Veteran Influx: A Qualitative Study Examining the Transition Experiences of Student Veterans from the Military to College

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Abstract

More than 5,000,000 post-9/11 service members are expected to transition out of the military by 2020 due to a reduction in the size of the U.S. military and presence in Iraq and Afghanistan (American Council on Education, 2014). As these service members separate from the military many will choose to enter some form of postsecondary education. The literature across the past decade has not changed in its recommendations on how to serve student veterans. If campus administrators expect to support veteran students in their transitions, they need empirical research about the transition experiences of veteran students and not rely on best practices that are not supported by empirical evidence.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the transition experiences of Post-9/11 student veterans from a military setting to a college setting. The study used grounded theory methods to systematically review the literature about the transition of student veterans from the military to a college or university and create a conceptual framework for this study, or the Student Veteran College Transition Model (SVCTM). The SVCTM showed what strategies used by college and university administrators during a veteran's transition to college promote positive transition outcomes for student veterans within a number of conditions and contextual factors. This qualitative study used a modified version of Seidman's (2013) phenomenological interviewing and collective-case study. Semi-structured interviews provided data for the study.

Findings of this study confirmed previous research that student veterans experience a challenging transition from the military to college and that military and veteran student offices and veteran student organizations play an important role in the transition for student veterans. The findings also included that the conflict between military, civilian, and academic cultures disrupted student veterans' ability to adapt to their new role as civilian and student. To combat this conflict, student veterans turn to family and other veterans internal and external to the college provide support during the transition from the military as they integrate their military, civilian, and academic identities.

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General Audience Abstract

More than 5,000,000 post-9/11 service members are expected to transition out of the military by 2020 due to a reduction in the size of the U.S. military and presence in Iraq and Afghanistan (American Council on Education, 2014). As these service members separate from the military many will choose to enter college. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the transition experiences of Post-9/11 student veterans from a military setting to a college setting. The researcher in this study reviewed the literature about student veterans' transition from the military to a college. This review led to the creation of the Student Veteran College Transition Model (SVCTM). The SVCTM was used to examine data collected from semi-structured interviews. Findings of this study confirmed previous research that student veterans experience a challenging transition from the military to college and that military and veteran student offices and veteran student organizations play an important role in the transition for student veterans. The findings also included that the conflict between military, civilian, and academic cultures disrupted student veterans' ability to adapt to their new role as civilian and student. To combat this conflict, student veterans turn to family and other veterans internal and external to the college provide support during the transition from the military as they integrate their military, civilian, and academic identities.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter One

Introduction

The U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) estimates that by 2020 there will be more than 20,000,000 pre-9/11 and post-9/11 veterans in the United States (U.S.) (National Center for Veteran Analysis and Statistics, 2014). An additional 5,000,000 post-9/11 service members are expected to transition out of the military by that date due to a reduction in the size of the U.S. military and presence in Iraq and Afghanistan (American Council on Education, 2014; DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008; Madaus, Miller, & Vance, 2009; Mitcham, 2013; O'Herrin, 2011; Vacchi, 2012; Wheeler, 2012). As these service members separate from the military, they will join current and former members of the U.S. Armed Forces, Reserves, National Guard, and non-veterans as civilians in the workforce or in some form of education program.

Veterans in Higher Education

As the number of transitioning service members from the military increases, the number of veterans in higher education will also continue to grow because of reductions in the military and the use of the Post-9/11 GI Bill. With this increase, it is important that researchers and administrators to understand this group of students, their experiences, and how to serve them. Student veterans make up approximately 4% of the total undergraduate student population and approximately 59% of these student veterans used the Post-9/11 GI Bill to fund their education (American Council on Education, 2014). At the undergraduate level, student veterans differed from their civilian counterparts.

Post-9/11 Student Veterans

Post-9/11 student veterans primarily served during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. They also represented a diverse group of Americans including branch of service, ranks, age, gender, race, and ethnicity (National Center for Veteran Analysis and Statistics, 2014). Not only will these veterans represent diverse backgrounds and experiences, some of these transitioning veterans will exit the military after multiple tours of active combat duty.

For Post-9/11 veterans that served during operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, they deployed on average 1.72 times each. However, frequency of deployments ranged from one to 47 deployments. Of those who deployed, 43% deployed multiple times. Of the group that experienced multiple deployments, a majority deployed twice (67%) and others deployed three or more times (Committee on the Assessment of the Readjustment Needs of Military Personnel,

Veterans, and their Families, Board on the Health of Select Populations, & Institute of Medicine, 2013). These student veterans bring the exhaustion of serving multiple tours of combat duty and a many bring physical and behavioral health issues with them into their civilian life.

Many have physical challenges, such as missing limbs, or behavioral health challenges resulting from active combat duty. As many as a quarter of student veterans diagnosed with physical or behavioral health disorders also have hidden disabilities. These hidden disabilities include diagnoses such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injuries (TBIs), or other behavioral health issues such as depression or substance abuse (Arminio, Grabosky, & Lang, 2015; Francis & Kraus, 2012; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Lokken, Pfeffer, McAuley, & Strong, 2009; Madaus et al., 2009; Ostovary & Dapprich, 2011; Wheeler, 2012). These health issues may affect veterans as they pursue their education. Post-9/11 veterans also differ from their more traditionally aged counterparts at college.

