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The Impact Of Military Experience On The Higher Education Experiences Of Veterans

Jeff Dougherty

Illinois State University, jeff.dougherty@icc.edu

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THE IMPACT OF MILITARY EXPERIENCE
ON THE HIGHER EDUCATION
EXPERIENCES OF
VETERANS

Jeffrey S. Dougherty

109 Pages

May 2015

Veterans have been an integral part of the student population on higher education campuses since the conclusion of World War II. The purpose of this study was to examine veterans' perceptions of how their military experiences affected their experience as college students. Twenty-six veterans were interviewed at six Illinois higher education institutions. Study findings suggest five ways in which the military experience helped veterans adjust to college: (a) veterans were experienced with group collaboration; (b) veterans held high expectations of themselves; (c) veterans were organized and task-oriented; (d) veterans were experienced learners, and; (e) veterans had experience and ability to work with others. In addition, the interviews uncovered five ways in which military experience made adjustment to college life difficult: (a) veterans faced difficulty with lack of direction; (b) veterans had challenges transitioning from the military to college; (c) veterans faced socialization concerns; (d) veterans had difficulty in coming to terms with age difference; and (e) veterans were frustrated when working on group projects.

Study results led to four recommendations. First, the military and universities can offer coordinated transition assistance. Second, colleges and universities can offer college orientation with veterans in mind. Third, the military and universities can offer assistance for veterans who desire to socialize more with others. Fourth, colleges and universities should implement mentoring and peer counseling programs for veterans. In addition to these recommendations, this study also suggests areas for further research.

THE IMPACT OF MILITARY EXPERIENCE
ON THE HIGHER EDUCATION
EXPERIENCES OF
VETERANS

JEFFREY S. DOUGHERTY

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Educational Administration and Foundations

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2015

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THE IMPACT OF MILITARY EXPERIENCE
ON THE HIGHER EDUCATION
EXPERIENCES OF
VETERANS

JEFFREY S. DOUGHERTY

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

James Palmer, Chair

Patricia Klass

Mohamed Nur-Awaleh

Neil Sappington

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First and foremost, this work is dedicated to all veterans. This work is also dedicated to my parents. I am sure they are just as relieved as I am that this particular journey is finally over. After all, that means I have that much more time I can spend with them. At this point in my life, this has become more of a blessing.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Veterans can readily identify other veterans by “using passer-by intuition” (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008, p. 87). Research has determined that veterans as a group experience a unique cultural and socialization environment because of their military service. There is some understanding of veteran perceptions and their higher education experience. Through interviews with veterans attending selected two- and four- year colleges in Illinois, this study examined how veteran perceptions affected their college experience. After a summary of prior research on veterans, this chapter will detail the research question, explain the methodology used to answer this research question, and identify conceptual frameworks that guided this study.

Background

There have been four lines of research literature on veterans since the passage of the 1944 G.I. Bill. One has examined veterans’ educational benefits and their impact on higher education (e.g., Bennett, 1996; Mosch, 1975; O’Donnell, 2002; Olson, 1974). A second has examined veteran earnings (e.g., Angrist, 1990; Angrist, 1993; Angrist & Krueger, 1994; Berger & Hirsch, 1983; Browning, Lopreato, & Poston, 1973; Bryant, Samaranayake, & Wilhite, 1993; Cohany, 1992; Cohen, Segal, & Temme, 1986b & 1992; Cutright, 1974; Goldberg & Warner, 1986; Little & Fredland, 1979; Magnum & Ball, 1987; Martindale & Poston, 1979; Mattila, 1978; Moskos, 1977; Schwartz, 1986; Teachman, 2005; Teachman & Call, 1996; Villemez & Kasarda, 1976). The third has

examined academic performance and socioeconomic attainment of veterans (e.g., Bound & Turner, 2002; Cohen, Segal, & Temme, 1986a; Frederiksen & Schrader, 1951; Sampson & Laub, 1996; Stanley, 2003; Xie, 1992). All have helped in understanding the nature and the impact of the educational benefits received by veterans.

The fourth line of research has examined veterans as students and has included studies that have looked at the veteran on a personal level. For example, Atwell (1999); DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell (2008); Larson (1990); and McNealy (2004) noted socialization differences among veterans. This research has suggested that the veterans' military experiences make them a unique group on campus and have an impact on their higher education experience. Differences between veterans and other student populations began to be noted shortly after veterans arrived in large numbers on college campuses at the end of World War II. These veterans entered college with perspectives about higher education institutions that reflected their military experience. For example, Howard (1945) noted that former service members as college students resented prerequisites or other required subjects because they did not apply directly to their course of study; they were used to intense training in the military and they tended to "chafe under the slower pace of the University" (p. 15). Justice (1946) noted that veterans felt "the teaching staff was not up to the standards expected"; that lectures were ineffective, "that the lecture material was poorly organized"; and that time was wasted on courses with "no direct bearing on his major studies" (p. 187). In her major study of the veterans who took advantage of the 1944 G.I. Bill, Mettler (2005) asserted that: "Veterans' responses to the G.I. Bill would be tempered by how they experienced their time in the armed forces" (p. 26).

The prevailing underlying theme in prior research has suggested that veterans' perceptions of their college experience are grounded within their military experiences and that these experiences make them a unique classification of students who share a common set of cultural phenomena that differentiate them from the rest of the general student population—a phenomenon that has been noted by, among others, Atwell (1999), Capps (2011), Larson (1990), Livingston (2009), McNealy (2004), and Persky (2010). Further research into veteran perceptions of how their military experience affects their college experience can provide needed insights into the services that might help veterans make the transition into the college environment. The military and higher education institutions would have a better understanding as to what would be effective, and, conversely, what has not been effective in helping the veteran population on America's campuses.

Research Question and Method

The purpose of this study was to examine how veterans perceived that their military experiences affected their experiences as college students. This study focused on the following research question: How do veterans perceive that their military experience affects their higher education experience?

Study data were collected through face-to-face interviews with veterans attending six higher education institutions in Illinois, including three public universities, two community colleges, and one private four-year college. Each institution provided the researcher with a list of military veterans who (a) were using higher education benefits resulting from military service in any branch (Army, Air Force, Marines, Navy, Coast Guard, National Guard, or Air National Guard) or capacity (active, reserve or a

combination of both), and (b) had served at least one year on active duty or experienced at least one overseas deployment within the last ten years. The researcher sent each of these veterans an e-mail invitation to participate in the study. Twenty-six who responded affirmatively were interviewed.

Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Participants were asked the following questions:

1. Under which branch did you serve in the military?
2. During what time period (or years) did you perform your military service?
3. Please explain your perceptions of how your military experiences affect your current experience as a college student.
4. How did your military experience help you adapt to and succeed in college?
5. On the other hand, how has your military experience perhaps made your adjustment as a student more difficult?
6. Given your experience, what are the most important things that colleges and universities can do to help veterans succeed in college?

Upon conclusion of the interview, participants were offered the opportunity to add additional information to the interview. The transcripts were transcribed by the researcher. Next, the transcripts were sent to the participants, who were asked to make changes, additions, clarifications or amendments they felt were necessary prior to coding. Coding was utilized as the methodology to sort and categorize information.

Conceptual Framework

Veterans attending higher education institutions have a perspective that is not readily discernible by others who have not had military experience. Veterans go through the unique experience of having to reconcile two organizational cultures with contrasting and conflicting values. Some veterans maneuver between both cultures concurrently

while others transition to the higher education culture after leaving the military.

The conceptual framework for this study was Tinto's model of institutional departure and Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation. Tinto's model of institutional departure suggests that positive experiences reinforce intentions and commitment to complete college; negative experiences weaken intentions and commitments to complete college (Tinto, 1987). Tinto posited that the lower the level of integration into the college's academic and social spheres, the more likely one would depart an institution; the higher the level of integration, the less likely one would depart an institution (Tinto, 1987).

Tinto's model indicates that higher education experiences are affected by what the student brings with him or her to college in terms of attributes, family background, and schooling (Tinto, 1987). The veteran's military experiences could also be included because, as noted above, they clearly impact the veteran's perspective and sense of identity. For some veterans, the military experience has had a profound impact.

The other conceptual framework for this study was Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation. The premise of perspective transformation posits that new experiences may transform the "meaning perspectives" gained from our past experiences (Mezirow, 1978, p. 101). Among the "unexamined cultural assumptions" that could have had influences upon us are "economic, political, social, religious, occupational or educational systems" (Mezirow, 1978, p. 104). Military experiences could easily fall within this realm.

Significance of the Study

Many studies have examined veteran benefits and entitlements. Some studies have suggested services and support that would best serve veterans during their higher education experience. Still, other studies have inquired further about what makes veterans a distinctive student group within the student population on higher education campuses. Veterans within the higher education student population have experienced a common set of cultural phenomena that differentiate them from the rest of the general student population. Examining their perceptions of how the military experience affects the college experience will help us see “college” through their eyes. Furthermore the relationship between the military and education should be reevaluated from the perspective of the veteran. As Larson (1990) has stated, “Veteran students comprise a distinct group of students in the colleges’ data base but not as a recognizable group in the classroom or on campus” (p. 39). The study of veterans and their perceptions about higher education institutions can be beneficial for the military and higher education. We now live in a world where the military and education are not insular entities, but more reliant upon each other. Both entities are more dynamically integrated than in the past.

Limitation and Study Organization

There was one limitation to this study. The data gathered was only as reliable as the information collected from the 26 interviews that were conducted. Qualitative research yields a composition of perspectives that may involve some degree of subjectivity, reflecting the biases of the interviewer as well as by the biases of the study subjects. Efforts to assure the trustworthiness of the study are discussed in the third chapter.

Chapter One introduced the study and detailed the research problem, conceptual framework, significance of the study, and study limitation. Chapter Two provides a review of research on veterans, including studies of education benefits, veteran earnings, veteran academic performance/educational attainment, and veterans as students. Chapter Three details the methodology for the study. Chapter Four discusses the interview findings. Chapter Five analyzes and discusses the results and concludes with recommendations and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The 1944 Serviceman's Readjustment Act, otherwise known as the G.I. Bill, was the convergence point between the veteran and higher education. Research literature on the 1944 G.I. Bill initially examined the veterans, their benefits, and their presence on higher education campuses. As research progressed, it branched out and further examined the veteran in such areas as degree attainment, performance of veterans in comparison to nonveterans in college, and earnings. Research also shifted towards the transition of the military from the draft to an all-volunteer force (AVF). After the transition to an AVF, research expanded its focus on the veteran to include veteran issues, veteran services and veteran experiences.

General Research Themes on Veterans During the World War II, Korea, Vietnam and Post-Vietnam Eras

History of the 1944 G.I. Bill

History is a continuum, subject to research, reevaluation, and revision. This applied to the history of scholarship on the original 1944 G.I. Bill. Bennett (1996), Mosch (1975), and Olson (1974) conducted research on the original 1944 G.I. Bill. The 1944 G.I. Bill was mostly associated with generous education benefits; however, other benefits were also offered to returning World War II veterans including unemployment benefits, home loans, and health care. As a result of the original 1944 G.I. Bill, and subsequent G.I. Bills, veterans continue to receive these benefits to this day.

The G.I. Bill and its successors helped shape American society, both economically and socially. According to Bennett, “The GI Bill was America’s first color-blind social legislation” (p. 26) and it had “a profound impact on social culture, tearing down assumptions of ethnic, religious, and racial superiority that were, if possible, even more deeply embedded in the minds of academics than ordinary citizens” (Bennett, 1996, p, 249).

Keith Olson (1974) conducted a case study at the University of Wisconsin focusing on the education benefits of the G.I. Bill, the veteran beneficiaries, and the higher education institutions veterans attended. He found that veterans “overshadowed their nonveteran classmates, dominated American campuses, and surprised prognosticators” (p. 43); that veterans “helped generate a steady flow of writing about veterans and their educational experience” (p. 48); that “educators consistently and emphatically agreed ‘veterans’ were singularly mature” (p. 49); that “the adjustment of veterans remained for several years a subject of serious concern and continuing interest” (p. 49); that “veterans accepted the university’s make-shift housing with rare complaint” (p. 93); that administrators worked to accommodate veterans arriving on campus already married, thus marking “an official acceptance of and an encouragement to married students” (p. 102); and, finally, that although the veterans recognized the inability of colleges to accommodate the overwhelming veteran response to the G.I. Bill, their prior military experience helped them “tolerate bigness, standing in lines, and improvisation” (Olson, 1974, p. 104).

Theodore Mosch (1975) analyzed the original G.I. Bill, subsequent Korean and Vietnam G.I. Bills, state veteran benefits, and veteran benefit programs administered

throughout the world. He noted that the 1944 G.I. Bill represented a new philosophy in which the traditional bonus was replaced with education benefits, and he argued that the bill reflected the values of the New Deal, emphasized “equal opportunity as part of democratic tradition” (p. 126), and ultimately led the “national government to implement similar programs for civilians” (Mosch, 1975, p. 128).

Two other dissertations provided additional G.I. Bill research. The study by O’Donnell (2002) was very similar to Bennett’s (1996) in that both studies showed how the 1944 G.I. Bill reshaped American society and created a new middle class in America. Michael Dooher (1980) analyzed the history of the Massachusetts college system between the years of 1944 and 1949, the primary years of the mass influx of World War II veterans on American higher education campuses. These studies focused on the original 1944 G.I. Bill and its impact on veterans and higher education institutions.

Among other findings, O’Donnell observed that the G.I. Bill “marked the popularization of higher education in the United States,” whereas, prior to World War II, “only people of privilege pursued” (O’Donnell, 2002, p. 50). O’Donnell also noted that this was the first time the federal government contributed to higher education since the land grants of the 1800’s, and that the G.I. Bill greatly reduced the threat of insolvency faced by smaller colleges and universities because of the Great Depression (O’Donnell, 2002). Key findings from Dooher’s study include insights into how the G.I. Bill changed educational policies that were in place prior to World War II, led to the implementation of veteran counseling services, and changed admission policies (Dooher, 1980).

The original 1944 G.I. Bill served as a template for subsequent G.I. Bill legislation. These subsequent G.I. Bills have kept the original precepts of the original

1944 G.I. Bill in effect to the present day.

Veterans Versus Nonveterans in College

After World War II, studies surfaced examining veterans who were pursuing higher education. Research comparing and contrasting veterans and nonveterans as college students appeared in the early 1950's. Published in 1951, and probably the most comprehensive study of veterans and nonveterans during this time period, was *Adjustment to College: A Study of 10,000 Veteran and Nonveteran Students in Sixteen American Colleges* authored by Norman Frederiksen and W. B. Schrader. These authors believed their findings would be beneficial for higher education college officials because their study analyzed predictors of academic success (such as motivation, attitudes, and background characteristics) that were applicable to all college students (Frederiksen & Schrader, 1951).

One of the primary research questions was “how did veterans and nonveterans differ with respect to academic success?” (Frederiksen & Schrader, 1951, p. 2). They found that “there *is* [emphasis added] a tendency for veterans to achieve higher grades in relation to ability than do nonveteran students” (p. 6); that with regard to achievement in college, “veteran students were superior to nonveterans of equal ability” (p. 6); and that “veteran status is associated with better-than-average academic performance” (Frederiksen & Schrader, 1951, p. 13). They concluded that, “On the whole, these results indicate that the students whose college careers were made possible by the educational provisions of the GI Bill performed slightly better, relative to ability, than the veterans who would or probably would have attended college in any case” (Frederiksen & Schrader, 1951, p. 312). They also concluded that “a substantial pool of effective

academic talent could be tapped by lowering economic barriers to higher education” (Frederiksen & Schrader, 1951, p. 327). In other words, the authors contended costs associated with attending a higher education institution, rather than the academic challenges of succeeding in college, were a major reason for one not to attend college.

Even though there were some noticeable differences between veterans and nonveterans, the researchers also pointed to similarities. The authors’ survey “revealed that the similarities far outweigh the differences” (Frederiksen & Schrader, 1951, p. 27). Examples of these similarities included “amount of anxiety and things worried about” (p. 23) and “similar attitudes toward their college and its program” (Frederiksen & Schrader, 1951, p. 352). The findings of Frederiksen and Schrader (1951) could be of value and interest to higher education administrators and college officials in “predicting academic success in college” for all students, not just veterans (p. vii).

Chapman (1983) conducted a similar study. The purpose of his study was twofold. The first purpose was to develop a veteran student profile in higher education, and second, to examine the theory that veteran students do just as well academically compared to nonveterans (Chapman, 1983). Several findings emerged from the study: Despite not performing as well in high school, veterans performed better than nonveterans academically; veterans received grades comparable to nonveterans; veterans changed their majors less often than nonveterans and when they did, one primary reason was “attributed to job-related issues” (p. 75); and, fewer veterans pursued education beyond a bachelor’s degree as compared to nonveterans (Chapman, 1983).

The study findings by Frederickson and Schrader, as well as by Chapman have implications that are far-reaching and of interest to higher education professionals,

policymakers, and educational leaders. These findings are not only applicable to veteran student populations, but, as stated previously by Frederiksen and Schrader, they are also applicable to all student populations attending higher education institutions (Frederiksen & Schrader, 1951). For example, grades and academic achievement had always been popular topics for research, yet subsequent follow-up research may not have been conducted as to why or how veterans' grades and academic achievement differed from other student populations.

Veterans and Earnings

Was military service detrimental to the socioeconomic status of the veteran in contrast to the nonveteran who had no military service? What about other veterans of different races compared to their civilian counterparts of the same race? What about subsequent G.I. Bills and their impact on the earnings of veterans? A significant body of research has focused on these questions with sometimes conflicting conclusions.

