012.pdf>
- Capps, T. (2011). *Veteran students: What motivates persistence from matriculation to goal completion?* Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertations. (UMI 3439499)

- Department of Defense Task Force on Mental Health. (2007). An achievable vision: *Report of the Department of Defense Task Force on Mental Health*. Falls Church, VA: Defense Health Board.
- Department of Veterans Affairs. (2013). Retrieved August 1, 2013, from <http://www.va.gov/budget/products.asp>
- Diamond, A. (2012). *The adaptive military transition theory: Supporting military students in academic environments*. Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertations. (UMI 3504491)
- DiRamio, D., Ackerman, R., & Mitchell, R. (2008). From Combat to Campus: Voices of Student-Veterans. *NASPA Journal*, 45(1), 73–102.
- DiRamio, D., & Spires, M. (2009). Partnering to assist disabled veterans in transition. *New Directions for Student Services*, (126), 81-88. doi:10.1002/ss.319
- Ford, D., Northrup, P., & Wiley, L. (2009). Connections, partnerships, opportunities, and programs to enhance success for military students. *New Directions For Student Services*, (126), 61-69. doi:10.1002/ss.317.
- Lackaye, B. (2011). *In country, on campus: A study of combat veteran integration into higher education*. Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertations. (UMI 3490398)
- Larick, J., & Graf, N. (2012). Battlefield compassion and posttraumatic growth in combat service persons. *Journal of Social Work in Disability & Rehabilitation*, 11, 219-239. doi: 10.1080/1536710X.2012.730824

- Lokken, J. M., Pfeffer, D. S., McAuley, J., & Strong, C. (2009). A statewide approach to creating veteran-friendly campuses. *New Directions for Student Services*, (126), 45-54. doi:10.1002/ss.315
- Murphy, P. (2011). *Military Veterans and College Success: A Qualitative Examination of Veterans Needs in Higher Education*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of North Carolina at Greensboro.
- National Association of Social Workers. (2014). Retrieved April 11, 2014 from <http://www.socialworkers.org/practice/default.asp>
- Olson, K. (1974). *The G.I. Bill, the veterans, and the colleges*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.
- Persky, K. (2010). *Veterans Education: Coming home to the Community College Classroom*. National-Louis University Chicago, Illinois.
- Rumann, C., Rivera, M., & Hernandez, I. (2011). Student veterans and community colleges. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2011(155), 51-58. doi:10.1002/cc.457
- Rumann, C. B., & Hamrick, F. A. (2010). Student Veterans in Transition: Re-enrolling after War Zone Deployments. *Journal of Higher Education*, 81(4), 431-458.
- Ryan, S. (2010). *From boots to books: Applying Schlossberg's transition model to the transition of today's American veterans to higher education*. K-State Electronic Theses, Dissertations, and Electronic Papers, 2004-07 Kansas State University.

- Schlossberg, N. (1981). A model for analyzing human adaptation to transition. *The Counseling Psychologist*, Summer, Vol. 9 (2), 2-18. doi: 10.1177/001100008100900202
- Schlossberg, N. K., Waters, E. B., & Goodman, J. (1995). *Counseling adults in transition: Linking practice with theory (2nd ed.)*. New York: Spring.
- Seligman, M., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist*, 55, 5-14. doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.5
- Small, S. & Memmo, M. (2004). Contemporary models of youth development and problem prevention: Toward an integration of terms, concepts, and models. *Family Relations*, Vol. 53 (1), 3-11.
- Steele, J., Salcedo, N., & Coley, J. (2010). Service Members in School: Military Veterans' Experiences Using the Post-9/11 GI Bill and Pursuing Postsecondary Education. *The American Council on Education*. Washington DC.
- Summerlot, J., Green, S., & Parker, D. (2009). Student Veterans Organizations. *New Directions For Student Services*, (126), 71-79. doi:10.1002/ss.318
doi: 10.1002/ss.311
- Tedeschi, & Tedeschi, R. (1999). Violence transformed: Post-traumatic growth in survivors and their societies. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 4(3), 319-341. doi: 10.1016/S1359-1789(98)00005-6
- Weinbach, R. & Grinnell, R. Jr. (2010). *Statistics for social workers (8th ed)*. Needham Height, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Zinger, L., & Cohen, A. (2010). Veterans returning from war into the classroom: How can colleges be better prepared to meet their needs. *Contemporary Issues in Education Research*, 3(1), pp.39-51.