Post-9/11 Veterans and Traditionally Aged College Students

Unlike the more traditionally-aged undergraduate college students, those between 18 and 22 and pursued their "a full-time education soon after receiving a high school diploma" (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2015, p. 24), the average undergraduate student veteran is a nontraditional student. Nontraditional students "are older, attend school part-time, married, have children, and/or work" (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2015, p. 24). While the traditional-aged college student matriculated at a college or university upon graduating from high school, undergraduate student veterans delay college by five years on average (American Council on Education, 2014; Brown & Gross, 2011; Madaus et al., 2009). The ages of veterans range from 24 to 40 years old and the average age was 25 years old when they started to pursue an undergraduate degree (American Council on Education, 2014; Molina & Morse, 2015). Veterans attend college as full-time students at lower rates than their undergraduate counterparts.

A majority of veterans (51%) were more likely to enroll and attend college as a full-time student compared to active duty and Reserve undergraduate students (Molina & Morse, 2015; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013). While attending college, 64% of veterans also held a full-time or part-time job, including work-study positions, to supplement their income (American Council on Education, 2014; Molina & Morse, 2015; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013). The financial pressure of working and attending classes intertwined with having a family (Brown & Gross, 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2009; Wilson, Smith, Lee, &

Stevenson, 2013; Zoli, Maury, & Fay, 2015). Approximately 44% of veterans are married when entering college and 52% of veterans have at least one dependent (in this case a child) (American Council on Education, 2014; Molina & Morse, 2015; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013).

The Post-9/11 GI Bill

As veterans choose between entering a training program and pursuing some form of postsecondary education, many will use their Post-9/11 GI Bill Benefits to pay for training or their education. The Post-9/11 GI Bill provided educational financial support for veterans and their dependents to pursue their education. The VA calculated benefits based on the amount of time the veteran served, where the veteran served, and the type of educational program the veteran pursues except at the nation's service academies (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2016).

In 2009, Chapter 33 benefits, or the Post-9/11 GI Bill, went into effect for those individuals that served at least 90 days of aggregate services on or after September 11, 2001, or individuals discharged with service-connected disabilities after 30 days and received an honorable discharge. Veterans that served for 36 months were eligible to receive 100% of the benefits. The benefits provided financial support for both education and housing to qualified veterans meeting these requirements. The Post-9/11 GI Bill now pays full in-state undergraduate tuition and fees at public colleges and universities. In addition, the VA pays fees, books, housing, and adjusts benefits based on a number of factors. Veterans may transfer the GI Bill to dependents in some circumstances (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2016).

Most of the veterans in this study qualified for and used the Post-9/11 GI Bill. However, it is important to understand other GI Bill benefits exist or existed for veterans depending on the era of service and type of service. These include Chapters 30 Montgomery GI Bill, Chapter 31 Vocational and Rehabilitation and Employment Service, Chapter 32 and Section 903 governing Post-Vietnam Veterans' Education Assistance Program (VEAP) and the Educational Assistance Pilot Program. Additionally, there are other chapters of the GI Bill for Reservists, National Guardsmen, and for those that have lost a spouse or parent who died in service or became permanently and totally disabled because of a service-connected disability (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2016). Along with the Post-9/11 GI Bill, Congress passed the Veterans Choice Act in 2014 to assist veterans transitioning to higher education.

Veterans Choice Act

The Veterans Choice Act of 2014 required all Post-9/11 GI Bill certified public educational institutions to charge in-state tuition and fees for all eligible student veterans. The law considers "covered individuals" to be a veteran who lives in the state where the college or university is located regardless of the veteran's formal state of residence and who enrolls in school within three years of being discharge. Covered individuals also include dependents using a spouse or parent's benefits. Veterans or dependents remain covered under the Veterans Choice Act as long as they remain continuously enrolled at the public institution of higher learning. This provision of the Veterans Choice Act ensures that veterans and their dependents will not have to pay out-of-state charges for education when using the Post-9/11 GI Bill (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2016). In total, American have invested more than $53 billion on educating approximately 1.4 million service members, veterans, and their families at colleges and universities (Molina & Morse, 2015). Once veterans get onto campus, they experienced one of three types of campus climates that may affect their transition experience.

Campus Climate for Student veterans

A college of university's campus climate may affect a veteran's experience and transition to higher education. Summerlot, Green, and Parker (2009) defined these climates in one of three ways: (a) supportive climate, (b) ambivalent climate, (c) and challenging climate.

Supportive climate. Veterans described a supportive climate, sometimes referred to as a "veteran-friendly" campus, as one in which the college and university faculty and administrators make efforts at the institutional level to support them. Supportive campuses tended to have strong historic ties to the military. For example, these institutions may be land-grant institutions, had strong ROTC programs, or within a close proximity to military installations. Additionally, these colleges had strong veteran services, active student veteran organizations (VSO), and academic or other institutional policies that supported student veteran needs. Veterans tended to be more comfortable identifying themselves and their military experience on campus (Ostovary & Dapprich, 2011; Summerlot et al., 2009; Tomar & Stoffel, 2014).