Veterans' status, earnings and race. Three studies conducted in the 1970's examined veterans' earning by race. Browning, Lopreato, and Poston (1973), Cutright (1974), and Little and Fredland (1979) all conducted their research during the draft era. Little and Fredland conducted their research in a longitudinal fashion and published their findings well into the years of the all-volunteer force with conclusions that differed from those drawn by Browning et al. (1973) and Cutright (1974). Browning et al. concluded that the income of White veterans lagged behind their nonveteran counterparts and that Black and Hispanic veterans showed some economic advantages over their respective nonveteran counterparts (Browning et al., 1973).

Cutright (1974) critiqued the study by Browning et al. arguing that it "failed to

provide national estimates” (p. 319). Cutright also questioned the methodologies of Browning, Lopreato, and Poston. He studied White and Black draftees, and concluded that military service had a negative consequence for White draftees in contrast to Whites who hadn’t served in the military and “that little evidence of a positive effect of service can be found among blacks” (Cutright, 1974, p. 326).

Little and Fredland (1979) researched veterans approximately 20 years after having completed military service during World War II. They concluded that earnings for all three groups (Whites, non-Whites, and Blacks) benefited from military service: White veterans had earnings 5% to 10% higher than White nonveterans; Blacks and non-Whites earned between 13% to 15% more than their nonveteran counterparts (Little & Fredland, 1979).

When race was taken into account, research results were somewhat contradictory. While Browning, Lopreato, and Poston (1973), as well as Cutright (1974), concluded that White veterans did not benefit economically from military service compared to their nonveteran counterparts, Little and Fredland (1979) concluded there was a noticeable economic benefit of military service. For the Blacks and Hispanics, Browning et al. (1973) concluded that there were advantages. Cutright’s conclusions could be construed as negligible for Blacks because some results were “small and irregular” (Cutright, 1974, p. 326). Little and Fredland concluded, on the other hand, that there were noticeable benefits of military service for all the groups (Little & Fredland, 1979).

These studies researched veterans from both economic and sociological perspectives. The studies were economic because they examined earnings, and they were sociological because earnings were also perceived to be associated to one’s social status.

As Little and Fredland (1979) noted,

Research by economists has focused primarily on the so-called ‘implicit tax’ on draftees during and immediately following their tour of duty. Research by sociologists, frequently using a long term perspective, has addressed the socioeconomic impact of military service as measured by income and various status scales (p. 245).

Earnings of World War II veterans. Angrist and Krueger (1994) focused primarily on researching the civilian labor market earnings of World War II veterans. They stated that previous research had shown that World War II veterans earned more than nonveterans when analyzed on the basis of a cross-sectional comparison (Angrist & Krueger, 1994). Angrist and Krueger reexamined World War II era veterans using census data from 1960, 1970 and 1980, a strategy that controlled for nonrandom selection (Angrist & Krueger, 1994). They concluded that World War II veterans did not earn more than nonveterans and possibly earned less than nonveterans (Angrist & Krueger, 1994). They did not address why World War II veterans’ earnings were about equal to or less than the earnings of nonveterans; however, they attributed the commonly held assertion that World War II veterans earned more than nonveterans “entirely to nonrandom selection into the military” (Angrist & Krueger, 1994, p. 76). Thus, the employment of different methodologies in researching the same population yielded different results.

Earnings of Vietnam-era veterans. During the Vietnam era, veterans fared poorly in terms of earnings. Researchers on this topic reached similar conclusions, noting that Vietnam era veterans’ earnings were noticeably less than nonveteran earnings

of the same era. Berger and Hirsch (1983) concluded that veterans “fared relatively poorly in the labor market” due to conditions of a deteriorating labor market (p. 476). Comparable conclusions were reached by Joshua Angrist (1990) who used Social Security records as opposed to a cohort study approach. Like his study of World War II veterans, he focused on the long-term consequences of military service in the Vietnam era (Angrist, 1990). He concluded that White veterans “earned substantially less than nonveterans” by as much as 15%; however, he found that differences between veteran and nonveteran earnings among non-Whites were “not statistically significant.” (Angrist, 1990, p. 330). Angrist offered an explanation to his findings concerning White veterans: “They earn less because their military experience is only a partial substitute for the civilian labor market experience lost while in the armed forces” (Angrist, 1990, p. 331).

Education was an important variable in the relationship between military service and earnings. Cohen, Segal, and Temme (1986b) found that there was an educational attainment advantage to World War II and Korean War-era veterans and an educational attainment disadvantage among the Vietnam-era veterans when compared to nonveterans of the same era. The researchers attributed this disadvantage mostly to “the development of civilian educational opportunities not associated with military service” (Cohen, Segal and Temme, 1986b, p. 206).

G.I. Bill benefit levels were beginning to fall behind the actual cost of education during the Vietnam era. Each successive G.I. Bill reduced benefits in both duration and level of monthly payments. Mattila (1978) compared the benefit levels of three G.I. Bills: those for World War II, the Korean War, and the post-Korean era (Vietnam). He concluded that the Vietnam veterans did not fare as well as World War II veterans

because enrollment levels of veterans in education and training programs were responsive to benefit allowances (Mattila, 1978). Jay Teachman (2005) drew similar conclusions when he concluded that Vietnam-era veterans did not attain as much education as nonveterans partially due to draft status, length of service, and age at entry. Teachman also concluded that benefit levels for Vietnam-era veterans were not “a substantial benefit of service” as compared to the benefits enjoyed by World War II veterans (Teachman, 2005, p. 66). Teachman (2005) also confirmed Cohen, Segal, and Temme’s (1986b) previous findings:

Rapidly expanding educational opportunities for civilians meant that education and military service became competing (and for the most part, mutually exclusive) activities, placing veterans at a disadvantage. In addition, veterans no longer enjoyed a GI Bill that made access to higher education a substantial benefit of service (p. 66).

Cohen, Segal, and Temme (1992) reached a similar conclusion when explaining why Vietnam veterans fared worse than nonveterans in regards to occupational attainment. Cohen et al. tested several hypotheses, some of which included attempting to find a correlation between the lower levels of Vietnam-era veterans’ occupational attainment and (a) time spent performing military service and (b) employment discrimination (Cohen et al., 1992). Cohen et al. attributed the lower levels of education attainment among Vietnam-era veterans “to the insufficiencies of government educational benefit policies” (Cohen et al., 1992, p. 408). In other words, and in general terms, these authors noted that benefit levels diminished with the passage of each successive G.I. Bill. Cohany (1992) took the research of Cohen et al. one step further and

drew similar conclusions. Cohany (1992) subdivided Vietnam-era veterans between those who served in war zones and those who did not serve in war zones. This study concluded that “veterans outearned nonveterans at lower levels of education” while no difference existed between veterans and nonveterans at higher levels of education (Cohany, 1992, p. 13). In addition, those who did not serve in a war zone earned “significantly more” than those veterans who had served in a war zone “in almost every education and occupation category” (Cohany, 1992, p. 13).

Goldberg and Warner (1986) also focused on veterans serving during the Vietnam era and discovered that military experience was beneficial to earnings. However, this was limited in scope. Earnings were beneficial to those in a limited number of military occupations, and some earnings of military occupations were equal to the civilian counterpart whose military careers were short (Goldberg & Warner, 1986). Nine of these transferable military occupations increased earnings; four provided added benefits to the civilian earnings experience; and the remaining five helped increase earnings, but not at the rate of the civilian experience (Goldberg & Warner, 1986).

Earnings of post-Vietnam era veterans. Bryant, Samaranayake, and Wilhite (1993) studied the post-Vietnam era and reached conclusions that were similar to the conclusions of previous studies of military service and earnings. Bryant et al. (1993) examined enlistees early in the all-volunteer military era and concluded the results had not changed even during the all-volunteer military era. The wage premium was negative, and veterans had lower earnings than nonveterans (Bryant, Samaranayake & Wilhite, 1993). The population studied by Bryant et al. (1993) was limited to young people with short work histories. According to the results of Bryant et al., as well as the results from

earlier studies conducted by Berger and Hirsch (1983), Magnum and Ball (1987), and Martindale and Poston (1979), wage premiums among veterans had fallen over time. (Bryant et al., 1993).

From these studies, a pattern became evident during the draft era and at the beginning of the all-volunteer era that showed military service negatively affected civilian earnings once someone left military service and entered the civilian workforce. Over time veterans who chose to pursue a higher education could eventually achieve the same earnings as the civilian counterpart, but at the cost of their military service. At the same time, the costs to the beneficiary to attend a higher education institution were transitioning from the benefit entitlement, which once covered the cost of attendance, to the veteran having to cover the shortfall in the cost of attendance. Increasingly, the shortfalls in cost of attendance were becoming the veteran's responsibility during this era.

G.I. Bill Comparisons: Earnings and Education Between World War II, Korea, Vietnam and the Present

Martindale and Poston (1979) studied cohorts from World War II, Korea and Vietnam. White veterans in the World War II and Korean cohorts had an earnings advantage over nonveterans, but for the Vietnam-era cohort, the situation had reversed; White veteran earnings were at a disadvantage to nonveterans (Martindale & Poston, 1979). Black veterans showed an earnings advantage over Black nonveterans in all three cohorts (Martindale & Poston, 1979). Hispanics had an earnings advantage over Hispanic nonveterans within the World War II and Korean War cohorts but had an earnings disadvantage within Vietnam-era cohort (Martindale & Poston, 1979).

Villemez and Kasarda (1976) studied World War II, Korean, and Vietnam-era veterans and reached similar conclusions. World War II and Korean-era veterans

prospered more than their nonveteran counterparts for both Whites and non-Whites, while veterans were at a disadvantage compared to nonveterans during the Vietnam era (Villemez & Kasarda, 1976).

Saul Schwartz (1986) concluded that the earnings of Korean War veterans were similar to the earnings of nonveterans, whereas Vietnam-era veterans were at an earnings disadvantage with nonveterans (Schwartz, 1986). The methodology used in the study involved two cross-sectional data sources covering 1968 for the Korean War veterans and 1980 for Vietnam-era veterans—12 to 16 years after each conflict’s respective peak induction period (Schwartz, 1986). The study found that Korean-era veterans had a higher rate of return on their higher education versus nonveterans, while for Vietnam-era veterans the return rate on higher education was lower than the return rate for nonveterans (Schwartz, 1986).

Angrist (1993) also studied both Vietnam-era veterans and veterans during the early years of the all-volunteer forces (AVF). His research focused on the transition period between the draft and AVF and included veterans covered by both the post-Korean (Vietnam era) G.I. Bill and the Post-Vietnam Veterans’ Educational Assistance Program (VEAP) (Angrist, 1993). The post-Korean G.I. Bill was noncontributory, while the VEAP was a contributory G.I. Bill and he concluded that the transition from a noncontributory to a contributory education benefit resulted in “a decline in the quantity and quality of recruits” (Angrist, 1993, p. 638). However, for those who decided to use education benefits, the use of veteran benefits resulted in an annual earnings raise of 6% (Angrist, 1993).

Angrist (1998) validated his previous research by designing a study that avoided

selectivity bias by using Social Security records instead of a cohort. He concluded that initially White veterans were at an earnings disadvantage early in the AVF, while non-White veterans enjoyed an earnings and “small employment” advantage over nonveterans (Angrist , 1998, p. 282). By 1988-1991, the earnings of the veterans who got out of the military and entered into civilian employment began to converge with nonveteran earnings because the AVF veterans were impervious to the negative effects of the recession in the early to mid 1980’s (Angrist, 1998).

Teachman and Call (1996) studied military veterans who served from the late 1960’s to the early 1980’s. The AVF cohort did not sustain any negative consequences associated with military service, while the Vietnam-era cohort did sustain some negative consequences as a result of military service; the negative consequences were “less education, lower status jobs and make less money than non-veterans” (Teachman & Call, 1996, p. 26). The authors attributed the veterans’ lower attainment to the military environment from which within they operated (Teachman & Call, 1996). The findings on the Vietnam-era veterans in the Teachman and Call study confirmed the Martindale and Poston (1979) findings regarding Vietnam-era veterans.

The studies regarding earnings and education benefits across several successive G.I. Bills elicited some discernible observations. First, the earnings data suggested that military service affected one’s potential future earnings. Second, education attainment provided an opportunity for the veteran to earn as much, or possibly more, than the nonveteran counterpart. Third, the level of education benefits was reduced with the passage of each successive G.I. Bill. Fourth, military service, in general terms, was beneficial for Blacks and Hispanics when compared to their nonveteran counterparts;

however, Whites were disadvantaged more often than not when compared to their nonveteran counterparts. Fifth, the compilation of studies by Berger and Hirsch (1983), Bryant et al. (1993), Magnum and Ball (1987), and Martindale and Poston (1979) painted the picture that veteran earnings, while not in precipitous decline, did decline from World War II up to the AVF. Finally, Cohen, Segal, and Temme (1992) showed the relationship between occupational attainment, educational attainment, and the reduction in veteran educational benefits. Without the education benefits earned through military service, the education attainment leading to the earnings would not be probable. The relationships among military service, education benefits, education attainment, and earnings (through occupational attainment) were evident.

Veteran Transition from Draftee to Volunteer

The transition from mandatory military service to voluntary military service brought with it dramatic change. The era in which members had an obligation to serve in the military gave way to an era in which the military had to entice a member to want to be in the military. Hence the term, all-volunteer force (AVF).

With the advent of the AVF, recruitment became a critical component of the military organization. Continual replenishment of a voluntary system was critical when military enlistments were restricted to 30 years and military retirement pensions could start as soon as one completed 20 years of active military service. The military was and is probably the only organization where one can start drawing a pension as early as 38 years of age. Recruitment was contingent upon offering something that benefited both the military and the military recruit: an outcome in which both parties benefited. This was done through tangible, generous benefits, such as education benefits, and non-

tangible benefits, such as experience and skills that the military provides at no cost to the military member. In addition to skills and training, military personnel are provided the opportunity to apply newly-acquired skills into experience. This experience could be beneficial because some civilian-sector employers prefer job candidates who have prior experience in certain occupations. The prospect of training and experience was a recruiting tool that promised recruits some opportunity once they left the military if the recruit decided not to reenlist after the expiration of their enlistment. If recruits tried the military and did not like it, they were not wasting time because, in the meantime, they could decide what they would like to do with their future once they left the military, all while still in the military.

Moskos (1977) hypothesized that the military structure would change from an institutional model to an occupational model after the draft was replaced by the AVF. The military in the institutional model put the goals of the organization ahead of member self-interest; and in the occupational model, member self-interest took priority over the goals of the organization, which, in essence, became part of a marketplace (Moskos, 1977). One example of the military structure moving towards the occupational model was unionization within the military structure, which allowed civilian contractors to take over some duties formerly carried out by the military (Moskos, 1977).

Magnum and Ball (1987) asserted that a key component to an individual's decision to join the military were the skills that could be acquired while in the military and then utilized in civilian employment. The authors concluded that skill transferability from military to civilian occupations depended on gender and type of military occupation: Males were more likely to transfer skills in "service, craft, and equipment-

repair occupations”; females were more likely to transfer skills in “administrative/functional support” occupations (Magnum & Ball, 1987, p. 438).

Veteran’s Military Experience and Impact on College Experiences

Sociological Implications of Education Attainment

Bound and Turner (2002) concluded that the original “G.I. Bill dramatically reduced the cost of attending college” and had a noticeable effect on the level of educational attainment for veterans (p. 809). They also concluded that the overall effect of G.I. Bill availability was “appreciably larger than contemporary estimates of the effect of the Pell program on student enrollment” and that one of the more lasting impacts of the original 1944 G.I. Bill on higher education institutions could be seen in the enrollment of students “from a wider range of ethnic, religious and geographic backgrounds” (Bound & Turner, 2002, p. 809).

Marcus Stanley (2003) conducted a study of the educational attainment of those who benefited from the World War II and Korean War G.I. Bills, looking specifically at “the distribution of college attendance among various economic classes” (p. 672). He concluded that the two G.I. Bills increased the years of post-secondary educational attainment among “men born between 1921 and 1933 by about 15 percent to 20 percent” (Stanley, 2003, p. 701). Higher education became “more accessible for the children of the middle and upper middle class, but apparently had little effect among those of the working class” (Stanley, 2003, p. 704).

Sampson and Laub (1996) studied the socioeconomic achievement of World War II veterans who entered the military as disadvantaged youths. They concluded that: “Military service in the World War II era provided American men from economically

disadvantaged backgrounds with an unprecedented opportunity to better their lives through on-the-job training and further education” (Sampson & Laub, 1996, p. 364). Cohen, Segal, and Temme (1986a) determined that educational attainment in the 1960’s was correlated to rank and length in military service and not based upon the distinction of whether the military member was from the officer or enlisted ranks as originally hypothesized (Cohen et al., 1986a). Cohen et al. concluded that overall military service in the 1960’s was negatively associated with educational attainment, even though “the effects of G.I. Bill benefits on education were more positive than ever” (Cohen et al., 1986a, p. 317). Another intriguing finding was that G.I. Bill benefits prior to the 1960s were seen as an incentive for youth in the military; however, military service was perceived as interfering with and disrupting their education (Cohen et al., 1986a).

Yu Xie (1992) showed that military service was positive for veterans. Xie studied veterans between the ages of 18 to 35 and drew data from the 1964-84 March Current Population Surveys (Xie, 1992). Veterans earned slightly more than nonveterans, but the “veteran premium” came later in life (Xie, 1992, p. 394). Veterans lost time for their education because of their time in military service, but veterans attained more education than nonveterans due in part to compensation from government policies or veteran motivation (Xie, 1992).