Ambivalent climate. College and universities with an ambivalent climate tended to be urban or commuter campuses with large numbers of non-traditional college students. On these campuses, the military experience of veterans was another pre-college experience that was no different from any other pre-college experience. Administrators provided minimal campus-

based services for veterans. In this type of climate, student veterans struggled with connecting with their veteran peers because they blended in easily in the student population. This disconnect on campus led to many student veterans to seek connection with veteran groups off campus (Summerlot et al., 2009).

Challenging climate. Veterans did not typically self-identify in challenging climates because of the negative attitude from faculty, staff, and students towards the military. These colleges tended to have a traditionally strong history of political dissent and anti-military activism. Instead of identifying as a veteran, student veterans concealed their identity to avoid judgment, confrontation, and criticism on campus within a potentially hostile classroom atmosphere (Summerlot et al., 2009).

Statement of the Problem

With more than 5,000,000 Post-9/11 service members transitioning out of the military by 2020 (American Council on Education, 2014; DiRamio et al., 2008; Madaus et al., 2009; Mitcham, 2013; O'Herrin, 2011; Vacchi, 2012; Wheeler, 2012), these veterans represent a diverse group of Americans. Many of these veterans have also served multiple deployments during operations in Iraq and Afghanistan (Committee on the Assessment of the Readjustment Needs of Military Personnel, Veterans et al., 2013). These veterans may bring physical challenges and behavioral health issues resulting from their active combat duty service (Arminio et al., 2015; Francis & Kraus, 2012; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Lokken et al., 2009; Madaus et al., 2009; Ostovary & Dapprich, 2011; Wheeler, 2012).

Student veterans are different from their traditionally aged counterparts. Student veterans are older than traditionally aged college students (American Council on Education, 2014; Arminio et al., 2015; Brown & Gross, 2011; Madaus et al., 2009; Molina & Morse, 2015) and are more likely to work in either full-time or part-time jobs (American Council on Education, 2014; Molina & Morse, 2015; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013). They are more likely to be married with families compared to traditionally aged college students (American Council on Education, 2014; Molina & Morse, 2015; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013).

A majority of Post-9/11 veterans will use their Post-9/11GI Bill benefits to pursue and pay for some kind of postsecondary education (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2016). Along with the Post-9/11GI Bill, veterans can take advantage of the provisions of the Veterans

Choice Act of 2014. Through the Veterans Choice Act of 2014, veterans can enroll at public institutions of higher education with the guarantee of in-state tuition if they are using their Post-9/11 GI Bill for college (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2016).

Veterans also experience three types of campus climates on campus. They experience Supportive Climates where they are freer to identify as a veteran and have a range of services to assist them with their transition (Ostovary & Dapprich, 2011; Summerlot et al., 2009; Tomar & Stoffel, 2014). The experience of veterans in Ambivalent Climate is one in which they are seen as another group of nontraditional students and seek camaraderie with other veterans off campus (Summerlot et al., 2009). Finally, the Challenging Climate is one in which a veteran may hide their military service to avoid the anti-military sentiments closely associate with these campuses (Summerlot et al., 2009).

The evidence about veterans and higher education is clear. They are and will continue to enroll in higher education in increasing numbers (American Council on Education, 2014; DiRamio et al., 2008; Madaus et al., 2009; Mitcham, 2013; O'Herrin, 2011; Vacchi, 2012; Wheeler, 2012) and bring diverse experiences (American Council on Education, 2014; Molina & Morse, 2015; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013). Some research has examined the institutional climate that student veterans experience (Ostovary & Dapprich, 2011; Summerlot et al., 2009; Tomar & Stoffel, 2014). There is some literature about the transition experience of student veterans (Arminio et al., 2015; DiRamio et al., 2008; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Madaus et al., 2009; Summerlot et al., 2009; Wheeler, 2012), but an overwhelming amount of the literature is not empirical research or it provides the case of a single university. If campus administrators expect to support student veterans in their transitions, they need more research that is empirical about the transition experiences of student veterans and not rely on the best practices articles that prevail in the literature that does not provide strong empirical evidence. The aim of my study was to provide such data.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the transition experiences of Post-9/11 student veterans from a military setting to a college setting. I used grounded theory methods to systematically review the literature about the transition of student veterans from the military to a college or university and create a conceptual framework for this study, or the Student Veteran College Transition Model (SVCTM). The SVCTM showed what strategies

used by college and university administrators during a veteran's transition to college promote positive transition outcomes for student veterans within a number of conditions and contextual factors. This qualitative study used a modified version of Seidman's (2013) phenomenological interviewing and collective-case study. To collect information, I relied upon interviews. In the interviews, participants described their own experiences as student veterans and their transitions. Two semi-structured interviews took place with each participant.

Research Questions

My study examined two research questions:

1. How do Post-9/11 student veterans describe their experiences transitioning from a military setting to a college setting?
2. How do Post-9/11 student veterans perceive services provided by the college or university during their transition from a military setting to college setting?

Significance of the Study

The present study had significance for future practice, research, and policy. In regards to practice, this study was significant for several campus stakeholders. One group that might benefit from the findings includes administrators in military and student veteran offices. The findings of this study provided those administrators with empirical data about the experience of veterans during their transition. Administrators may use the findings to assess the programs and services they offer to promote a positive transition to college.