Literature on veteran educational attainment reveals more of a consensus on the somewhat positive impact of military service when compared to studies researching veterans’ earnings. Bound and Turner (2002) showed the lasting impact of opening up opportunities for populations that had not traditionally attended college campuses prior to the first G.I. Bill in 1944. Stanley (2003) showed the positive effects of GI benefits on

the educational attainment of World War II and Korean War veterans, and, subsequently, on the access future generations had to higher education, whether or not they were veterans (Stanley, 2003). Sampson and Laub (1996) identified both on-the-job training and educational opportunities for disadvantaged youth who performed military service. An intriguing finding by Cohen, Segal, and Temme (1986a) was that, despite the negative effects of military service in the 1960's, military service was seen as an interruption of one's own college education. In general terms, these studies arrived at the consensus that the Vietnam/1960's era was a period in which veterans did not fare as well as previous veterans had during the World War II and Korean eras. Xie concluded that the benefit of military service would eventually be realized later in a veteran's life despite a disruption in one's life (Xie, 1992).

Higher Education and Social Impact

The influx of veterans onto college campuses happened shortly after the conclusion of World War II. The impact of veteran enrollment on higher education culture was dramatic in the years immediately after World War II, but veteran enrollment has waned since.

One noteworthy change to higher education institutions had to do with access. Access was no longer open just to the socially elite. Clark (1998) asserted that the 1944 G.I. Bill was a precedent for increased access and "influenced changes in American cultural perceptions of college education" (p. 189). The veteran presence on college campuses helped "democratize the image of higher education" and by integrating consumer values into elite representations (Clark, 1998, p. 180).

One often overshadowed issue regarding the 1944 G.I. Bill was its negative

impact on women. According to Clark (1998), this negative impact manifested itself in three ways. One, according to Solomon (as cited in Clark, 1998), the number of women allowed into higher education institutions was limited in order to accommodate the increasing numbers of veterans. Two, women's academic experiences were valued less than their "socializing experiences" (Clark, 1998, p. 186). Third, the postwar cultural changes implied that the virtues of domestic life were more important for women than education (Clark, 1998).

Mettler (2005) also researched the G.I. Bill's marginalization of women. The G.I. Bill was designed and implemented by policymakers who had "the men in mind" (p. 150); but even though many women used the G.I. Bill, they did not experience affirmation and inclusion that was greatly experienced by the males (Mettler, 2005). "Women of the 'greatest generation' did not experience incorporation as citizens through the G.I. Bill, and they were deprived of its mobilizing effects for civic and political involvement"; thus, they lost out on the transformative power the G.I. Bill had for men (Mettler, 2005, p. 158). According to Clark (1998) and Mettler (2005), whatever impact the G.I. Bill had for men was not experienced to the same degree by women.

Not all of the veterans' impact on higher education was positive. Things started turning in a different direction during the 1960's. James Stever (1996-1997) contended that even 20 years after the Vietnam War, higher education institutions covertly and overtly held a grudge towards veterans in the form of tenure and employment decisions, treatment of veteran students, and recognition of veteran interests (Stever, 1996-1997).

Veteran Socialization and Perceptions

The literature is somewhat limited when it comes to veterans and their perceptions of higher education institutions. Gauntner (1981) studied veterans' perceptions of student personnel services by comparing perceptions of Veteran Affairs Coordinators who were veterans and Veteran Affairs Coordinators who were nonveterans. Gauntner concluded that "Veterans Affairs Coordinators who were veterans tended to perceive more of the needs of veterans as most pressing" (Gauntner, 1981, p. 235). On the other hand, Veterans Affairs Coordinators who were not veterans viewed veteran "needs as average pressing needs" (Gauntner, 1981, p. 235). Veterans Affairs Coordinators who were veterans perceived that a larger number of student services were "average in effectiveness"; however, "Veterans Affairs Coordinators who were nonveterans perceived a greater number of student services to be most effective than coordinators who were veterans" (Gauntner, 1981, p. 235). Gauntner concluded that because more Veterans Affairs Coordinators were veterans than nonveterans, college administrators recognized that Veterans Affairs Coordinators who were veterans themselves were "more effective in dealing with problems of other veterans" (Gauntner, 1981, p. 237).

The literature reveals that a unique form of socialization occurs as a result of military service. Frederiksen and Schrader commented that veterans "are less concerned about feelings of inferiority and about social adjustment" than nonveterans (Frederiksen & Schrader, 1951, p. 27). Larson (1990) conducted his research with veterans on a number of higher education campuses located within the state of Idaho. His study was probably the first to examine and compare veterans and nonveterans in terms of educational experiences, involvement, and perceptions (Larson, 1990). He claimed that

veteran students were a distinct group, “but not as a recognizable group in the classroom or on campus” (Larson, 1990, p. 39). Larson concluded that some experiences of veterans were similar to the experiences of students in the general population, although veterans were not as reliant on “interpersonal relationships with other students” and were “unusually individualistic” (Larson, 1990, p. 139).

Barnhart (2011), Capps (2011), and McNealy (2004) classified veterans as nontraditional students. Atwell (1999) classified veterans as “‘nontraditional’ at-risk students” (pp. 28-29). Persky (2010) classified “veterans as a unique group of students” (p.32), as did DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell (2008), who classified them as “a unique population” (p. 74).

McNealy (2004) stated that “veterans experience unique socialization influences and educational benefits” (p. 142). She contended that literature on college-process decisions came primarily from “family, peers, and school systems” and that these decisions were more complex for veterans because the organizational structure of the military sent conflicting messages regarding the importance or unimportance of higher education (McNealy, 2004, p. 51). Veterans’ limited education aspirations, combined with negative educational socialization, clearly indicated that “veterans have special needs” when entering higher education (McNealy, 2004, p. 152). This implied that military service may have a negative consequence when it comes to socialization within the higher education experience. McNealy (2004) suggested that higher education institutions must understand that veterans have different needs and that, as a consequence, colleges must offer support services to ensure their educational success.

The socialization of veterans into college and university life is unique. Veterans

as a group bring common socialization attributes into their higher education experience from their military experience. Studies mention some attributes that are common to the veteran's military experience. For example, Larson (1990) mentioned individualism, and LaBarre (1985) (as cited in Larson, 1990) mentioned heightened levels of self-esteem and a strong desire to succeed (Larson, 1990). Other attributes included leadership, confidence and discipline (MacLean, 2004).

Some of the literature concluded that higher education had not readily addressed concerns raised through these studies. Researchers have also recommended steps that can be taken to address this oversight. For example, Larson (1990) suggested that higher education administrators should find ways to increase veteran involvement in campus life and extracurricular activities. McNealy (2004) suggested that higher education institutions make available more services and support systems for veterans because of their lack of educational socialization.

Veterans and College Experiences

Veterans have experiences from their military service that are unique to them and that set them apart from other higher education student populations. Military experiences impact perceptions. Differences between veterans and other student populations were noted after veterans arrived in large numbers on higher education institutions at the end of World War II. Veterans were impatient with many aspects of college life, including "useless prerequisites or required subjects" and "the slower pace of the University" which was quite different from the "intensified Army training" they had experienced (Howard, 1945, p. 15). Veterans were critical of the college-level teaching as they believed it was not up to their expectations; "they wasted the student's time and effort by requiring too

many courses that had no direct bearing on his major studies” (Justice, 1946, p. 187).

Recent studies continue to take note that the military experience of veterans sets them apart from other student populations. Researchers have discovered, or rediscovered, these unique veteran experiences. As Barnhart (2011) stated, “There are distinct differences between the life experiences of veterans and nonveterans, and these experiences play out on college campuses” (p.10). Capps (2011) stated this in other terms:

Therefore, it could be difficult for veterans to deal with traditional students, as they often viewed situations from a completely different perspective. A traditional college student might find it difficult to deal with a girlfriend or boyfriend breaking up with them, their hair dryer not working before coming to school, the electricity being off while they were trying to get ready for school, or being under a boil water order. These issues might seem insignificant to veterans who previously dealt with being thousands of miles away from their loved ones and in locations where no electricity or a good water supply were available. (p. 25)

Carne (2011) asserted:

All students who enter colleges and universities learn or adapt and are enculturated, acculturated, and socialized into any culture, in this case a university culture, by sharing knowledge in meaningful and acceptable ways to guide their behaviors and to avoid misunderstandings. . . . They carry with them into college and university culture previous experiences that affect how they interact, adapt, and integrate. This process includes

how they deal with emotions and view the world. Returning service members carry with them experiences that are likely unrecognizable to most of their community peers, family members, and friends, let alone their student peers. (p. 28)

Livingston (2009) researched veterans with the purpose “of better understanding the student veteran experience and discovering new avenues of support for this population” (p. ii.). One of Livingston’s study recommendations was that a “more specific study might focus on the effect military influence has on student veterans’ college experience” (Livingston, 2009, p. 190). Lolatte’s (2010) research is similar to Livingston’s in that his purpose for the “study was to develop an understanding of the experiences that veterans have transitioning from military service to a land grant four year institution of higher education” (p. 8). Rumann’s (2010) research also focused on the transition experiences of veterans, looking specifically at those who re-enrolled in a community college after returning from military deployments. He determined, among other findings, that “Participants also had to manage the transition of returning to college, and many of the experiences described in their transitions back to the civilian world also affected their college experiences—specifically, simply attending college” (Rumann, 2010, p. 94).

Conclusion

The extensive research on veterans reinforces the fact that the military experiences of veterans on campus must be understood if we are to understand how they perceive and experience college life. Accordingly, this study seeks to understand—from the perspective of veterans themselves—how the military experience shapes the college

experience. The following chapters detail the study methodology, summarize findings, and note implications for practice and further research.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research studies have noted the experiences of veterans. Mettler (2005) and DiRamio et al., (2008) observed that military experiences have a profound impact on veterans. Other studies have specifically noted the experiences of veterans on college campuses. McNealy (2004) observed that veterans experience different socialization influences than other college students. Larson (1990) noted veterans were a “distinct group of students in the colleges’ data base but not as a recognizable group in the classroom or on campus” (p. 39); were not reliant on “interpersonal relationships with other students”; and were “unusually individualistic” (p. 139). Recent research by Barnhart (2011), Capps (2011), Carne (2011), Livingston (2009), Lolatte (2010), Persky (2010), and Rumann (2010) have also examined veteran experiences on college campuses.

Thus, there is some understanding about veteran experiences on campus. This study adds to this body of scholarship by examining how veterans perceived that their military experiences affected their experiences as college students. This study focused on the following research question: How do veterans perceive that their military experience affects their higher education experience?

Qualitative methods were used to answer this question. Qualitative inquiry leads to explanations of behavior and attitudes (Creswell, 2003) and “is concerned with understanding the point of view of the subjects” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 261). This

study was exploratory, but the study findings have the potential to increase our understanding of contemporary veterans as they proceeded through their educational programs. The findings could be used to evaluate institutional policies and procedures and consider implementation of programs and services for the veteran population.

Study data were collected through interviews. Interviews are conversations that serve as “a pipeline for transmitting knowledge” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997, p. 113). Interviews may appear straightforward; however, the challenge lies in understanding interviewee perceptions. In the book, *Particularities: Collected Essays on Ethnography and Education*, George Noblit (1999) described this challenge by using the example of a *picture*, the *participants*, the *artist*, and the *observers*. In Noblit’s example, interpretation and perspective differ among the artist who paints the picture on the canvas, the participants who pose for the picture being painted, and the interpretation of the observers who view the picture after it was completed (Noblit, 1999). In the case of this research study, the researcher was the artist, the picture was the research study, the participants were the veterans, and the observers included those who read the research study. In essence, the findings of the qualitative research in this study offer potentially valuable insights into the perspectives of veterans. But interpretations of these findings are of course subject to the varying perspectives of different stake holders.

Study Design

Data collection for this study came from interviews with veterans attending six higher education institutions in Illinois: three public universities, two community colleges, and one private four-year college. Participants were selected from e-mail rosters provided by each institution that identified students who were military veterans.

Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed.

This sort of phenomenological research focuses on understanding “the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 23). Veterans are a unique group who carry with them experiences that other veterans will easily relate to. To those who have not served in the military, these experiences may seem peculiar and difficult to interpret. Extended and multiple deployments by the military have brought increased attention to this phenomenon. Leaders have expressed concerns about the “disconnect” between the military and the general population (Ewing, 2011, para. 5). The interviews conducted in this study provided explanations from the perspective of veterans themselves as to how their military experience affected their college experience.

Study Sites and Participants

Participants were drawn from the veteran student populations of three public universities, two community colleges, and one private four-year college. The study sites were selected on the basis of two criteria. One criterion was to select both public and private institutions with veteran student representation. The second criterion was related to geographic location: all of the institutions were strategically located in different regions of the state so as to allow for an equal opportunity from which to draw participant population.

Participants in this study were military veterans who (a) were using higher education benefits resulting from military service in any branch (Army, Air Force, Marines, Navy, Coast Guard, National Guard, or Air National Guard) or capacity (active, reserve, or a combination of both), and (b) served at least one year on active duty or

experienced at least one overseas deployment within the last ten years. Benefits were defined as federal or state education entitlements received as a result of military service. Federal veteran education benefits included Post-9/11 G.I. Bill (Chapter 33); Montgomery G.I. Bill – Active Duty Educational Assistance Program (MGIB-AD/Chapter 30); Montgomery G.I. Bill – Selected Reserve (MGIB-SR/Chapter 1606); Post-Vietnam Veterans’ Educational Assistance Program (VEAP/Chapter 32); and Reserve Educational Assistance Program (REAP/Chapter 1607). The state veteran education benefit for the State of Illinois is the Illinois Veterans Grant (IVG). The IVG provides tuition assistance to qualified veterans attending state-supported institutions in Illinois. Not all veterans receiving federal education benefits and attending higher education institutions in Illinois receive the IVG; however, the majority of veterans do. One of the primary qualifications for receiving the IVG is state residency prior to joining and after discharge from military service.

Participant Selection

Twenty-six participants were interviewed. The method for selecting interviewees was through an appropriate point of contact at each institution who was asked to forward an e-mail message to all veterans attending their institution. The appropriate point of contact at each institution was the institution’s Veterans Affairs office or the institution’s official who certified eligibility for military education benefits. A letter was mailed to the institutional point of contact that explained the study, noted the criteria for inclusion in the study, and requested that an e-mail message about the study be forwarded to students who were using veterans’ benefits. Those eligible veterans who were interested in participating in the study responded directly to the researcher. The researcher then

scheduled an interview with the interviewee.

Data Collection and Analysis

Interview Questions and Procedures

Data collection for this study came from 26 face-to-face, phenomenological interviews. The interviews were audio recorded with a digital voice recorder. After the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed. Each participant signed an IRB-approved Informed Consent form prior to the commencement of the interview acknowledging that he or she was aware the interview would be recorded.

The interviews began with closed-ended questions, which provide descriptive background information, and concluded with open-ended questions. Interviewees were asked the following questions:

1. Under which branch did you serve in the military?
2. During what time period (or years) did you perform your military service?
3. Please explain your perceptions of how your military experiences affect your current experience as a college student.
4. How did your military experience help you adapt to and succeed in college?
5. On the other hand, how has your military experience perhaps made your adjustment as a student more difficult?
6. Given your experience, what are the most important things that colleges and universities can do to help veterans succeed in college?

Upon conclusion of the interview, all participants were offered the opportunity to add any additional information. After transcription was completed, interviewees were offered, and, if acknowledged, given a copy of the transcript and invited to add additional information or provide clarification.

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed by the researcher. This effort on the researcher's part further ensured confidentiality, put the participant more at ease, and fostered a more candid environment for interviewing. After transcription, the transcripts were offered to the interviewees for review. If the interviewee accepted the offer to review the transcripts, the transcripts were sent to the interviewee. The interviewees were asked to make changes, additions, clarifications, or amendments they felt were necessary prior to coding.

Coding is a method of sorting and categorizing information. Coding categories first emerge to the researcher during the data collection process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Creswell (2003) suggested using coding to generate a detailed description of the interviewee perspectives. Bogdan & Biklen (2003) observed that developing coding categories in qualitative research was "a crucial step in data analysis" that is best accomplished by developing a system of coding categories into "families of codes" (p. 161). In this study, two coding categories were discovered. The first category identified in this study was military experiences that helped veterans adjust to college. The second category discovered was military experiences that made adjustment to college difficult.

Trustworthiness

Trust was very important to the integrity of the study. Trustworthiness in qualitative research, according to Guba (as cited in Shenton, 2004), addresses four issues: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Criteria that addressed the credibility issue included the researcher's "background, qualifications and experience" as well as efforts to include member checks in the study procedures (Shenton, 2004, p. 68).

In the case of this study, the researcher had a considerable degree of military experience totaling almost 30 years, in addition to over 20 years experience advising and teaching in the community college environment. Member checking was achieved when steps were taken to clarify issues during the interview, allow participants to add additional information if they thought of something at the conclusion of the interview, and provide participants with the opportunity to review interview transcripts.

According to Merriam (as cited in Shenton, 2004), transferability or, to a greater extent external validity, is the application of findings from one study to other situations or populations (Shenton, 2004). Information to be considered for transferability includes the following: “number of organizations taking part in the study,” number of participants, data collection methods, “number and length of the data collection sessions,” and the time period of data collection (Shenton, 2004, p. 70). Transferability in this study was ensured by the incorporation of several study site locations, which were strategically located in different regions of the state, by participant selection procedures that provided all veterans at each institution with an equal opportunity to participate, and by the phenomenological interview approach, which focused on capturing the perspectives of veterans themselves.

Dependability is the ability to replicate the research study using the same methodology and participants (Shenton, 2004). The general exploratory nature of this study, the simplicity of this study, and the detailed description outlining the methodology satisfies the dependability criterion. Transferability and dependability are somewhat related in that they are both key in being able to replicate the study.