Secondly, the findings may benefit administrators for inclusion and diversity on college campuses about how veterans experience campus climates. The findings of this study provided those administrators with data about how veterans experience a positive transition to college. Administrators may use these findings to assess the campus climate for inclusion and diversity purposes as it relates to veterans.

My study also had significance for future research. For example, I primarily examined what strategies used by college and university administrators during a veteran's transition to undergraduate higher education. A future study may examine what strategies used by college and university administrators during a veteran's transition to graduate-level higher education or professional programs. Such a study would increase the information about the transition experience of veterans to graduate school, professional programs, and higher education in general. Secondly, a future study may use a quantitative methodology to examine factors that

predict academic achievement in student veterans in college. This study would increase the information about student veterans in higher education in general.

Finally, the present study had significance for future policy. The study provided federal and state policymakers with information on the experiences of veterans transitioning to public higher education. Policymakers may use this information when regulating the Post-9/11 GI Bill and implementing accountability measures for future educational programs.

Another way that the current study may influence is to inform campus facilities policymakers to prioritize the use of academic and student activities space for serving veterans. Policymakers may use this information when outlining policies on how to allocate academic and/or student activities space for veterans and departments serving veterans

The last significance for policy is to inform enrollment management policymakers to prioritize training for student, faculty, and staff relating the experience of veterans. Policymakers may use this information to outline policy priorities for inclusion and diversity training relating to veterans on campus.

Organization of the Study

This study consists of five chapters. The first chapter introduced the topic of the study, the purpose of the study, the research questions, and significance of the study. The second chapter provides a systematic review of the literature used to create the conceptual model for this study relating to the literature on veterans and their transitions to higher education. The third chapter presents the methodology of the study including sample selection and the data collection and analysis procedures. The findings of the study appear in the fourth chapter, and the final chapter discusses those findings and their implications for future practice, research, and policy.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

I conceptualized the literature relating to my study by creating a conceptual model, the SVCTM. I used grounded theory methods to represent the literature about student veterans' transition to college and to construct the model. The literature consisted of both empirical research from various sources and non-empirical research from higher education and student affairs peer-reviewed journals. Additionally, I reviewed the theoretical literature about the phenomenon relating to transitions in general and for veterans. I organized the chapter around the components of the SVCTM, the general literature about veterans, and the theoretical literature. Conditional and contextual factors do not appear in this chapter since it was covered in Chapter One.

Statement of the Student Veteran College Transition Model (SVCTM)

The SVCTM suggested that six conditions shaped a veterans' transition to higher education (the phenomenon). The conditions were (a) veterans may have physical and behavioral health issues, (b) choice of institutional type, (c) veterans were not traditional college students, (d) veterans worked while going to school, (e) veterans had families, and (f) military peers. Contextual factors in the model influenced strategies to promote a specific outcome. In this study, the outcome was experiencing a positive transition to college that included persistence and sense of belonging. Contextual factors were the (a) reduction in the military through troop drawdowns and transitions out of the military, (b) multiple active duty deployments, (c) use of the GI Bill, and (d) the Veterans Choice Act. The strategies used by administrators were (a) implementing a military or student veteran office or MVSO, (b) facilitating veteran peer-to-peer relationships, (c) peer mentoring programs, (d) creating a veteran student organization or VSO, (e) awarding academic credit for prior learning, and (f) other institutional policies to support veterans. In the model, the transition process proved effective because the support received from fellow student veterans, facilitated by the strategies used by college administrators, led them to a successful change in their role and self-identity (Hachtmann, 2012).

Veteran's Transition to Higher Education

A majority of the literature about a veteran's transition to higher education focuses on the challenges and negative experiences of student veterans. The literature focused on the adjustment from the military to civilian life, social aspects of campus life, and the academic

aspects of a student veteran's transition. The adjustment outside of the military focused on the difficult transition student veterans experienced outside of the military in civilian life. The social aspects of a student veteran's transition included a lower sense of belonging. The academic aspects of a student veteran's transition focused on their grade point average (GPA).

Military to Civilian Life Adjustment

The transition from military to civilian life for student veterans can be a difficult adjustment (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Garza Mitchell, 2009; Morin, 2011; Olsen, Badger, & McCuddy, 2014). Generally, some of the reasons and factors that predicted a difficult transition for veterans from the military to civilian life included having a traumatic experience; being seriously injured; serving in the Post-9/11 era; serving in a combat zone; serving with someone killed or injured; and for Post-9/11 veterans, marriage while in the service (Morin, 2011).

Student veterans described their transition program provided by the military in various ways because each branch of the military conducted the programs differently (DiRamio et al., 2008). However, since 2013 the Department of Defense implemented the Transition GPS (Goals, Plans, Success) curriculum for the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) (U.S. Department of Defense, 2016). Many veterans described the previous version of the TAP program as focusing on mental health issues and included educational benefits and other topics (Ackerman et al., 2009; DiRamio et al., 2008). The Transition GPS curriculum took a more holistic approach to the transition process. There appeared to be no literature since Ackerman, DiRamio, et al. (2008) that included the major change in the TAP program provided to transitioning service members.