The last criterion, confirmability, was addressed by steps taken to assure that

findings accurately reflect interviewee perceptions and experiences, and not those of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). This researcher's veteran status and military experience were readily admitted. According to Miles and Huberman (as cited in Shenton, 2004), the key to confirmability is the researcher admitting his or her own predispositions and taking steps to avoid letting those predispositions cloud his or her understanding of what study participants perceive (Shenton, 2004). As noted above, the researcher conducting this study is a veteran himself with almost 30 years of military experience. The researcher was aware of this positionality and consciously avoided, to the extent possible, letting personal experiences affect interpretation of the interviews. However, the researcher's experience in the military provided helped develop a sense of trust with the interviewees. As Bogdan and Biklen (2003) note, developing trust allows the researcher to become "privy to certain information and opinions" pertaining to the population one was studying (p. 89). The researcher's status as a veteran was beneficial to this study.

Ethical Considerations

Two ethical issues with this study included the need for confidentiality and the potential that a veteran's discussion of his or her military experience might trigger disturbing memories, especially if the veteran had experienced combat. The first ethical consideration, the need for confidentiality, was both paramount and necessary to ensure trustworthiness and candor in participant responses to interview questions.

Confidentiality was achieved through a number of steps. Participants were assured of confidentiality both verbally prior to the start of the interview and in writing with an IRB-approved Informed Consent form. In addition, the researcher decided to complete the transcription of the recorded interview himself. This additional step provided extra

assurance of confidentiality to the interviewee and further added to a more favorable environment for eliciting candid responses to the research questions. Other than the participant, access to the transcripts was limited only to the researcher and the chairperson of his dissertation committee. Participants were informed both verbally and in writing about access to the transcripts. Participants were offered the opportunity to access their own respective interview transcript in order to make changes, additions, clarifications, or amendments they felt necessary. Many participants did accept this offer, but none made any changes, additions, clarifications, or amendments.

In terms of the second ethical consideration, the researcher avoided any intentional references to memories of negative military experiences; however, there was no guarantee this would not occur. This issue was addressed with the participant prior to the interview. The participant was advised prior to the interview of local counseling services available to him or her in the event that negative experiences were encountered during the interview. It was the interviewee's decision to determine what he or she would reveal about his or her military experience. The study did not purposely select participants who had been in harm's way; however, this was a possibility.

Prior to the interview, some participants divulged that they had endured some negative experiences but chose to continue with the interview nonetheless. These interviewees indicated that counseling services had been or were currently in use at the time of the interviews. Some had indicated that enough time had passed between the negative experiences and the interview and had come to terms with what they had experienced. These participants assured the researcher they had no misgivings about continuing with the interview process.

Tables 1, 2, and 3 below provide a descriptive summary of the 26 study participants. The next chapter reviews study findings, focusing on how the veterans perceived that their military experience helped them adjust to college and, at the same time, also made it difficult to adjust to college.

Table 1

Veteran Participants by Institution, Gender and Military Branch

Institution	Male	Female	Army	Air Force	Marines	Navy
A	5	1	3 ^b	1	1	1 ^a
B	0	1	0	0	1	0
C	8	1	5	1	3	0
D	2	1	2	0	0	1
E	2	2	1	2	1	0
F	1	2	1	1	0	1
Total	18	8	12	5	6	3

^a Member also served in another military branch, Army. ^b One member also served in another military branch, Air National Guard.

Table 2

Veteran Participants by Institution, Deployment and Length of Enlistment

Institution	Deployment	Multiple Deployments	Four-year enlistment	Over four-year enlistment
A	0	2	1	5
B	0	0	1	0
C	4	2	4	5
D	1	0	1	2
E	1	1	3	1
F	1	0	0	3
Total	7	5	10	16

Table 3

Veteran Participants by Service-Connected Disability and Prior Community College Attendance

Institution	Service-Connected Disability	Prior Community College Attendance
A	0	0
B	0	0
C	3	3
D	0	3
E	1	1
F	0	0
Total	4	7

Note. Service-connected disabilities were self-reported. Prior community college attendance denotes participant attended a community college previous to the current institution they were attending.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter analyzed data collected from participant interviews which addressed the following research question: How do veterans perceive that their military experience affects their college student experience? Ten themes emerged. Five themes emerged that identified how the military experience helped veterans adjust to college. Five other themes emerged that identified how the military experience made adjustment to college difficult.

This study was conducted with a total of 26 participants at six higher education institutions. The interviews were conducted during the Fall 2014 and Spring 2015 semesters. As shown in Table 1, eighteen participants were male and eight were female; 12 served in the U.S. Army, five served in the U.S. Air Force, six served in the U.S. Marines, three served in the U.S. Navy; two of these participants served in two different military branches. According to Table 2, seven participants had been on one deployment and five participants had been on multiple deployments; 10 participants did a four-year enlistment and 16 participants did more than a four-year enlistment. As outlined in Table 3, four participants had service-connected disabilities related to their military service; seven participants at the four-year colleges had attended community colleges prior to attending their current institution.

Many of the veterans believed their perceptions of military service had a significant impact, if not a life-changing transformation. The experiences of the veterans

studied ranged from serving their entire military service period stateside to being deployed on multiple deployments. Some veterans did not endure challenging situations while some veterans experienced difficult combat overseas. For example, one Army veteran noted,

I've seen combat . . . when I got back, like I, I just didn't, I didn't have any value; there was no value in the civilian world for me. That's what it was. Like there was nothing, everything, they told me what should hold value and going to college was one of those things that should hold value somewhat. But to me at that time, it just didn't, so I couldn't put any value once I got into this school situation on anything that was assigned to me.

Others who served under less-trying conditions also noted similar perceptions about the impact of their military experience. For example, an Air Force veteran stated,

My military experience affects college in a lot of different ways. One of the biggest ones I see is being involved in a [organization] on campus. I don't really do well with the excuses posed by people that are younger in my [organization]. I am a little more blunt with them and I don't think they appreciate it as much as somebody who was older and did experience more in their lifetime would . . . so it's very difficult; like it tries my patience quite a bit like, like compared to other students; you have to constantly think, they're still younger, you're older coming to college.

While levels of transformation varied to a degree for veterans, this chapter specifically focuses on experiences that made the adjustment to college easier and adjustment more difficult.

How the Military Experience Helped Veterans Adjust to College

During the course of the interviews, veterans highlighted several ways in which their military experience provided them with skills and dispositions needed to succeed in college. They noted the military had increased their capacity to work with others in a team and exert leadership where needed in team efforts. They also indicated that being in the military led them to have high expectations of themselves and to carry out their work

in an organized manner with a high level of task orientation. Another benefit communicated by the interviewees dealt with their capacity to learn; throughout their military experience, they had been expected to take part in numerous learning activities, including college courses, as well as online and classroom training. A final benefit they acquired through military service was experience interacting with diverse populations; the veterans had served in military units that included individuals from all walks of life and from all areas of the country. All of these benefits served the veterans well as they pursued their college studies.

Collaborating in Groups

Much of what the veterans experienced in classroom group projects had already been experienced in the military. Despite challenges encountered while working on group projects in the classroom, veterans readily saw the correlation between work in the military and group projects in the classroom. Veterans tended to overcome these challenges and equated the teamwork they had experienced in the military to the group research projects they were expected to do in college. One veteran, for example, saw little difference between group projects in the military and in the classroom. As this veteran observed,

It's, I mean, the group work of, it's very similar in the sense of, it's a group of people who may have never worked together before who are getting lumped together and told to get a job done. So, that's no different than a team that you might get stuck with for a deployment.

Another Army veteran related that teamwork experience was a little different in the military, but that the emphasis the military placed on responsible teamwork helped in group projects assigned in the college classroom:

It's a lot different in the military in the fact that you were handed a team in

the military. You were assigned that team more so, whether it was from your supervisor or the overall Army assigning this person to this unit. So, it's a little different aspect, but just having the team work helps me, or the teamwork experience helps me building that team and being the leader of it.

Another veteran reinforced the benefits of the teamwork emphasized in the military, noting how teamwork reinforced the importance of working together and helping out one another. This veteran carried this ethos into his college work:

Maybe I'm thinking more of, looking it at from the perspective of like a team level. That's how we operated in the Army, a lot in the infantry. So, someone on your team needed help with PT or your, or whatever it was, weapons cleaning, whatever. You're supposed to be there to kind of help each other out, and I know, one of the big things here in the [major] Department is collaborating and even co-teaching and things like that, so just reaching out to other people for help or kind of a collaboration or assistance, anything like that. In the Army it's expected that you do that.

Veterans also saw the same dynamics in group projects whether they were conducted in the military or in the college classroom. One veteran observed,

And everybody comes from these different backgrounds, too, so, I mean, you look at the university and you have people from all over the state or all over the nation that you're in classes with. It's no different of you have completely different skill set or a completely different background you're bringing into a dynamic and how do you handle that. It's the same whether it's in, you're wearing ABU's, Airman Battle Uniform, or you're wearing jeans and a T-shirt. I mean, it's the same dynamic, it's just whatever goal you're trying to achieve, one's probably a little bit more serious.

The veterans drew parallels between the challenge of getting younger students to carry out their responsibilities in group work and the challenge of trying to get the most junior level enlisted members to do something. Veterans, no matter whether they were in the military or in college, knew they had to work together and they had a need to get the job done no matter what constraints befell them. One veteran noted, "Trying to get undergrads to do something you want; it's like herding cats, but it's no different than

trying to get an E-3 to do something that you want them to do.”

Veterans ultimately understood the need to do well in group projects as there were consequences for not completing the project. The veterans knew that their own grade was on the line in a group project. One veteran stated,

Because, I get into the classroom and I'm more apt to work with my peers in getting us a task done, because to me, the goal for us as students is for everybody to get an A. It's not a competition from individual to individual.

In the military, there could be repercussions and corrective actions like the assignment of extra duties, or perhaps a negative reflection on one's annual performance review. In the college environment the consequence comes down to the grade earned for the project.

The group work experienced in the military was not similar in all ways to the group work experienced in college. The veterans noted that in contrast to team projects in the military, there was no clear understanding of who was in charge in college group projects. As one veteran stated, “The main difference in that [military] situation versus your college situation is there is a clear line of who's supposed to be in charge.” As another interviewee observed, in the absence of military rank, other less-tangible factors, including personality, played a role in determining who took on leadership roles in college group projects:

So, I've had those experiences; that's atypical in a sense, so, you know, usually there's protocol, there is that very specific chain of command and these clothes you're wearing, I'm like, all you do is you look at the shirt he's wearing and know where you stand on the totem pole, comparatively to him. So, that's sort of the situation you have to figure when you're in a university setting of who's the one that's going to be in charge because you're all supposed to be equals and who is going to take the lead, now it's the situation of personality that's gonna take the position versus an actual protocol that forces that position on another person.

Another interviewee expressed frustration in dealing with the unclear lines of authority in

student work groups, noting that he simply jumped in and took charge:

I feel like I always seem to be the one to initiate it, whether form the team itself, or designate a time, or what I'm going to be doing versus what somebody's else's part of the job, might even, or the project might be.

Still, veterans understood the importance of team interaction in getting group projects started, organized, and completed. Veterans felt obligated to step up and do, instead of waiting around for someone else to step up and take the lead. Veterans understood that their course grade, and everyone else's course grade, was on the line for the group project. In addition, the teamwork they had experienced in the military helped them to understand that there were ways of getting a team to work even when group members did not agree on things. Veterans also understood that although they could not simply delegate tasks as they could in the military, the project nonetheless had to be completed, even if they personally had to take over the responsibilities of other group members in order to get a satisfactory grade. One veteran went above and beyond when the team members were not showing up or doing their assigned tasks,

So, I mean that, like I said, that was kind of difficult to deal with, with people showing up or, and actually one time in a group project they came up with every excuse in the world why they couldn't get their stuff and help package it together, and I said; you know guys, I'll finish it, I'll get it done for us and I did all the work myself. It was just easier to tell them forget it, I'll do it and I'll submit it for our grade.

Another veteran summed up his commitment to getting the job done when working on group projects no matter the environment,

I think being forced to work with others; you find ways to make it work, no matter what, so whether or not you see eye-to-eye, or whatever, you can still work together enough to get the job done.

The veterans, despite the frustration and aggravation that often became part of group projects, were successful in reaching what they saw as a desired outcome. When

they worked on group projects, the veterans saw themselves as leaders and modeled leadership behavior, using this as a teachable moment for younger students. The veterans observed that these students had not had the opportunity to take leadership roles. One veteran commented,

What I see with a lot of the 17, 18, 19 year olds is they have no concept of what working in a team is and no one's willing to step up and say okay; how about you do this and then you guys over here do this other part. They just kind of sit around and look at each other waiting for a leader to stand up and, and take charge and say this is the direction we're going and, and that's definitely helped me . . . just kind of cope with the different mentalities. I feel like I'm, I feel like an adult in a pre-school sometimes.

This same veteran also noted that,

There are classmates that have never had an opportunity to lead and they come from a background where their ideas aren't relevant or aren't . . . they feel that they're not important, and it just seems there's a lot of shyness and lot of students are timid and I find myself and other veterans being the exact opposite.

Another veteran was cognizant of the lack of leadership in getting a group project together and off the ground, noting that he just took charge:

Yeah, I guess I just don't want to, part of me just . . . I don't want to wait for someone else to step up. I'm just going to do it. If someone else has other good input, definitely, I'm all ears. I guess one project I'm working on now . . . last class, I was there a little early. I usually am a little early for this class, one of my marketing classes. There's a project, we need five people on our team. I've been talking with one other guy, but I was trying to see if he knew anyone else in the class first. Maybe he would want to work with; I gave it a couple of weeks. He ended up not having anybody, so I went ahead and talked to three other people in the class. They sit in my area, it's a larger class, so they sit in my area within the class and just started talking to them about the project, see if they had a team, just kind of started organizing that team.

Thus, while the veterans were sometimes frustrated by the lack of leadership skills among their younger classmates, they also understood that without initiating leadership themselves, group projects might not be successfully completed. The veterans saw the

need to engage in leadership; otherwise, they would have to suffer the consequences of a poor project grade.

However, the veterans also sought to impart their leadership skills through mentoring, taking care of and looking out for others. Taking care of and looking out for others was a resolute and steadfast principle of the military culture. Veterans felt the obligation to develop other students' leadership skills, and at the same time, mentor them. Some veterans felt this as an obligation because working together and helping out each other was a key value they had learned in the military and something that they felt also applied to higher education. As one veteran asserted, "Just reaching out to other people for help or kind of a collaboration or assistance, anything like that. In the Army it's expected that you do that."

There was an expectation among veterans to step up, reach out, and mentor others when they see others who are struggling. As one veteran reflected on stepping up,

I know how to work as a team and it's hard to find a team out here, but I try and teach that to others as well. You learn leadership skills and stuff like that, so those transfer and I try to share a lot of my experiences now with many others just to help bring awareness to what it's like.

Another veteran recalled the importance of mentoring,

Mentoring is a big one. It's pretty much like leadership . . . it's pretty much what I said before, you know, you just, you just try to help out as much, help somebody out that's struggling. If the professor can't get to them, or you're, in the military, if the other team leader or NCO can't get to them, you know, and you're not busy, you already figured the question out, help 'em out. It's no big deal, you know. Sometimes you learn better from your peers than from your leadership.

Another veteran saw leadership defined as putting everyone else's needs above one's own needs,

Leadership in the military, God, like, lets see, always putting yourself last,

you know, make sure your soldiers are ready to go, what they need, and make sure they're prepared. There is this saying, a leader, you have to lead in the front, you can't lead in the back. That's how I was always trained. You can't always put yourself first cause, you know, you got other people to worry about. They come first. Same thing in the civilian world. Like at a job or even being a student. You know, if you see someone struggling on something, you know, a lot of people think it's kind of, you know, kind of abnormal in a situation, but help them out, taking initiative, just being a leader. Just be the first one out there.

In summary, veterans were experienced in group projects because of their experiences in the military. Veterans saw a correlation between group projects in the military and the college classroom. They associated teamwork they experienced in the military to group projects they were expected to do in college.

High Expectations

In addition to a high capacity to work in groups, veterans also had high expectations of themselves—a disposition honed through military experience. This was manifested in a tendency to present themselves to others with a sense of professionalism. Veterans were conditioned this way through military experience. One veteran made this observation about himself,

You just stand out differently than some of the students here, you raise your chin up higher, you're glad your . . . you woke up the next day. It's one of those things . . . students I see, sometimes, they're like dragging their feet, tired, unprepared, and I wake up and, I'm like, ready to go. I'll walk to class, talk with a different style than most students do. It's just one of those things the Marines help to be successful, not just in the military, but also outside of it.

Another veteran discussed their habit of attention to detail,

You always, you know, you always hear this with the military; everything is attention to detail. That's the reason you have to make sure your uniform looks perfect. If it's every, you know, you pick on every little detail and the ones that don't matter, which means the ones that do matter are taken care of, too. That's sort of the mindset, and which I'm, and obviously you know this, obviously, but, so that attention to detail, I'm . . .

and also how I present myself cause that's one of my biggest pet peeves. If you are going to represent the school, or if you're going to represent yourself, for like example, you're doing a speech for a class or event like that, not only do you have to be prepared, you have to look prepared, so you have to look the part. You should not be wearing jeans and a hoodie, and you should present yourself as if you were doing this as a professional.

Veterans were naturally conditioned to wearing their uniform and looking presentable. Periodically uniform inspections in the military were conducted to ensure they were in good working order and met or exceeded presentable standards. Veterans carried a sense of pride with their uniform. Veterans took this sense of pride to the college campus as if correlating their college appearance to the military uniform of the military branch they once represented, or perhaps, still represent. One veteran even noted their professional dress for their interview with the researcher, "Yeah, I mean I don't dress nice; I'm wearing a tie for the record. I don't dress nice everyday, but I don't dress horrible, either . . . so, I try to come to class at least, like presentable." Veterans applied this pride to the institution they were attending and saw their appearance as representing the institution they attended.

Professionalism was not just limited to their appearance. It also extended to their interaction with course instructors. One veteran had a pet peeve when it came to addressing instructors properly,

And then that's also when it comes to little details on even just formatting papers on how you present yourself, how you talk to professors, the idea that you never refer to a professor as Mr. or Mrs. unless they happen to be that, that is theirs, you know. There's a couple professors that are, that have not received their doctorates at this point, but usually I still refer to them as professor whatever their name is, but if you know somebody has a doctorate, you do not call them Mr. or Ms. It just ticks me off. This is one pet peeve, it just, it just . . . no, they earned their title, and to me, it's like calling a sergeant, or a, like calling a Master Sergeant, Sarge. I'm like, that is not appropriate. That is not, no, it's not right. You show them the

respect of, you know, they put in a lot of effort, you may not like them, they put a lot of effort out there to, so at least respect the fact that they did, and call them by their title. So, that little, little picky stuff like that I do notice.

Another veteran commented about what they believed was the appropriate way to contact course instructors outside of class,

I noticed a lot of people use like their text, text messaging. Why would you text message a professor unless that is okay with them. Me, I think that's going too personal. Me, I'd rather be professional where I would actually call them or e-mail them or even showing up to their office, that they're, probably their office hours that they have posted. I just, that's just as I see as being professional.

Still another veteran reflected on how they are expected to act in a classroom environment,

I get annoyed in class a lot and some of the younger students, you know, they don't know how to act and whatever, but overall, like my, how I actually dictate my own self in class, is pretty well compared to some of the other ones since they weren't in the military; like I feel like, that like I pay attention better, attention to detail they taught me and how to, how to act towards your superiors and all that stuff.

Veterans were keenly aware of how they acted in front of others on college campuses. Veterans presented themselves in a professional way. They understood the importance of respect for their course instructors and addressed them by their earned title and associated this to military rank, rendering appropriate acknowledgement in their respective environments. Veterans also understood how to act while in a classroom environment.

The high expectations the veterans set for themselves was also manifested in the value they placed on punctuality. Veterans had the expectation of being on time for class. Punctuality, or being on-time, is a requirement for the veteran, not a suggestion subject to interpretation, as it seemed to be for many students who had not served in the

military. One veteran reflected on what being on time meant to them as a civilian and in the military,

In the civilian world, it's so common and so allowed, I don't get it. Part of military, I was corporate, and I would show up for work five minutes late, and go, what's wrong, I don't get it. I'm still here. I'll just work five minutes late. Now, I can't even fathom doing that.

Being on-time was a habit that seemed to be deeply ingrained within many of the interviewed veterans. Some veterans expressed their punctuality being directly relatable to their military experience, "I mean in the Marines they, they always talk to us about being on-time and if it's worth doing, it's worth doing right and those are things that I've directly brought back to school." Another veteran reflected on his observations of being on time from their military experience, "I don't, I'm hardly ever late for anything, and if I am, usually I'm at least 15 minutes early just because . . . did that before the military, and they taught me to be 15 minutes before the 15 minutes." Another Army veteran observed what his military service taught him about showing up,

But on the flipside its, it was like, certain parts of doing homework and getting to class and things like that were less stressful, because I felt the habits of the Army made it more of a, you just, you just show up, you're there.

Veterans were conditioned to repercussions for not being on time through various military corrective actions. A couple of veterans reflected on how the military could impose consequences for not being on-time. One veteran identified actions that could be taken against them for not being on time, "If you weren't on time to work in the military you were getting yelled at." Another veteran provided more detail regarding the implications of being late, "You got to make sure you are on time for classes or you'll be late and miss, you know, the lecture, and then in the military, if you're not on time you

get basically a course of action, you know, like a negative counseling.” Being on-time can be interpreted as subjective. Being on-time, according to the veterans, ranged anywhere from 30 minutes ahead of time to arriving and being ready for class before the time class started. One veteran reflected on the time she would arrive to a class that started at 10:00 a.m.; “I’m always early so I better be there by 9:30. If the doors aren’t open by then, 9:45, be ready.”

For many of the interviewees, being on-time meant arriving 15 minutes prior to start of class. This time frame, 15 minutes, is the military standard for proper relief of watch-standing duties. Many veterans commented on this 15-minute time frame. One veteran noted that “On time is at least 15 minutes early, so if I’m supposed to be here at 1:30 I show up at least by 1:15 if not sooner.” Another veteran commented,

Be healthy and show up to class 15 minutes prior before class. It is like one of those things that . . . that mindset they gave us in the military, or especially in the Marines, it is like be there on time. If you’re on time, you’re late. So, that is how I hold myself, and, if I’m going to miss a day, I let the professor know I won’t be here this day because I have an appointment.

Still another veteran commented,

What I’ve done in school and in my civilian life is I still show up to things at least 15 minutes early, and whether it’d be a social event or whether it’d be school, which has prevented me from ever being late to a class. It keeps me on track with my homework. If I have a project or a group meeting going on, I show up to that meeting 15 minutes before it starts. I, they’re commitments to me just like they were in the military. I have to be there. It’s not an option.

Some veterans considered anything less than 15 minutes as being late. One veteran summed it up this way: “If you’re 10 minutes early, you’re five minutes late.” Being in class 15 minutes before the start of class, from the veterans’ perspective, “has prevented me from ever being late to class.” The ultimate goal of being on-time from the veterans’

perspective was to ensure they were, in the words of one of the interviewees, “squared away, prepared, books ready, ready to go, uniform squared away, ready for the next assignment.” Veterans understood the implications on showing up late and not being on time. As one veteran commented,

I feel like a lot of times if you show up late, the teachers, not only they know that, you are kind of disrupting other people and I don't like disrupting other people's learning, so . . . I just try to make sure I'm always there a few minutes early.

To summarize, veterans had high expectations of themselves through military experience. This sense of professionalism was apparent through self-presentation, interaction with course instructors and punctuality.

Organization and Task

In addition to high expectations of themselves, veterans also felt organization and task helped them adjust to college. Many of the interviewees noted that military experience helped them become organized and task-oriented. These were traits that helped them succeed in college. This theme emerged particularly in the interviews with veterans who joined the military after initially attending college for at least a short period of time. Their approach to college after the military experience was markedly different than their approach to college before the military experience. One Army veteran summed up his college experiences before and after the military this way:

Before it was kind, what I was supposed do. That was the deal getting out of high school. You go to college, or you go maybe to a trade school or work some fairly low wage job, maybe minimum wage. It was that next step when I went to [institution]. That's what I was supposed to do. I really didn't appreciate it. I didn't work for that. I had taken loans out. That wasn't something I had worked for previously, whereas, the second time around, my idea, my focus, one of my main reasons going into the military was the educational benefit. There was a lot more actually gained through that experience, but, so I was working those six years, spending

that time in the service and having worked for my education. I feel like now I appreciate it more and I do see the benefit, I guess the long term goal for myself.

This same Army veteran then went into the military, noting that “At first I really didn’t want to do the military. I saw the benefits on the educational side, but I didn’t see the rest of it. As I went through the military, I learned a lot.” After returning from the military, this same Army veteran returned to college a second time,

I just think it really set me up for success. I kind of struggled. I kind of struggled. I went to [institution] right out of high school and just really struggled with school, in general. I just wasn’t really focused. Didn’t have the dedication to just go to class every day, do my, being on time with whether it was homework or just showing up to class on time. I think just some of the lessons I learned through the military, building my discipline, my accountability for myself, just really helped me succeed here. It’s translated well in that sense.

Another Army veteran had similar experiences going to college, joining the military, and then returning to college. This individual, however, had earned a bachelor’s degree before for his enlistment:

I got my four-year degree before joining, and then I enlisted, and then after getting out of the Army about, about a year after getting out I started grad school for my [Master’s]. One thing I did notice right away is homework assignments and deadlines were a lot easier to meet. Suddenly there, I wasn’t, I wasn’t so concerned about getting stuff perfect, like I had been in college. So, a lot of it was just get it done, get it in, spend as many hours as it takes to get it done and get it in.

An Air Force veteran had a similar experience, but after receiving an associate’s degree and little direction in life:

I wasn’t ready for university setting prior to the military . . . I actually went to college for two years before I joined the military. Got my associate’s degree; had no direction. I actually got my associate’s degree in General Studies. I never declared a major. And that’s actually why I joined the military, because I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life.

This same Air Force veteran later recalled in the interview,

When I was getting my associate's degree, I was cutting classes, you know. If I was tired, I didn't go. I have not missed a single class, except for actual illness since I have started at this school, and on that level, I just, and like I said, it's your money.

Another Marine also reflected on his perspective:

And when I came to school, I've been at school at [institution] in [city, state], too, and it's just, ever since I started classes, like in high school, I didn't care about classes. I got bad grades cause I just didn't care. I didn't do homework, or whatever, and when I came back to school after the military, I feel almost like I'm more focused, like I see the objective and I have to, at least, try to achieve it the best I can.

The military experience and the organized structure of the military had a decisively profound impact for these veterans in regard to their college experience.

Another impact could be seen in the tendency of some to draw on their military experience to organize their lives as students. Some correlated the military structure and organization to the school structure and to the degree type they were pursuing. They applied the training they received in the military to the coursework in college. One Air Force veteran correlated his military training to going to college,

Well, my military experience, whenever I'm doing any of my class work or anything that's done here, I always draw back to any training that I had to go through like NCO Academy or those sorts of things. . . . I was trying to remember that those were hectic and a lot of times. . . . Time was kind of crunch sometimes for school work, also. So, I try to remember that I went through those things while in the military. If I did okay with that, I should do okay in school. I should just plan my time accordingly like in like they taught me to in the [NCO] Academy or any other training that I had to go through in the military.

Another Marine veteran noted the similarity between the military and college, observing that,

The military, it's almost like, going from one institution to another, but this one is not as strict. It's the same kind of general, it's not a military

institution, but it's still an institution with rules and, you know, things you have to do to succeed and to go forth, so, I mean, I kind of, in taking my military experience and putting the same sort of effort towards the school.

This same Marine also elaborated further,

Rules are a big thing, like, you know, when I was in the military we'd have, you know, monthly safety meetings, and just meetings all the time about different things, you know, so there's always something going in your brain about what you have to do, what you should do, and it's the same thing here where you have rules about, you know, like being on time, you know, just doing your homework and doing stuff that you should be doing at all times.

As noted, veterans saw some correlation to the structure and the organization of colleges and universities. They also noted how the skills they learned in the military were applied to their work as students. Organizational skills, for example, were important. One organizational skill was preplanning. One Army veteran identified preplanning when she expressed,

The pre-planning that the military teaches you . . . goes into effect just to get your homework done. It's just they've, it's in your mind and that's all you do, okay I've got to preplan. I preplan. I'm going camping in two weeks. Who needs to do that? The military. Only the military.

This same veteran gave an example while in college,

If a class says, I have to have this paper written by Wednesday morning at 8:00 a.m. You don't think about it Tuesday. You've already pre-planned, Okay, I have got five classes, I have this class that takes two hours of studying every night, so I can work one hour on my paper, on Monday, two hours on Tuesday . . . it would be completed prior to the class.

Being prepared is another organizational skill. A Marine veteran elaborated on being prepared,

I'm prepared for about everything. The night before, I think of it as a mission; I have all my books, and equipment ready, like water, everything I would need for the next day. I would have it already, clothes are all set up. I get up in enough time to get everything done so I'm not rushing around. You just show up, pretty punctual, and maybe even a little early. I start . . . instead of studying and cramming the night before, I study a

long time, ahead of time, to try to be ready for everything. I'm able to prepare myself and have that kind of good discipline.

This same veteran elaborated further:

I have clinicals, so, if I want to be successful, I'd spend the night before . . . or if it's a test, a week before, start preparing myself mentally, and then I would have all of my equipment ready. You would want to have everything ready, so I'd have pens, pencils, sharpeners, paper, and all my notes. I would have everything ready ahead of time, water, just about anything that you would need. There's logistics involved in school. You may not think that. If you want a desired outcome, you have to prepare for it. You can't really just hope. You really need to be ready for it. Be proactive about it.

He went on to summarize how being prepared was key to his success:

I think you have to for success. You have to be able to . . . if you don't plan ahead, then you're going to get surprised all the time. I see it in a lot in my other classmates. They are like, oh, wow, I didn't know this was due. Well, you probably didn't look in the syllabus, or you probably didn't write it down, or you're just absent-minded, or obviously not prepared.

Interviewees also noted the importance of adaptation as part of being prepared.

For example, a veteran reflected on being able to adapt to an unanticipated assignment,

You're in class and you get an assignment that's due in two days and it may not have been on the syllabus. Maybe it's something a little extra that he or she decided to add in there. So, it definitely . . . being able to handle the curve ball. That definitely helps. The experience there helped with that.

Another Army veteran gave an example of having to adapt to a college environment,

If you're not able to learn from something, and continually adapt to your surroundings, then, guess what, the next time you have that test, you might be more prepared because you'll study more than just the PowerPoints. I have had teachers in the past, just study the PowerPoints. You study the PowerPoints and then they quiz you over the book material and the book material is different than the PowerPoints. So you're like, ok, well, I'll be mad for a few minutes, or whatever; disappointed that I got a lower grade than I should have, but then the next test, I'll study the book and the PowerPoints.

Still another veteran summarized preparation and adaptation:

We have three tests tomorrow and I have other fellow classmates, like, oh, my gosh, where do I start? How do I do this? Blah, blah, blah. And I'm like, well, I already have half this stuff done because I have planned ahead and now I've had all these crazy situations thrown at me, so I'm able to adapt and not let it freak me out or go to my head because . . . if you lose your wits, then I feel the battle is already kind of lost and you won't do as well. It's only school. It's not like this is the enemy that is going to kill you or anything.

In addition to adaptation, being methodical and prioritizing was also cited by the interviewees as organizational skills they brought with them from the military. For example, one veteran reflected on those skills in addition to being able to adapt:

Yeah, if you have three projects or a test, a project and something else due. . . . People are like, how do I get this done? Well, you get it all done by doing number one, and then you do number two, and then you do number three. Or you do half of number one, then you do half of number two . . . you have to be very methodical, like you said, and also prioritize, just focused on that too, and driven. You have to be able to think about multiple things and get the most important done first and then do the second, and then do the third. Worry about deadlines and do a little bit of a juggling act. Prioritize is the main thing . . . and adapt.

The combination of skills acquired while in the military allowed the veteran to utilize these skills to meet deadlines in the college environment. A veteran reflected on how he was much better at being able to meet deadlines after being in the military:

After the military, I've been able to actually work with deadlines better. Like, I'll type a little bit of the paper, I'll outline it and I could just plan, yeah, maybe not so much work on deadlines, maybe planning would be a better word. My planning has improved after the military.

Pre-planning, planning, being prepared, adapting, being methodical and prioritizing were all acquired military skills actively utilized in the college environment. The meeting of deadlines was the culmination or combination of these acquired skills. Veterans viewed these deadlines within a military framework, employing military terminology that was familiar to them. One veteran equated a deployment in the military to school work, noting that:

If you look at deployments, being responsible for yourself was, I would say more, being alert of your surroundings, knowing what was going on, making sure you're kind of doing, maybe, in the right spot at the right . . . not in the wrong spot at the wrong time, trying to be at the right spot at the right time. That goes with just being aware of your surroundings. Relating to school you had just . . . it's a different aspect, but just having a personal responsibility, like you're responsible for your actions. No one else is going to take responsibility, no one else is going to own up to whatever you did. And it's basically on me, so I feel like that relates to my, definitely my school work as well. It's up to me. I'm responsible for it.

Some veterans, who had been on deployments, used this terminology to describe tasks, missions, and deployments. Several tasks, sometimes small in nature, made a mission; and several missions made a deployment. In other words, deployments were paramount, missions were secondary and subordinate to deployments, and tasks were subordinate to missions. One Army veteran summed it up this way,

I would say the course is the theater of war, it's a deployment. That could be correlated that, whereas, a homework assignment could be correlated to a mission within that deployment. Once the semester is over and that course is over . . . you go into your decompression state and leave your theater of war to head back home.

Another veteran corroborated this with a similar observation when it came to missions:

When school work comes around, they go, okay, you have an essay due at the end of the semester. You don't start a week before the semester is over. You start looking at topics. You discuss that with your teacher by midterm, and then you start writing the paper to make sure you are on the right track is what the instructor wants. And then you check it before, way before it's due, so you know what he or she wants, your instructor wants, and that way, when you turn it in, you're pretty good that the mission's completed.

This same Army veteran elaborated further on using military terminology and relating it to college terminology,

It generally takes about four years to, depending on what degree you're getting to get an undergraduate degree. It takes about four years in the military to get your discharge if you're active duty on a normal contract. I

know certain branches are different, but mine was four years. You have theaters of war which could be looked at as classes, and you have inside that theater of war, you have the missions that you go on; patrols, raids, whatever, maybe, which is looked at as homework assignments, some more severe, papers, some less severe, going on just a normal patrol, just a normal homework assignment, or researching something, studying something. When all is said and done, you're getting a degree. When all is said and done, you get your honorable discharge and you get that piece of paper on the wall that says, that you get to tell your grandkids, I did that.

Veterans also used the term *standard*, which to them implied an expectation of the level of performance required to remain in the military. If these *standards* were not met, the military service member could be discharged. To the interviewees, meeting the *standard* meant one was average. Those who exceeded a *standard* were the ones who set themselves apart from others. The veterans interviewed in this study thought of their college work in these terms. One veteran viewed a syllabus as a *standard* when he stated,

As far as succeeding in college, the Army just tells you exactly what you need to know. They tell you what the standard is. They tell you when you fall short. They tell you when you're above it. And that made it extremely easy to look at any syllabus, to look at any situation, and immediately pick out what do I have to do, to . . . to meet the minimum requirement, what can I do to go above and beyond the requirement, and that was really easy. I think that's the biggest one for succeeding in college other than the military prepared me is just, they set a standard, you know, above and below and how to go beyond that.