Another challenge for student veterans as they transitioned from the military to their civilian life focused on their finances. As a student veteran entered into their civilian life as a student, they may experience financial issues because their Post-9/11 GI Bill did not provide for all living expenses for a student veteran especially those that had a family. Many student veterans sought employment to supplement their GI Bill leading to stress because of having to balance school, work, and family (Brown & Gross, 2011; DiRamio & Spires, 2009; Durdella & Kim, 2012; Elliott, Gonzalez, & Larsen, 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2009; Wilson et al., 2013; Zoli et al., 2015). Some student veterans also chose to attend community colleges to save money for general education and remedial courses (Wheeler, 2012).

Next, a student veteran's disability status may present a challenge to the student veteran's transition to higher education. Since many of these student veterans may have physical and behavioral health challenges like missing limbs, PTSD, and TBIs, this complicates their transition further (DiRamio et al., 2008; Francis & Kraus, 2012; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Lokken et al., 2009; Madaus et al., 2009; Ostovary & Dapprich, 2011; Wheeler, 2012). Hidden disabilities such as PTSD and depression also played a large role in a student veteran's transition to higher education. These hidden issues may mean that student veterans were uncomfortable in certain situations such as large groups of people. They may continue to experience changes in their personality such as going from being social to a more unsocial person (Ackerman et al., 2009; DiRamio et al., 2008). Along with these disabilities, student veterans must navigate the VA's classification for disability status and those hat qualify under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA) (Madaus et al., 2009; Ostovary & Dapprich, 2011; Ruh, Spicer, & Vaughan, 2009). Student veterans may not qualify as disabled for the VA; however, they may be eligible for appropriate accommodations under ADA once the student veteran requested accommodations (Madaus et al., 2009; O'Herrin, 2011; Ostovary & Dapprich, 2011). The next aspect of student veterans' transition involve their social lives and not having the camaraderie of military life (Olsen et al., 2014).

Social Aspects of a Student Veteran's Transition

The social aspects of student veterans' transition to college presented another challenge. The social aspects were typically described as difficult experiences (Livingston, Havice, Cawthon, & Fleming, 2011). Social support structures for student veterans include support from military peers, experiences with traditionally aged college students, and support from family.

Support from military peers. One reason that student veterans described the transition as more difficult is because they were not engaged in the camaraderie they experienced during military life (Olsen et al., 2014). For centuries, military friendships have been identified as some of the strongest relationships in western culture with uncommonly strong bonds (Hinojosa & Hinojosa, 2011). Service members' military training and the military culture in which they live is built on the concept of relying on one's fellow service members leading to strong friendships between members of the military (DiRamio et al., 2008; Hinojosa & Hinojosa, 2011; Livingston et al., 2011; Olsen et al., 2014). Additionally, the physical and social isolation, shared risks, and

deployments facilitated service members to rely on one another for social and emotional support (Hinojosa & Hinojosa, 2011).

In many cases, the military provided a service member a surrogate family and provided outlets for recreational and emotional intimacy especially during deployments. Recreational activities, both planned or unplanned, assisted with taking the soldier's mind off being deployed and included activities such as playing video games, shopping in the on-base store, dining together, "hanging out" and talking about home, relationships, and work. These things are not unlike traditional civilian activities (Hinojosa & Hinojosa, 2011).

The second outlet provided by the military family was emotional intimacy. A service member may not share everything with everyone but may share their emotions, fears, concerns, and homesickness with bunkmates (Hinojosa & Hinojosa, 2011). These relationships served as a therapeutic processing for them to deal with a range of emotions and experiences including "terror, horror, sadness, boredom, and tedium of deployment" (Hinojosa & Hinojosa, 2011, p. 1153). Overall, these service members described the connections with service members as a "brotherhood" or "camaraderie" or "the bonds of war" (Hinojosa & Hinojosa, 2011, p. 1153). In the military, student veterans were surrounded by other people with the same types of lived experiences; however, when they entered college they are no longer surrounded by people with the same experiences; instead, they are surrounded by traditionally aged college students with very different life experiences (DiRamio et al., 2008; Durdella & Kim, 2012; Elliott et al., 2011).

Experiences with traditionally aged college students. Student veterans described themselves as not fitting in on campus with traditionally aged students (Elliott et al., 2011). Student veterans tended to be older than traditionally aged students (American Council on Education, 2014; Durdella & Kim, 2012; Molina & Morse, 2015). Student veterans typically saw traditionally aged students as immature, inexperienced, and expressed frustrations with them because they did not have the same world experiences that student veterans did (Ackerman et al., 2009; DiRamio et al., 2008; Durdella & Kim, 2012; Livingston et al., 2011; Olsen et al., 2014). Since student veterans did not identify with traditionally aged students because they were older, had families, and worked more, they tended to have a lower sense of belonging on campus (Durdella & Kim, 2012).