Another veteran viewed course grades as a *standard* when he said,

Yeah, in the military you are always trying to exceed the standards. And I would say, that's a great term to use towards the education. If the standard is, in the education program, is a C to pass, of course I want to go for an A, so that's kind of been my goal my whole time through college is shoot for the A's.

Veterans took terminology to which they were accustomed to in the military and transferred this terminology to their college experience. For veterans who had not deployed, they had similar perceptions of their military terminology and related it to their

college experiences. In the military, a *standard* is a set of expectations that everyone is expected to meet. This same *standard* was applied to the college experience with the *standard* generally being course grades.

In summary, many of the interviewees noted that military experience helped them become organized and task-oriented. This was discovered through the following experiences: veterans who joined the military after initially attending college, acquired traits of pre-planning, planning, being prepared, adapting, being methodical and prioritizing, and lastly, application of military terminology to their college experience.

Experienced Learners

Along with organization and task, veterans were experienced learners and this helped them adjust to college. Veterans in this study emphasized that the learning process was not a new concept to them after they left the military. They had been conditioned to the learning process while in the military through military training, enrollment in college courses while they were in the military, and through participation in leadership courses or other skill-based military occupational courses. Upon transitioning to the higher education environment, veterans had already developed a learning mindset. One veteran, for example, indicated that he had taken military training and college courses concurrently while in the Army:

When I mentioned the military schools, another thing that helped me too was, I did go to school while I was in the Army, college while I was in the Army, using my tuition assistance, so I already had a little basis of college built up that it was like, okay, I need to finish.

Learning in the military had a significant impact on veterans. One veteran reflected on the significance of learning in the military, noting that there were consequences for not keeping up or mastering course material:

Definitely, the military taught me how to learn, if that makes sense. Before I came into the military, high school was awful. I did the bare minimum. I was a sports addict. I just did what I needed to do to get by and my grades weren't good. And then, joining the military and having to learn your job or get kicked out. That's your livelihood. You have to learn it and you have to buckle down. Do what you need to do to succeed. So, that definitely translated to college.

Another veteran indicated he would still be able to learn had he not been in the military, but that learning in the military assisted in the learning process: "I mean, without the military to like guide me I suppose, I still would have learned, but it would have been a slower process. I mean, in the military, you had to learn or you were out."

Veterans appeared to adapt the learning process to their benefit in college because they did not dwell on bad grades; rather they learned from the bad grades. One veteran discussed how he looked at bad grades as a temporary setback and took steps for improvement on the next test:

Some people, if they don't finish the test, they start crying because they're used to being A and B students, but if they start, what am I thinking here? Yeah, they're just able to get shaken really easily. If they want an A on a test and they get a C or B, they're like, [sigh], you start thinking it's the end of the world. And I, just like, well, you know what, you gotta learn from this and then do better the next time. Take it as a learning situation for the next one.

In summary, the veterans had already been conditioned to learn because of their military experience prior to attending college. They took the learning experiences acquired in the military and applied them to their college experience. In addition to being experienced learners, veterans attending college were also experienced working with others.

Working with Others

Veterans were experienced in working with others. This experience was beneficial in helping veterans adjust to college. Veterans had experience interacting with diverse populations and cultures before arriving on college campuses. Some veterans served in military units that included individuals from all walks of life, from different parts of the country and the world. The military's transient nature of frequent duty rotations exposed veterans to many parts of the world. The decision to join the military caused a member to interface with various ranks in the military and work together with others to complete an outcome, be it a task or a mission. One Army veteran viewed working with others this way:

I interface with a lot of different ranks and backgrounds . . . and finding a level playing field or an emotional appeal, to not, I don't want to say get my way, but for everybody to, like I said, arrive at a favorable outcome.

The decision to join the military exposed a veteran to experiences that they would otherwise not have been experienced. One veteran addressed that when she noted:

I got an exposure to the world I would have never had . . . I've been to 23 countries in less than five years, all over Southeast Asia, Africa and the Middle East, and all over Europe . . . I've seen how other cultures work, I've interacted with other cultures.

This same veteran associated the different backgrounds she had experienced in the military to the different backgrounds in the college setting when she commented:

And everybody comes from these different backgrounds, too, so, I mean, you look at the university and you have people from all over the state or all over the nation that you're in classes with. It's no different.

Another veteran expressed the benefit of experiences with other cultures in a diversity class in which she was enrolled. This veteran had a much better understanding because,

After my training in the States, I went overseas to [Pacific island] and then

I went to [Asian/Middle Eastern country] and then I went to [European country] and I've been to different countries and I've had different experiences with different cultures and people and stuff like that. I had a diversity class this semester and it helped with that tremendously with different religions that I've experienced, different languages, and I've experienced it, experienced the language and cultural barriers that a lot of people in my classes that haven't left the state, have no idea about.

Veterans saw the benefit and value of having experienced diversity. Veterans possessed experience and capability in working with others and interacting with different cultures.

One veteran saw the benefit of this experience when he stated: "The different experiences with the diversity . . . you can throw me in any situation and, like with the variety of people and I, I think I can do pretty good."

In summary, veterans had experience working with a wide range of people from different walks of life from many parts of the United States and the world. Most veterans had this experience before they stepped on a college campus for the first time. This experience, in turn, had benefited veterans in knowing how to work with people with whom they may have never met or may not get a choice in having to work together.

How the Military Experience Made the Adjustment to College Difficult

During the course of the interviews, veterans highlighted several ways in which their military experience made adjustment to college difficult. They noted that college life was less structured compared to the military, and this presented adjustment concerns. Veterans indicated concerns about lack of indoctrination and associating with others. Another difficulty in adjusting to college was the transition process from the military to college. Veterans brought with them some issues once the transition process began and some issues they did not recognize until after they began college. Another issue making the adjustment to college difficult was socialization and the inability to relate military

experiences to nonveterans. Age difference presented another difficulty for veterans because veterans compared themselves to other students. The last difficulty veterans experienced when adjusting to college was frustration with working on group projects; even though their military experience had accustomed them to teamwork, they were frustrated with other students who did not approach group work with the same sense of joint responsibility that the veterans did. These difficulties made adjustment to college difficult for veterans.

Lack of Direction

Veterans discovered that they were entering a different environment when they came to college. Veterans observed difficulties moving from the military to a less-structured college environment resulting in a lack of direction. Lack of direction emerged throughout many of the interviews in three distinct ways. First, the interviewees noted their surprise at the limited steps undertaken at college to orient them to their new environment. In contrast, they noted, the military had taken definite steps—basic training—to indoctrinate them to the military culture. Veterans experienced nothing close to this at college. For example, one veteran noted that:

There is no indoctrination when you switch from the military to a university. You're just expected to do it and that's what's scary, is like in that sense, yes they're both bureaucracies, yes there's certain people in charge of certain areas, yes, you have your certain, like instead of a job, this one's your certain degree, but how the systems work, who do you answer to, all that stuff. You just like, oh, here's a book, figure it out.

Second, and partially as a consequence of their limited indoctrination to college, the interviewees sometimes found it difficult to feel a sense of belonging in the college environment. This was highlighted by one interviewee's observations about the first day of class:

Then just the first day of class everybody's, I, how do I say this, first day of class when I came here, it was a little different, you know, not everybody's, you know in the military, you're like family. You're so cohesive, even when you bring in new soldiers you kind of get them into, you know, into the family, but, here in class you kind of like, everybody has their own little, clique, I guess. So that's kind of different.

A Navy veteran made another similar observation about his reaction to the first day of class:

I remember going to school . . . after the military, the first day back at school, and I was sitting in class, you know, before class starts, you know, and these people have their laptops and their I-Pads out, or whatever, and, and the teacher walks in and starts talking and I'm like waiting for all these people to put their stuff away, and I was like, what is going on here, you know, and then, the whole class, and then now, it's like you know the kids are sitting there with their laptops and everything and I'm like, what? We would've been shot, you know, the first time, I mean if, it just didn't happen. It wouldn't cross your mind to . . .

Third, veterans sometimes noted that they needed to adjust to an environment that provided little direct guidance. In the military, their lives had revolved around routine and constantly being instructed what to do, but this was not the case in college. Two veterans reflected on the divergence between their military and college experience. The first veteran stated:

You get so used to having to be somewhere at a certain time and then here it it's like they don't kind of look after you so much. Like in the military you are told you gotta to be here, here and here and you gotta be in a certain uniform to do a certain task, but here on this campus it is like, if your late there's no repercussions or anything like there would be in the military.

The second veteran offered a different perspective:

I think there is definitely a downside in the enculturation process. The two systems are completely different. The military is a lot more rigid and a lot more formal, whereas college is a lot more informal, and . . . you have more autonomy, so I think sometimes I . . . if I do have a struggle it's with . . . maybe doing things just to do them because I am supposed instead of being told what to do.

Still another veteran noted the amount of freedom in the college environment when he said:

You have a lot more freedom when you get to a university. You have the choice of are you going to show up to class, it's your money. If you show up and you pass the class, that's on you.

As a result of these differences, veterans understood they would need to approach college with a different mindset. As one interviewee put it, "It's a little bit of an adjustment from one way of thinking to another way of thinking." Veterans also realized that associating with others in this new environment was difficult. One veteran was having difficulty "adjusting to the atmosphere of how you're making new friends." Another veteran elaborated on her difficulty associating with others when she described this difficulty:

We don't have the same thing in common. I can't just walk up to somebody and be like; hey, where did you serve, you know, and people get kind of weirded out when you talk to them, they don't know you cause they're not used to that, cause in the military everybody, you're used to going up to strangers in the military, everybody has to go through that. You go through basic training with strangers, you know. You don't really know anybody usually, but in college, like, a lot of these kids know each other. They're from the same school, like the high school, but they get kind of weirded out when you're talking to them for no reason. So it is a little harder to make a connection.

Veterans had been surrounded by their peers while in the military, but not so much in college. Veterans saw themselves as being on their own in the college environment. As one veteran observed, "You are here and you are kind of like on your own." Another veteran compared the difference between the military and college. This veteran felt he was,

More of on your own, and that's, I think, civilians and that sort of thing. Maybe it's, I think that school is a lot more competitive. It's both

competitive, but the military is still kind of brothers on the same team.

This feeling of alienation was in stark contrast to the sense of cohesiveness the interviewees had experienced in the military. Two veterans had observations about the importance of cohesiveness, which was noticeably lacking in college. The first veteran stated:

Through the military, my experience there was, you weren't necessarily forced friends. Just because you work with some guy doesn't mean you have to be friends with them. At the same time you see them everyday, you deploy with them where you are seriously with them 24/7 for, however, long you might be deployed, a year or four months, whatever. So, you're not forced to be friends with them, but it's definitely an incentive because you work better when you are cohesive like that.

The second veteran commented about her lasting friendships because of cohesiveness:

In the military you somewhat can, really, because, even though, if you go to one duty station to another, you're still in contact with, with that same group, even with the same group that you deployed with. They are so family. I even still talk to the people that I even deployed with. That's been over, that's been what, three years now since I came back from Afghanistan, so I still talk to those people, but in class, I really don't talk to them. I only talk to some of them that I met in my other semester classes.

Veterans saw value in having peers and treating others like family. They appreciated the cohesiveness that bonded them with fellow service members while in the military.

In summary, veterans observed difficulties moving from the military to a less-structured college environment, thus resulting in the lack of direction. This lack of direction theme emerged throughout many of the interviews in three ways: lack of indoctrination, lack of sense of belonging and lack of guidance. Lack of guidance challenged veterans to change their mindset and presented difficulties associating with others. In addition to lack of direction, adjustment to college was further compounded with difficulties in the transition process.

Transition

Some veterans had difficulty transitioning from the military to college. Transition times from the military to college ranged from a couple of years to having no transition time. Only a few veterans waited a year or more before transitioning to college. The majority transitioned within six months between leaving the military and starting college. Difficulties in transitioning included unresolved personal issues, veteran misperceptions resulting from their transition mindset, disappointment in transition expectations, and the lingering effects of transition.

Veteran transition, the length of time between leaving the service and enrolling in college, ranged from “just about two years” to a much shorter transition period as explained by another veteran: “I was in Iraq, like April or something, and then I got out in the end of May. I had the bare minimum, like 45 days of transition, and then I went straight to school in August.” Another veteran had no transition when she reflected on her discharge from the military:

I got out on October 7th, so, and then, I was still, I was still going to classes, actually missed three weeks of classes cause I was, I hadn't got my orders, yet, so, I had to wait like three weeks, and missed class, and then I was out, then I went to my first day of class in October.

While a few transitions were relatively long, the majority were relatively short. This shortened transition time came with personal issues that were hidden from the veteran.

One veteran had not been aware of family issues during his deployment and was suddenly surprised when he returned from a deployment. This veteran described getting off the bus when he encountered:

My mom being in the middle of a divorce, my grandfather dying and just a bunch of family problems that they didn't let me know of while I was deployed because they didn't want those stresses to affect me any more

than they already did.

Another veteran, who eventually went to college but instead went straight into employment, knew about approaching personal issues when he was getting out, but, nevertheless, knew transitioning out was going to be difficult when he recalled:

When I got out, we were in the middle of a deployment, and like I said, I have a wife and a son, so the job was number one, you know, because getting out is a stressful situation and having a job is a big deal, especially when you have a family to support, so, and I was kind of at a, a disadvantage because I was deployed the six months before I go out, so it was not like I was, in [city] where the ship was stationed and I could take leave and fly to [city] and do an interview or, or go and look up jobs and call people and . . . I did it, I did my best, but I ended up having a job before I was even off the deployment, you know, well pending an interview or whatever, but it was all set up so then I got to my job and, and I knew I didn't want to go right into college because that, I felt like that would take away from like what I put into my job.

Issues resulting from transition included unrealistic expectations because veterans thought that leaving the military would make their lives easier and, secondly, misperceptions about the transition process and dealing with others. Veterans had a preconceived perspective of what re-entering the civilian world was supposed to be like. One veteran had a much different perspective about getting out of the military than what he actually experienced when he was discharged. This veteran admitted:

I didn't transition from soldier to civilian, so trying to transition from soldier to student was impossible not making that civilian transition first . . . so the first five months between once I got back and got into school was just a hell and then getting here, like I was like, ohh, this should be heaven compared to where I've been, and it wasn't.

Misperceptions about dealing with people was just as difficult, if not more difficult, than unrealized perceptions of the transition process. Veterans felt degraded because of their veteran status after the transition. One veteran reflecting on his military service and transition, observed that:

When I was in the military and as a veteran, I feel like I'm on a certain status. I'm on a certain par and when I'm transitioning I almost feel like I'm degrading myself to come on their terms because they lack the certain discipline to understand that no means no. However, being in the military, one of the things that you have, you have honor, you have loyalty, you have all those things. To degrade myself is like to take away everything that I've done in the past four years and I don't want to degrade myself.

Another veteran went further. He had difficulty dealing with others in a manner that was considered acceptable in the military, but not acceptable in college:

When someone does something just incredibly dumb or when they can't be relied upon, they say, I'll have the work done by 8 o'clock, and it's not done, I, one of the first things I want to do is scream and yell at 'em and say, hey; why didn't you get this done, and, it's, the transition of, you, I, it's not their fault, I mean they're not expecting that, it's, it's my fault for believing that I can treat people that way, so just the transition of working with people for so long and that was socially acceptable, and then moving into a different environment where that's far from socially acceptable.

Other veterans expressed this same frustration, but they also knew this was not acceptable behavior in the college setting.

Veterans indicated that they were still transitioning while in college. Transition had not ended for them. One veteran reflected on how he would go to family and friends for advice in dealing with college situations when he said:

Well, I'm still transitioning. I was constantly going to friends and family asking them how to deal with certain situations because I knew it wasn't socially acceptable, but, these certain things, but I didn't know exactly how to handle it, but, I can't say definitively that the transition is over, even yet. So, I still think of it as, the transitioning is still happening, but most of it already happened within the first year.

Veteran transition, or the length of time between leaving the service and enrolling in college, was not a defined period of time. This is contrary to the perception that the time period for transition was between when the veteran left the military and when he or she entered college, essentially the same period of time one leaves one phase of life and

enters another phase of life. The transition for veterans extended beyond the time when the veteran entered college.

In summary, some veterans had difficulty in transitioning into college. This difficulty took the form of transition times between leaving the military and entering college, difficulties in unresolved personal issues during the transition process, disappointment in transition expectations, and lingering effects of transition beyond the veteran entering college.

Socialization

In addition to transition difficulties, socialization was another difficulty encountered by veterans in college. Veterans tended to socialize less than most other college students. Veterans attributed this to three issues: difficulty in relating to others, reluctance in translating military context into explanations for nonveterans, and perception that veterans' stories and experiences were unappreciated.

Veterans were aware of challenges posed by socialization in nonveteran or nonmilitary environments. One veteran admitted it when he stated: "Yeah, I guess the most difficult part for me would definitely probably be relating to other students . . . there's fewer students that you can relate to I feel like." Veterans attributed this lack of socialization to the difficulty of explaining the military to nonveterans and the reluctance to do so. As one Army veteran explained,

You're thinking of a military experience you had that relates to a conversation you're having with another student in regards to whatever homework you're doing, and you're trying to take it out of military context and put it into what a civilian could relate to. And it's very difficult. It is very difficult.

This same veteran explained that a contributing challenge was the difficulty of avoiding

military jargon or references that helped her make sense of things but that were not understood by nonveterans:

I would come back from a deployment and I'd be dropping Army jargon and acronyms, left and right. For example, FOB, Forward Operating Base, totally military jargon . . . Might get it. But, no, if you're talking about that in a classroom situation, people would go, and they don't ask you, what does that mean, what does that mean, what does that mean, because all they hear is military, military, military, and you're like, no, I'm trying to not be military, I swear.