Support from family. The role of a student veteran's family is important because family members' identities were closely associated with the military and veteran status of the student veteran. When student veterans left the military, the transition affected their family just as much as the veteran (Ainspan & Penk, 2012; Dekel, Goldblatt, Keidar, Solomon, & Polliack, 2005). These effects included the challenge of losing family support from other military families (Ainspan & Penk, 2012), other support networks (Ainspan & Penk, 2012), military structure (Ainspan & Penk, 2012), and taking on the role of caregiver for those veterans with physical and behavioral health issues (Dekel et al., 2005; Romero, Riggs, & Ruggero, 2015). In some cases, these effects could be stressors adding to family strife (Dekel et al., 2005; Romero et al., 2015). In some cases, veterans described their families as not understanding their experiences like their fellow service members (Demers, 2011). To ensure the survival of spousal relationships, veterans and their spouses had to work to create a new normal for the family after leaving the military (Ainspan & Penk, 2012). This new normal for student veterans included them not engaging in as many extracurricular activities as their traditionally aged counterparts because of the focus on their family, academics, and work (Durdella & Kim, 2012). The last aspect of student veterans' transition related to their academic GPA.

Academic Aspects of a Student Veteran's Transition

The literature about the academic aspect of a student veteran's transition focused on the student veteran's GPA after entering college. Most of the studies examining academic achievement focused on two major topics: (a) veterans experienced initial academic challenges because they were not academically prepared for college coursework and (b) student veterans tended to have lower GPAs than civilian students did.

Many student veterans entering college for the first time experienced initial academic challenges because of a lack of academic preparation (DiRamio et al., 2008; Livingston et al., 2011; Wheeler, 2012). Student veterans that were not academically prepared typically found themselves in remedial courses to refresh their skills and knowledge (Ackerman et al., 2009; DiRamio et al., 2008; Wheeler, 2012). A lack of academic preparation provided one reason that many student veterans attended community college when they initially left the military as compared to attending a four-year institution (Wheeler, 2012). Many student veterans also experienced initial academic challenges because of their poor study habits and lack of focus, with possible attribution to PTSD (Ackerman et al., 2009; DiRamio et al., 2008).

The second topic concerning the academic aspects of a student veterans' transition was they tended to have lower GPAs than civilian students. The literature from the World War II (Garmezy & Crose, 1948; Love & Hutchison, 1946) and after the Vietnam War (Joanning, 1979; Paraskevopoulos & Robinson, 1969) showed that veterans had higher GPAs than their civilian counterparts. However, in the one study focused on GPA for Post-9/11 veterans, the researcher found that student veterans had lower GPAs than civilian students did after controlling for input characteristics such as demographic (for example, age and gender) and certain college experience variables (for example, extracurricular activity participation) (Durdella & Kim, 2012). To assist student veterans through the phenomenon of transitioning to higher education, college administrators have implemented strategies and services to support student veterans.

Strategies and Services to Support Student veterans

The literature about strategies and services used by administrators to support student veterans in higher education consisted of five strategies. The first three strategies were about the relationship between student veterans and the institution and the relationship between student veterans to other student veterans. These strategies were (a) implementing a military or student veteran office, (b) facilitating veteran peer-to-peer relationships, and (c) creating a student veteran organization. The last two strategies were about institutional policies that administrators could implement to support student veterans. These strategies were (d) awarding academic credit for prior learning and (e) other institutional policies to support veterans.

Implementing a Military or Student veteran Office

The first strategy used by college and university administrators was implementing a military or student veteran office (MVSO) that served as a central resource center for veterans and campus. By establishing a MVSO on campus, college administrators may begin to assist with the difficult transition and the unique needs of student veterans (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Wheeler, 2012) and serve as the hallmark of supportive or "veteran-friendly" campus climates (Summerlot et al., 2009). The dedicated MVSO typically housed clerical and professional support staff that served veterans in a variety of capacities, including GI Bill Certifying Officials that process a veteran's GI Bill paperwork (Ackerman et al., 2009; Brown & Gross, 2011; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Olsen et al., 2014).

Staff members of the MVSO worked to establish connections in campus offices to serve as resources for veterans needing assistance for academic policies, financial aid policies,

disability services, and other policies (Ackerman et al., 2009; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). These staff members also assisted veterans by establishing partnerships off campus with VA hospitals and local veterans affairs officers (Brown & Gross, 2011; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). By establishing on-campus and off-campus relationships, MVSO personnel served as referral agents for veterans depending on their needs. The last purpose for a MVSO was to serve as a meeting space, lounge space, and social space for veterans in between classes and for VSOs (Brown & Gross, 2011; Elliott et al., 2011; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; O'Herrin, 2011; Summerlot et al., 2009; Wheeler, 2012). Having a MVSO was a common strategy used by campus administrators to serve veterans. One purpose of a MVSO was to help facilitate veteran peer-to-peer relationships.

Importance of and Facilitating Veteran Peer-to-Peer Relationships

One of the most important strategies used by campus administrators including MVSOs was to facilitate peer-to-peer relationships between student veterans and other student veterans as well as faculty and staff members that served in the armed forces. Relationships with other student veterans was important because these students identified with one another through their prior military service (DiRamio et al., 2008; DiRamio & Spires, 2009; Livingston et al., 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Summerlot et al., 2009; Wheeler, 2012). The close bonds between military service members because of the amount of time spent in high-stress situations (Olsen et al., 2014) led student veterans to want to connect with other military related colleagues (Livingston et al., 2011). Student veterans described the adjustment to not having the close military bond as difficult (Olsen et al., 2014; Tomar & Stoffel, 2014; Wheeler, 2012). Student veterans were able to provide support and validate each other (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). They were also more comfortable with other student veterans because student veterans perceived traditionally aged undergraduates as immature. They believed that they did not things in common with traditionally aged students (Livingston et al., 2011; Olsen et al., 2014). Camaraderie was important among student veterans and one approach in facilitating this was using peer-mentoring programs on campus.

Peer Mentoring Programs

Peer mentoring programs on college campuses had new student veterans choose a veteran mentor that was either an upperclassmen student veteran, faculty member, or an administrator. The program gave veterans a direct connection with someone who could support their transition

from the military while providing them information and assisting with navigating the administration of the campus. The program also served as an early intervention warning system for student veterans that were struggling with their transition (Branker, 2009; DiRamio et al., 2008; DiRamio & Spires, 2009; Elliott et al., 2011; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Moon & Schma, 2011). A second way campus administrators facilitated veteran peer-to-peer relationships was by facilitating the creation of a VSO on campus.

Creating a Student Veteran

Another way campus administrators facilitated veteran peer-to-peer relationships was by creating a VSO on campus. Typically, the VSO was a chapter of the Student Veterans of America (SVA), whose mission is "To provide military veterans with the resources, support, and advocacy needed to succeed in higher education and following graduation" (Student Veterans of America, 2016). These organizations, like a MVSO, were another hallmark of a supportive campus climate or "veteran-friendly" campus (Summerlot et al., 2009). These organizations provided a place of escape for student veterans in challenging campus climate (Summerlot et al., 2009). A campus VSO assisted student veterans in both their educational pursuits and build social relationships because of the need for camaraderie found in the military (DiRamio et al., 2008; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Moon & Schma, 2011; Olsen et al., 2014; Summerlot et al., 2009; Tomar & Stoffel, 2014; Wheeler, 2012). These organizations provided an atmosphere for student veterans to interact with other student veterans inside and outside of the classroom (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Moon & Schma, 2011). VSOs served as an information exchange and referral agent for on campus (Summerlot et al., 2009) and off-campus veteran services including referrals to the local VA (Olsen et al., 2014)

VSOs also served as a conduit for veterans to the campus and for members of the campus community to work with student veterans. The VSO members along with the MVSO can help educate faculty, staff, and other students about issues affecting veterans on campus and advocate on their behalf. Education programs such as Green Zone modeled after the Safe Zone education program for the Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, and Transgender community was one way to educate members of the college campus (DiRamio et al., 2008; Olsen et al., 2014; Wheeler, 2012). Members of the VSO also served the community through various service events such as Veterans Day events, the U.S. Marines Toys for Tots Drive, and other military and veteran related events (Moon & Schma, 2011). College and university administrators must build relationships with

student veterans and facilitate student veteran peer-to-peer relationships but administrators must also implement institutional policies.

Awarding Academic Credit for Prior Learning

One institutional policy that campus administrators may implement on campus is awarding academic credit for prior learning in the military towards a student's degree based on recommendations from the American Council on Education (ACE) (Brown & Gross, 2011; DiRamio et al., 2008; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Mitcham, 2013; Vacchi, 2012). ACE worked with the Department of Defense (DOD) to review formal military technical training, on-the-job training education credits, and job experiences to make recommendations for college credit for former members of the armed services (American Council on Education, 2016). To award these credits, administrators reviewed both the Joint Services Transcript used by the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, and Coast Guard that consisted of recommendations from the ACE Military Guide. ACE does not have recommendations for the Air Force because the Air Force provides academic credit through the Community College of the Air Force and the college issues their own transcripts used to award transfer credits by college and university administrators (American Council on Education, 2016).

While some colleges used the ACE standards regularly, many college administrators do not maximize the number of credits awarded. The hesitancy to awards credits for prior learning existed because military transcripts do not translate easily into traditional academic credits and administrators do not understand the process that ACE uses to make their recommendations. This conflict was easily resolved by college and university administrators collaborating with student veterans organizations, ACE, federal agencies, and other stakeholders to build a pathway for student veterans while learning more about the ACE review process to eliminate the stigma around credit awarded for military education and training (Mitcham, 2013; Vacchi, 2012; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). Awarding credit for prior learning was one of the most important policies campus administrators could implement on campus; however, other institutional policies existed that administrators may use to support student veterans.

Other Institutional Policies to Support Veterans

Other institutional policies included financial policies and identifying veteran allies in campus offices. The first critical policy for university administrators was to create deferred interest-free tuition payment plans for these students. These plans were important because the

timing of the GI Bill payments paid out to the institution may not align with the university's billing cycles and due dates. In most cases, a student veteran's university bill comes due before the semester before the VA makes GI Bill payments to the institution (Brown & Gross, 2011; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Summerlot et al., 2009). Another financial policy for campus administrators to consider was creating scholarship programs or waiving tuition for student with limited GI Bill funds or for those that have exhausted their GI Bill benefits (Elliott et al., 2011; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). Since GI Bill benefits have a maximum amount and period for use, some veterans may exhaust their benefits quickly without realizing it until it is too late because of the complicated regulations. Campus administrators should seek institutional or foundation funds to support these students finishing their education (Elliott et al., 2011; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015).