Veterans also socialized less with others because they felt what they had to say was unappreciated and had little to no value. One veteran made this observation when it came to socializing and military experiences: "Socializing was difficult only because, all I have are military stories. People don't want to hear military stories 24/7. They can't relate."

Another veteran summed it up when he made this statement regarding veteran experiences:

I don't really feel like [institution] embraces their veterans for the true resource they could provide. Could that be student led, could that be university led; I don't know. But, I think there is a vast amount of information out there that all our veterans have in their experiences, but I think sometimes it is kind of brushed underneath the rug thinking that everybody has a traumatizing experience and they don't know how to cope with racial diversity, or prejudice, or bias, or whatever it may be.

In summary, veterans socialized less than traditional college students. Veterans attributed their lack of socialization to three factors: difficulty in relating to others, reluctance in translating military context into explanations for nonveterans, and perception of veterans' stories and experiences being unappreciated. Another difficulty encounter by veterans in college was age difference.

Difference in Age

Veterans were older than most of the traditional college-aged student population. Veterans gave up a period of their lives for military service. In return, they received an educational benefit that allowed them to attend college, something they might otherwise have not been able to do. Veterans perceived their age difference in negative terms because they felt their age put them at a disadvantage, led them to experience culture shock, burdened them with responsibilities that other students did not have, and sometimes led them to feel less accomplished than the younger students they worked with in terms of the academic progress they had made.

As older students, the veterans were keenly aware that they were different from other students. One veteran commented that:

Yeah, I don't feel like I'm the traditional college student. I just feel like they still see us as . . . again, it's no fault of the teachers. They just adjust as they see fit. Sometimes I think that some teachers probably forget that there's students in their classes that are not these high school, new to college, not new to college in the sense that they came straight from high school, but they're new to the college in the sense that they've done a job, or they've been in their career from four to 20 something years.

Another veteran recalled the difference in age and how he felt because of it when he returned from another deployment:

So then I was recalled to return to Afghanistan and came back, back to [institution] to finish up my degree, and I would say the second time around it was, like the first, but just even a little bit harder. I knew how to, I guess, I had some of the tools to integrate into the school a little better since I knew what to expect coming back the second time, but it seems like now there's more of an age difference, and things like that so I was a little more, I feel on a different kind of level or something than a lot of my classmates at that point.

Another veteran observed expectations of herself because of her age:

I think age has a thing to do with it . . . see it kind of as a setback . . . I just started out in a program this summer, so my first semester here . . . and

people are asking me how [institution] has helped me, what they have done, and it's my first semester. I have no idea. I haven't even walked all around campus, yet.

Other veterans saw a form of culture shock when they reflected on their age difference to the point that it troubled them. One veteran recalled:

And there was, and the whole, you know, maybe, being older, too, and you know, I can't . . . it takes every ounce of energy not to, not to turn around and start yelling at somebody when they're, when they're doing stupid things in the middle . . . like they'll start talking. That's one thing I can't take is . . . I'm sitting there and I'm trying to learn, you know, and, and, and there's people talking, or, doing something, if you . . . now I, I had my last class today, now I, especially, you know, my chemistry class cause I sit kind of far away from the projector, so I, I can go on-line and pull up the book, so I, as she's going through examples and stuff. I'll have the book up on my computer and that's great, you know and I like it, but, you know, there's other people that are looking at ESPN, or whatever, you know, and it, like I said, takes every ounce of energy, people talking, just not turn around and tell them to knock it off, you know, but so far, so good, I guess.

Another veteran had a similar observation without as noticeable of a reaction and offered a way to resolve the issue had she been in the military:

I think the only thing I've noticed that might be a negative is that I'm working with kids. Like, they're all like 19, 20, 21, 22. I'm 28, so there's kind of a disconnect, like they don't act the way I expect them to. I get the same thing with the young airmen, but, I mean, there's like discipline and structure, but if airmen act stupid I can go to their supervisor.

Some veterans perceived college as a culture shock because they were unable to enforce consequences for what they perceived as misbehavior. One veteran recalled how what once may not have been difficult or a concern became a challenge now that he was older:

I mean it certainly wasn't the case before. If I, you know, high school or college the first time that, you know, if I get something, it's like okay, whatever. Now it's just like, you know, I want to know it and everything and I, and I feel frustrated that I've, you know, maybe I'm, maybe its part that maybe I'm just older than everybody else and I have like, that like, maybe I feel like I should, it should kind of be easier for me, I guess because I've been through so much, and you know, and this is something

that 19 year-olds are living now or whatever it might be, maybe it's frustration or, but when I can't get something I can't put it down until I figure it out.

Another veteran observed the increased level of responsibility when he compared himself to others:

Don: Yeah, definitely. Some of the guys I've met around here do have a lot more free time than I do. They don't have to mow a yard, fix . . . worry about an income. Maybe, they don't have to work. The level of responsibility just being independent does cost some, I guess. Some issues there.

Interviewer: So the level of responsibility actually has changed significantly?

Don: I would say so. Oh, yeah, yeah, from my first try at college at [institution], definitely.

Veterans felt they had much more responsibility than other students on college campuses.

Veterans attributed this to their age difference. Veterans also had feelings they had not accomplished as much as they should have. Veterans felt this way because they compared their own progress in college to other younger students in college. Veterans, while they may have been older students, perceived themselves as either being behind or at about the same level of academic progress towards their degree with the other younger students. One veteran had a couple of observations about this perspective:

Sometimes I think that, at my age, I just want to be done and it makes me feel kind of incompetent whenever they're other people like 10 years younger than me starting out and they're gonna be graduating before the age where I even started.

This same veteran also had an observation about herself and others on campus when she expressed this:

So, when you're walking on campus you're kind of thinking, wow, these people, well they're probably six years younger than me and, you know, I'm almost gonna be at the same place at graduation. . . . But it's that

perception that it's like I, I feel I should be doing more, I should have accomplished more.

Veterans compared their ages to the ages of others and correlated this with a common endpoint: graduation. Veterans saw this as a letdown when they equated their older age to this perception of a lowered level of accomplishment.

In summary, veterans perceived their age as a detriment to their college experience for a number of reasons. They attributed these factors to their own negative perceptions of themselves being older students. Veterans perceived their age difference in negative terms because they felt their age put them at a disadvantage, led to culture shock, increased their level of responsibility compared to other students, and was associated with feelings, or the perception, of a lack of accomplishment. Just like challenges with age difference, veterans also faced challenges working on group projects.

Working on Group Projects

Despite veterans' experience and ability to collaborate in group work, veterans had a very difficult time working on groups projects with other college students. Factors that made working in college groups difficult included: frustration, lack of military group project dynamics, lack of consequences for nonparticipation, lack of team member responsibility, and veteran reaction to being unable to enforce consequences for team member nonperformance. One veteran summarized group work succinctly: "I hate doing group work." Another veteran recalled the difficulty in getting a team together:

I know how to work as a team and it's hard to find a team out here . . . I get into the classroom and I'm more apt to work with my peers in getting us a task done, because to me, the goal for us as students is for everybody to get an A. It's not a competition from individual to individual. You see that a lot with other peers. It's that, oh, I'm not going to share this information, my notes or anything because this is mine. No, it's a collective working together, and in the military, if I was taking this class

with my squad, we would all be sharing notes, we would be working together, and that's the biggest difference. So, when I fell into problems in the classroom on my own, I didn't have that person to lean on in there to help me through it.

Another veteran admitted his displeasure in working with other students in group projects when he compared working as an individual and working in teams. He said, "Group work annoyed me. Individual work I was okay with, but what was difficult for me to accept was group work. It was real tough working with groups." Another veteran simply liked the way the military did group work compared to college when he said:

I just dreaded any class that would be group related because I had no idea what the performance of those students would be, whereas in the military when you're in uniform and everybody is in uniform it's like, we're going to meet to do this project at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday. Okay, it's a given, everybody's there at 10:00 a.m.

Veterans were conditioned to expect a predetermined leadership role and to have little difficulty in getting a team together. One veteran noticed drastic differences in leadership roles between military and college when he observed: "The main difference in that situation versus your college situation is there is a clear line of who's supposed to be in charge . . . protocol determines who is supposed to be in charge."

Another veteran was disappointed when developing a group project team in college when he recalled:

Your squad is designated to you. There are no factors here. You have to find it . . . people you know, you got to fit in, and it's hard to fit in when you're older. You have tons more experience. You don't hold the same values on things, just difficult.

Veterans disliked the lack of consequences for one's own actions. One veteran mentioned the lack of a *standard* when he stated: ". . . but they're not held to a standard like the military where you could be punished for not being there to do your work."

Another veteran elaborated on a *standard* and the inability to delegate when he said:

I needed to, you know, I was performing my job, performing it up to standard. . . . I guess my most recent one was, it wasn't a real difficult project, probably worked two hours as a team. I haven't really seen how other teams interact and how they can plan stuff, I mean, I feel like I always seem to be the one to initiate it, whether form the team itself, or designate a time, or what I'm going to be doing versus what somebody else's part of the job, might even, or the project might be. That, I try not, I mean, I'm not in the military any more, I can't delegate that.

An Air Force veteran put her experience in these terms when she had the capability to enforce a *standard* and hold one to a *standard* in the military. She recalled:

In the military, if my team didn't want to pull their weight, if someone didn't want to do it, then I know I could go to their supervisor and complain and they would probably get written up, but in college I have a group project and two of the people aren't doing their work, but I've got no one to complain to. . . . as opposed to when you're in the college setting there are no consequences for not doing the task that everybody is supposed to be doing on their part.

Veterans were frustrated with other project members who were not taking responsibility for their part of the project. One veteran expressed his frustration when he reflected:

Group assignments, big one. In economics we have a term called a free rider. . . . it is basically someone who, if you have a group, there's always going to be that one individual who just kind of coasts along and plays along like they're partaking in things, but really, they're not.

One veteran compared group project participation in the military and in college when he recounted:

Having come from a place where, if it's a group project in the military and you're one of five members, not one member is going to be late, all five will be there. Not one member will . . . all individual members will have their stuff done. You'll be ready to participate with your group.

In this same veteran's college experience, he said:

Three of us got together to start working on what needed to be done, that

we were counting on each other for our grade, and we were each supposed to do some groundwork. I was the only who got my groundwork done; the two of them had zero work done. . . . It was just easier to tell them, forget it, I'll do it and I'll submit it for our grade.

Veterans became distressed when they experienced frustrations working on group projects and they could not enforce consequences. One veteran noted:

That was kind of a shock and difficult to deal with because, I so bad, as a Senior Non Commissioned Officer, wanted to yell at 'em and tell 'em pull their head out of their four-point contact and perform like they're supposed to, but they're not held to a standard, well, they're held to a grading standard, but they're not held to a standard like the military where you could be punished for not being there to do your work.

Another veteran had a more blunt perspective when he reflected on his frustration:

That's the kind of the bad aspect of it; there was myself and another veteran, she was [military branch], currently in the military, we were in a group project with five other students, had no military experience, this is the first place outside of home that they've really been to, and we, we struggled really hard working with these kids because we spent more of our time trying to bring them into working on this group project for the first half of the semester. We talked to the professor and he wouldn't do anything about it; said it's simulating business life and you have to work with people that generally don't work and so find a way around it, and we put a lot of effort to including these kids and they put a lot of effort into avoiding doing any work, and there came a point where, I'm sure you've seen *Full Metal Jacket* with R. Lee Ermey. That's, that's not a . . . for Marines that's not a negative stereotype. I, I almost went drill instructor on them. I never was a drill instructor, but I thought, I've tried being nice, I've tried bribery, I'll buy pizza if we do this, and I just got to the point where I wanted to flip a table and start screaming and yelling at them, because that's what works in the Marines. I mean, if someone isn't pulling their weight, you scream and yell at them, embarrass them in front of everyone and they get their act together, but, thought about it and that's really not how college kids are equipped to handle situations and didn't want to be kicked out of school.

Veterans became frustrated and knew the root cause for their frustration working in groups; and, yet, they were almost helpless in coming to terms in dealing with this dilemma.

In summary, veterans had a difficult time working on group projects with other college students. Factors that made working in college groups included frustration, loss of military group project dynamics, lack of consequences for nonparticipation, lack of team member responsibility and veteran reaction to being unable to enforce team member nonperformance. Nevertheless, veterans knew the consequence in this dilemma was their grade for the project.

Chapter Summary

This chapter focused on military experiences that helped veterans adjust to college and made adjustment to college difficult. The important findings from this study concluded military experiences that helped veterans adjust to college included: 1) collaborating in groups, 2) high expectations, 3) organization and task, 4) experienced learning, and 5) working with others. The analysis of interviews, data and coding produced the following findings that helped veterans adjust to college:

- 1) Veterans were well prepared for collaborating in groups. Despite frustration concerns encountered working on group projects, veterans had military experience working on projects and correlated this experience to the classroom group project environment.
- 2) Veterans had high expectations. Veterans were conditioned to present themselves with a sense of professionalism. Veterans were also punctual and had the expectation of being on time for class.
- 3) Veterans liked organization and tasks. Veterans came to college with the organizational skills of planning, being prepared, adapting, being methodical and prioritizing. Veterans were also task-oriented. Veterans associated

military terminology to collegiate terms and incorporated this military terminology into their college experience.

- 4) Veterans were experienced learners. Veterans had been conditioned to the learning process in the military through military training and college courses while in the military. After transitioning to college, veterans had already developed a learning mindset.
- 5) Veterans were experienced when it came to working with others. Veterans arrived on college campuses with much experience, already having interacted with different populations and cultures.

The important findings from this study also concluded that military experiences that made adjustment to college difficult included: 1) less structured college life, 2) transition, 3) socialization, 4) difference in age, and 5) working on group projects. The analysis of interviews, data and coding produced the following findings that made adjustment to college difficult for veterans:

- 1) Veterans had difficulty with lack of direction. The challenges for veterans included a lack of indoctrination, lack of sense of belonging, lack of guidance, change of mindset and difficulty in associating with others.
- 2) Veterans had difficulty with transitioning from the military to college. Transition for veterans varied and was not a definitive period of time. Transition issues for the veteran lingered and extended beyond the time after the veteran entered college.
- 3) Veterans had difficulty with socialization. Veterans socialized much less than most other college students. Veterans had difficulty communicating military

experiences to nonveterans. Veterans also felt their own stories and experiences were unappreciated.

- 4) Veterans had difficulty in coming to terms with age difference. Veterans perceived their age difference in negative terms because of feelings their age put them at a disadvantage, there was a culture shock of being older, there was an increased level of responsibility, and they had perceptions about their own lack of accomplishment.
- 5) Veterans were frustrated when working on group projects. Despite veterans being well-prepared and experienced working on team and group projects, they had a very difficult time working on group projects with other college students. Veterans were unable to hold anyone to *standards* or expectations. Veterans were unable to implement or enforce consequences for nonperformance of other group members.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This study examined how veterans' military experiences affected their experiences as college students. Chapter One detailed the research problem, conceptual framework, significance of the study, and study limitation. The study's conceptual framework incorporated Tinto's model of institutional departure and Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation. The study drew on interviews with 26 veterans attending six colleges in Illinois.

Several themes emerged from the interviews. Some of those themes related to how the military experience helped veterans adjust to college. Specifically, the interviews revealed that veterans' military experience was helpful in five ways. First, many indicated that the teamwork emphasized in the military prepared them for collaboration in classroom group work. This can be seen, for example, in the observation of an Army veteran who noted:

I mean, the group work of, it's very similar in the sense of, it's a group of people who may have never worked together before who are getting lumped together and told to get a job done. So, that's no different than a team that you might get stuck with for a deployment.

Second, interviews also revealed that the military experience instilled high expectations in the veterans in terms of their work as college students. This was especially evident in the pride they took in presenting themselves to others with a sense of professionalism, in their interactions with course instructors, and in other behaviors,

including being on time for class. The remarks of a former Marine illustrated this example of presenting one with a sense of professionalism:

It's one of those things . . . students I see, sometimes, they're like dragging their feet, tired, unprepared, and I wake up and, I'm like, ready to go. I'll walk to class, talk with a different style than most students do. It's just one of those things the Marines help to be successful, not just in the military, but also outside of it.

An Air Force veteran expressed her expectation of how to address an instructor in a professional manner when she noted:

If you know somebody has a doctorate, you do not call them Mr. or Ms. It just ticks me off. This is one pet peeve, it just, it just, no, they earned their title, and to me, it's like calling a sergeant, or a, like calling a Master Sergeant, Sarge. I'm like, that is not appropriate.

Still, another veteran reflected on how he presented himself while in class. He observed:

How I actually dictate my own self in class, is pretty well compared to some of the other ones since they weren't in the military; like I feel like, that like I pay attention better, attention to detail they taught me and how to, how to act towards your superiors and all that stuff.

The commitment to being punctual was also emphasized. As one veteran put it,

If I have a project or a group meeting going on, I show up to that meeting 15 minutes before it starts. I, they're commitments to me just like they were in the military. I have to be there. It's not an option.

Third, veterans embraced organization and a high task orientation. For instance, some veterans entered college prior to enlisting and noted how their subsequent military experience led them to become more focused in their work. One veteran recalled:

Before it was kind, what I was supposed do. That was the deal getting out of high school. You go to college, or you go maybe to a trade school or work some fairly low wage job, maybe minimum wage. It was that next step when I went to [institution]. That's what I was supposed to do . . . whereas, the second time around, my idea, my focus, one of my main reasons going into the military was the educational benefit. There was a

lot more actually gained through that experience, but, so I was working those six years, spending that time in the service and having worked for my education. I feel like now I appreciate it more and I do see the benefit, I guess the long term goal for myself.

Veterans also approached their coursework in ways that reflected their military training.

For example, one veteran saw a connection between military and college learning when he stated:

Well, my military experience, whenever I'm doing any of my class work or anything that's done here. I always draw back to any training that I had to go through like NCO Academy or those sorts of things and. . . . I was trying to remember that those were hectic and a lot of times. . . . Time was kind of crunch sometimes for school work, also. So, I try to remember that I went through those things while in the military. If I did okay with that, I should do okay in school. I should just plan my time accordingly like in like they taught me to in the [NCO] Academy or any other training that I had to go through in the military.

Veterans also used terminology associated with the military and applied it to their college experience. One veteran noted:

I would say the course is the theater of war, it's a deployment. That could be correlated that, whereas, a homework assignment could be correlated to a mission within that deployment. Once the semester is over and that course is over . . . you go into your decompression state and leave your theater of war to head back home.

Fourth, veterans were experienced learners prior to arriving to college. Veterans had developed a learning mindset from the military. As one Air Force veteran recounted,

Definitely, the military taught me how to learn, if that makes sense. Before I came into the military, high school was awful. I did the bare minimum. I was a sports addict. I just did what I needed to do to get by and my grades weren't good. And then, joining the military and having to learn your job or get kicked out. That's your livelihood. You have to learn it and you have to buckle down. Do what you need to do to succeed. So, that definitely translated to college.

Finally, veterans possessed experience working with others who were from different backgrounds and applied this experience to working in groups. One veteran

summed it up when she explained:

I got an exposure to the world I would have never had . . . I've been to 23 countries in less than five years, all over Southeast Asia, Africa and the Middle East, and all over Europe . . . I've seen how other cultures work, I've interacted with other cultures. . . . Everybody comes from these different backgrounds, too, so, I mean, you look at the university and you have people from all over the state or all over the nation that you're in classes with. It's no different.

On the other hand, some of the themes emerging in the interviews suggested how the military experience made adjustment to college difficult. More specifically, interviews also revealed that the veterans' military experiences were not helpful in five ways. First, many veterans indicated difficulty in adjusting to the lack of direction that characterized college life and made it much different than what they had experienced in the military. This lack of direction was evident to the veterans in the lack of indoctrination they received as college students, in the limited guidance they experienced as students, and in the lack of cohesiveness they felt on campus. One veteran noted that,

There is no indoctrination when you switch from the military to a university. You're just expected to do it and that's what's scary, is like in that sense, yes they're both bureaucracies . . . you're just like, oh, here's a book, figure it out.

The lack of guidance was reflected in the observations of another veteran:

I think there is definitely a downside in the enculturation process. The two systems are completely different. The military is a lot more rigid and a lot more formal; whereas college is a lot more informal . . . I do have a struggle.

Additionally, veterans noticed a lack of cohesiveness in college. One veteran noted the profound lack of cohesiveness in college when she reflected on friendships in the military. She recounted:

In the military . . . you're still in contact with, with that same group, even with the same group that you deployed with. They are so family. I even

still talk to the people that I even deployed with. That's been over, that's been what, three years now since I came back from Afghanistan, so I still talk to those people, but in class, I really don't talk to them. I only talk to some of them that I met in my other semester classes.

Second, veterans encountered difficulties transitioning from the military to college. Difficulties associated with transition included unresolved personal issues and the stress experienced in transitioning from the military to civilian life. One veteran had many family problems that were kept from him while on deployment. When he returned home he found out:

My mom being in the middle of a divorce, my grandfather dying and just a bunch of family problems that they didn't let me know of while I was deployed because they didn't want those stresses to affect me any more than they already did.

Another veteran recounted his challenges when getting out of the military and seeking employment before going to college. He retraced his journey:

When I got out, we were in the middle of a deployment, and like I said, I have a wife and a son, so, the job was number one, you know, because getting out is a stressful situation and having a job is a big deal, especially when you have a family to support . . . but I ended up having a job before I was even off the deployment . . . and I knew I didn't want to go right into college because that, I felt like that would take away from like what I put into my job.

Another veteran recalled his experience of how he thought things would be after he got out of the military and how things actually were after getting out of the military. This veteran noted: "Once I got back and got into school was just a hell and then getting here, like I was like, ohh, this should be heaven compared to where I've been, and it wasn't."

Another veteran noted his transition was not over when he said:

Well, I'm still transitioning. I was constantly going to friends and family asking them how to deal with certain situations because I knew it wasn't socially acceptable, but, these certain things, but I didn't know exactly how to handle it, but, I can't say definitively that the transition is over,

even yet.

Third, veterans socialized less than other students because they found it difficult relating to others. Veterans also avoided discussing military context with nonveterans and felt that their experiences were not appreciated. One veteran admitted “the most difficult part for me would definitely probably be relating to other students.” Another veteran explained the efforts she made to avoid bringing military context into conversations:

You’re thinking of a military experience you had that relates to a conversation you’re having with another student . . . you’re trying to take it out of military context and put it into what a civilian could relate to and it’s very difficult. It is very difficult.

Another veteran expressed his perception of the lack of appreciation of veteran experiences when he stated:

I don’t really feel like [institution] embraces their veterans for the true resource they could provide. . . . But, I think there is a vast amount of information out there that all our veterans have in their experiences, but I think sometimes it is kind of brushed underneath the rug thinking that everybody has a traumatizing experience.

Fourth, veterans had difficulty coming to terms with their age. For example, one veteran explained how she compared herself to others:

I think age has a thing to do with it . . . see it kind of as a setback . . . I just started out in a program this summer, so my first semester here . . . and people are asking me how [institution] has helped me . . . I have no idea. I haven’t even walked all around campus, yet.

Another veteran experienced culture shock because of his difference in age. This veteran recalled:

And there was . . . maybe, being older, too . . . it takes every ounce of energy not to, not to turn around and start yelling at somebody when they’re doing stupid things in the middle . . . like they’ll start talking. That’s one thing I can’t take is . . . I’m sitting there and I’m trying to learn,

you know, and, and, and there's people talking, or, doing something, if you...now I, I had my last class today, now I, especially, you know, my chemistry class cause I sit kind of far away from the projector, so I, I can go on-line and pull up the book, so I, as she's going through examples and stuff. I'll have the book up on my computer and that's great, you know and I like it, but, you know, there's other people that are looking at ESPN, or whatever, you know, and it, like I said, takes every ounce of energy, people talking, just not turn around and tell them to knock it off, you know, but so far, so good, I guess.

The responsibilities that come with being older were also viewed as a hindrance. For example, one veteran compared his level of responsibility to the responsibilities faced by younger students:

Some of the guys I've met around here do have a lot more free time than I do. They don't have to mow a yard, fix . . . worry about an income. Maybe, they don't have to work. The level of responsibility just being independent does cost some, I guess. Some issues there.

One veteran perceived herself as being behind the other younger students when working towards her degree because of her age. This veteran noted:

Sometimes I think that, at my age, I just want to be done and it makes me feel kind of incompetent whenever they're other people like 10 years younger than me starting out and they're gonna be graduating before the age where I even started.

Fifth, although the veterans had become used to teamwork in the military and put that experience to good use in group projects, many nonetheless felt frustrated with other students in those groups who did not pull their weight in group projects or who did not exhibit a sense of responsibility to other group members. For example, one veteran speaking about group dynamics observed that "the main difference in that [military] situation versus your college situation is there is a clear line of who's supposed to be in charge." This wasn't the case in groups formed to carry out course assignments, nor did these groups carry the same weight in the college culture as they did in the military

culture. As another veteran observed, “Your squad is designated to you. There are no factors here. You have to find it.” An Air Force veteran expressed frustration with the lack of accountability that characterized her group work experiences in college and stood in sharp contrast with what she had experienced in the military. She recalled:

In the military, if my team didn’t want to pull their weight, if someone didn’t want to do it, then I know I could go to their supervisor and complain and they would probably get written up . . . when you’re in the college setting there are no consequences for not doing the task that everybody is supposed to be doing on their part.

Veterans were annoyed when project members did not take responsibility for their part of the group project. One veteran gave an example of this lack of responsibility when he said:

Group assignments, big one. In economics we have a term called a free rider. . . . it is basically someone who, if you have a group, there’s always going to be that one individual who just kind of coasts along and plays along like they’re partaking in things, but really, they’re not.

Veterans also became frustrated at not being able to enforce consequences. One seasoned veteran noted:

That was kind of a shock and difficult to deal with because, I so bad, as a Senior Non Commissioned Officer, wanted to yell at ’em and tell ’em pull their head out of their four-point contact and perform like they’re supposed to, but they’re not held to a standard, well, they’re held to a grading standard, but they’re not held to a standard like the military where you could be punished for not being there to do your work.

In summation, the interviews revealed that the military experience helped veterans adjust to college life in five ways: veterans were well prepared for collaborating in groups, they had high expectations of themselves, they were organized and task oriented, they were experienced learners, and they were experienced when it came to working with others from different backgrounds. On the other hand, the veterans found

adjustment to college life difficult in many ways: they were often frustrated with the lack of direction they received in college and with the limited cohesiveness they experienced in the college culture; they often experienced stressful personal difficulties in transitioning to civilian life; they found it difficult to socialize with other students; they had difficulty in coming to terms with the age difference between them and other students; and they were frustrated when working on group projects with other students who failed to carry out their responsibilities and suffered no consequences.

Discussion

Livingston (2009) suggested a research study “on the effect military influence has on student veterans’ college experience” (p. 190). Lolatte (2010) conducted a research study on college choice “to develop an understanding of the experiences that veterans have transitioning from military service to a land grant four year institution of higher education” (p. 8). Rumann (2010) conducted a research study on the transition experiences of veterans re-enrolling in a community college after returning from military deployments. These studies reflect the importance and impact of veteran experiences, acknowledging that the college experience of veterans is at least partially a function of their military experience.

Research conducted by Carne (2011), Capps (2011), and Barnhart (2011) also noted the perspectives of veterans in college. Carne’s (2011) research focused on student veterans who served in the Middle East. She came to the conclusion, as this study does, that “Veteran students should be provided with orientations to college culture to avoid conflicts, misunderstanding, and need to become informed about basic knowledge and appropriate behavior” (Carne, 2011, p. 124). Carne (2011) identified difficulties in

transition when she noted:

Veteran students really straddle three cultures: the culture they have returned from or military culture in general, the culture they have recently returned to (home), and university culture. This means they must, in a sense, become tri-cultural very quickly. (p. 125)

The qualitative portion of her mixed-methods study was limited in scope to one study site, and to veterans attending anthropology courses “at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs” (Carne, 2011, p. 63). The study detailed in my dissertation, which included the insights of a wider population of veterans, also identified a need for college orientation services.

Capps’ (2011) research studied “factors that motivated veteran students to persist from matriculation to goal completion” at a community college (p. 10). Among the study findings were the conclusions that “the majority of veterans felt that their transition to college was normal” (p. 85), and that “almost half of the veterans found it difficult to deal with nonveteran students” (Capps, 2011, p. 87). This is similar to the findings of this dissertation study. As noted in the previous chapter, veterans faced difficulties in dealing with other students, primarily because of their age difference and having to work with them in groups.

Barnhart (2011) studied the “the relationship of academic and social integration to educational persistence for military veterans in two-year colleges” (p. 15). Among his findings were the conclusions that “there were no differences in academic or social integration” between veterans and nonveterans (p. 131) and that “social integration indexes were virtually identical for veterans and nonveterans on all statistical tests from this research” (Barnhart, 2011, p. 138). Barnhart (2011) concluded there was no difference in social integration for veterans; however, this study did note difficulties in

social integration. Clearly, more research is needed on how and under what circumstances veterans fully socialize into college life and, on the other hand, how and under what circumstances veterans find it difficult to do this.

Larson (1990) recognized that veterans socialized differently, and one of his study's findings was that veterans were not too reliant on "interpersonal relationships with other students" (Larson, 1990, pp. 139). McNealy (2004) also studied veterans, identifying the need for support services because of the lack of their educational socialization. The findings in these studies indicate that socialization in college can, as noted above, be problematic for veterans. As noted in the previous chapter, the findings of this dissertation study echo this concern. Some of the interviewees chose not to socialize, sometimes because of family and job obligations. However, some wanted to socialize but found it difficult to bridge the gap between the military culture they had been used to and the civilian culture of their fellow students.

This study focused on any military veteran who received G.I. Bill benefits, regardless of whether or not they had been deployed during their service or what type of higher education institution they attended. The study results also highlight what previous studies have confirmed: that the college experience is affected by the military experience, that veterans often face a gulf between the military culture they are used to and the very different collegiate culture they find themselves in, that this gulf may be wider and more daunting for some veterans than it is for others, and that services aimed at veterans need to help them bridge this military-college divide. Socialization, as discussed by Tinto (1987), came to the forefront as an important issue. On the one hand, the interviewees noted that the military experience provided them with skills and dispositions needed to

succeed in the academic arena; they were experienced in learning, working with others, meeting deadlines, and group collaboration. On the other hand, social integration was more challenging because of the fact that the veterans were moving from one culture to a very different one, making it difficult to forge close ties with fellow students.

Recommendations

This study focused on how veterans perceived their military experience affected their higher education experience. Four important recommendations for practice emerged from the findings.

Recommendation 1. *The military and higher education institutions should assist in the military-to-college transition process. The military can offer transition assistance for veterans choosing to go to college after discharge rather than to find civilian employment. Higher education can also offer transition assistance in a format that mirrors the military Transition Assistance Program (TAP), which veterans will be very familiar with. This can be offered formally for veterans once they begin their college experience. Transition assistance can also be offered informally on an as-needed, walk-in, or appointment basis for those who seek occasional assistance.*

As noted in the previous chapter, some of the interviewees in this study mentioned the TAP's program but felt it was more helpful to those transitioning to the civilian workforce. Military transition assistance for veterans, if not already being offered, could be modified to offer transition assistance geared toward those who plan on attending college in lieu of returning to the workforce.

Colleges and universities could also offer additional transition assistance such as one-on-one academic advisement from the first semester through degree completion, a

scavenger hunt to discover available college resources on campus, workshops on how to adapt veterans to the less-structured college environment, group discussions on the expectations of college as compared to the military, and simulations of classroom experiences. Colleges and universities could offer these transition services in workshop formats that are similar to those provided by the military TAP program. One veteran suggested: “maybe we should have something like that whereas a couple weeks. . . the veterans get together and take a class together . . . like another TAP’s.”

Recommendation 2. Veterans welcome some form of college orientation specifically targeted towards them. These orientations could run in tandem with the transition services noted above and should be targeted towards all veterans regardless of the conditions in which they served.

Veterans were supportive of college orientation. An orientation could help veterans adjust to the college culture, learn about available services, and provide an opportunity for networking. This orientation can be relatively brief and offered either as a workshop or college course. In veteran parlance, this “basic training” can range anywhere from a workshop that lasts from one to three days to a transferrable college-level orientation course that specifically targets veteran students to help them understand the college culture and other issues first-time college students face. This course would also serve a networking and support function, allowing veterans to share experiences and gain confidence in their ability to complete a transferable, college-level course. A veteran offered suggestions for an orientation. She suggested:

An orientation . . . where to find the rules, any kind of teaching setting, you get inundated with so much, you’re not going to retain everything. You’re going to forget something, so you need not only to have that information available to you and given to you from the get-go, but also a

resource in which to find that information if you don't remember it.

Recommendation 3. The military and higher education should offer assistance that addresses the idiosyncrasies of veteran socialization. Some veterans indicated they had socialization issues and desired assistance to address this issue.

Assistance focusing on veteran socialization would be voluntary because some veterans seem concerned about their socialization while other veterans felt they socialized just fine or chose not to socialize. Social integration at college was difficult for veterans for a variety of reasons. For example, one veteran noted awkwardness when she recounted: "I didn't know how to be able to approach people, especially a different age limit, age difference, so I didn't want to make it awkward that someone who is way older talking to them." Other veterans who did not socialize cited obligations outside of college that limited their presence on campus. As one interviewee commented:

I know there are services available. I haven't actually gotten into them or anything like that because it's difficult maybe in...I'm not gonna drive an hour to come to a meeting or something, it's, I don't know, I just, it's difficult. Just being a commuter is difficult and I know a lot of veterans aren't going to be, on campus, necessarily.

Recommendation 4. Colleges and universities should implement mentoring and peer counseling programs.

This study discovered that veterans lost the sense of cohesiveness when they transitioned to the less-structured collegiate environment. Veterans were surrounded by their peers while in the military, but not in college. As one veteran observed, "You are here and you are kind of like on your own." Veterans saw and understood value in having peers and treating others like family. They appreciated the cohesiveness that bonded them with fellow service members while in the military. Colleges and

universities should implement mentoring and peer counseling programs to address this need. Mentoring and peer counseling are valuable, simple, effective, and cost-efficient strategies that can be incorporated into existing veteran services and support programs.

Future Research

Based upon the findings of this study, future research should focus on three themes. First, future research is needed on the socialization of veterans into the campus community. Some of the interviewees in this study opted not to socialize with others, but others who wanted to socialize found it difficult to do so. Future studies could determine if this is related to military experience or some other factor, such as age. Second, future investigations could examine the ways nonveterans (e.g., students, instructors, and administrators) perceive veterans. These studies could determine the accuracy of these perceptions and how they affect the extent to which campus cultures are welcoming to veterans. Indeed, some of the interviewees in this study expressed the awkwardness they experienced when dealing with others who had no military experience. Third, additional research is needed to explore the experiences of veterans who enter college, subsequently join the military, and then return to college. Several of the participants in this study attended college before joining the military and then returned to college after the military. Their perspectives, as well as performance in college, changed significantly for the better. Additional research is needed to determine the extent to which this can be attributed to the military experience or to other factors, such as simply gaining experience over time.

The military and higher education have taken strides to assist veterans. The transition period between the time the veteran leaves the military and enters college is crucial and often difficult because it requires him or her to transition between two

distinctly different environments. This is where efforts by both the military and higher education can make a difference and have a beneficial impact.

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