The last important policy change on campus was for campus offices; especially those that directly serve student veterans such as financial aid, bursar, admissions, registrar, and disability services. For example, there should be specific points of contact with whom veterans should speak with when they visit certain university departments. By doing so, veterans have a single person that understands their needs (O'Herrin, 2011). Additionally, these points of contacts, as well as other stakeholders, should convene as a campus working that meet to discuss student veteran issues on campus (O'Herrin, 2011). According to college administrators and the literature, including both scholarly and best practices, about student veterans, these six major strategies to support student veterans all promote experiencing a positive transition to college as an outcome for student veterans.

Experiencing a Positive Transition to Higher Education

The literature focused on student veterans experiencing a positive transition to higher education is minimal. An overwhelming majority of the literature focuses on the negative experiences of student veterans in higher education and the strategies used by college administrators to support this student population. Two articles, however, did discuss how peer support was associated with positive academic adjustment and higher GPAs (Whiteman, Barry, Mroczek, & Macdermid Wadsworth, 2013; Wilson et al., 2013).

A bulk of the student veterans' literature focused on negative experiences and transitions to higher education. In this case, general literature in higher education that discussed factors that lead to (a) student persistence and (b) sense of belonging were included. The literature did not

explicitly say these factors were indicators of a student's positive transition. A reasonable assumption is that if a student is persisting and has a sense of belonging on campus then the student is experiencing some form of a positive transition to higher education and ultimately reaching educational attainment.

Persistence

The literature examines educational attainment, whether a degree or certificate, as a measurable outcome for students in higher education. The literature also discusses student persistence as a needed condition for degree attainment (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Student persistence was defined as the "the progressive reenrollment in college, whether continuous from one term to the next or temporarily interrupted and then resumed" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 374). There was an abundance of literature about student persistence. The student persistence literature focused on a variety of topics. I chose to focus on academic performance, intervention programs, interaction with faculty and peers, and student integration (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Other topics included studies about interruptions in attendance; differences between public and private institutions, two-year and four-year institutions, state policy, gender, and race or ethnicity; the role of financial aid; living on campus; and academic major (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Academic achievement. A student's academic performance, or GPA, reflected the student's performance compared to other students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Using grades as a measure of persistence has limitations because there was variation in the application of grades within and across disciplines and institutions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Even with these limitations, grades are the best and most consistent predictor of student persistence in numerous studies examining persistence from the first to second year of college and beyond (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Intervention programs. Along with academic performance, the literature discussed various intervention programs used by campus administrators aimed at increasing student persistence. These intervention programs include remedial programs, supplemental instruction, and first-year seminars among others (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Remedial programs focused on assisting students to overcome academic deficiencies in their academic preparation for college. These programs appeared to promote student persistence in the short-term and in the long-term (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Supplemental instruction (SI) programs focused on traditionally difficult courses or those where larger numbers of students earn lower grades. Supplemental instruction programs focus on small group learning and interactions led by a SI leader, or a student that succeeded academically in the course. Students who attended SI sessions appear to have a stronger persistence rate than those who do not participate in SI programs (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

The last intervention program was first-year seminars (FYS) for all first-year students. These seminars function like regularly scheduled courses with an instructor and peer instructor. The content of the courses vary but the purpose promoted academic performance and student persistence. A student who participated in FYS had a higher rate of persistence from the first to second year as well as higher academic performance across courses (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Interaction with faculty and peers. The next topic that contributes to student persistence was student interactions with faculty and peers. The literature showed that interactions with faculty and even the perception that faculty were accessible to students had a positive effect on student persistence (Johnson et al., 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Peer interactions and the environment that these interactions took place also played an important role in a student's persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Student integration. The most widely used framework associated with a student integration and persistence was Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Tinto (1993) suggested that certain student characteristics along with the initial commitment to the institution and to graduation influenced the student's decision to leave college. He also suggested that the earlier a student commits to the institution and continues to do so will affect a student's academic and social integration at the university, which were important factors in student persistence (Tinto, 1993). Tinto's (1993) 13 propositions may be the most used framework; however, it is not without flaws and some researchers have suggested it needs revision to focus more on social integration instead of academic integration (Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997).

Braxton and Hirschy (2005) revised Tinto's (1993) theory and focused on the social integration aspects of the theory. The authors left Tinto's idea that student characteristics; such as gender, race and ethnicity, academic ability, etc.; shaped a student's initial commitment to

attaining a degree and to the college (Braxton & Hirschy, 2005). The initial commitment to the institution influenced a student's perception of college administrators' commitment to the student's well-being, institutional integrity, peer interaction as well as a student's social adjustment and psychosocial engagement (Braxton & Hirschy, 2005). The greater the initial commitment led to the greater potential for positive perceptions, social adjustment, and psychosocial engagement. In turn led to commitment over time and persistence from year to year (Braxton & Hirschy, 2005).

Bean and Metzner (1985) said that the theories of Tinto (1993) and others focused too much on social interaction, which did not fit with well with the persistence of nontraditional students. In response to this issue, Bean and Metzner (1985) created a conceptual model that took into account that nontraditional students were not typically as socially integrated as their traditionally aged counterparts. To be considered nontraditional, students had to meet one of the following requirements: (a) be older than 24-years-old; (b) be a commuter, or (c) be enrolled part-time (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Decisions to drop out for nontraditional students included four variables. The first variable was academics that referred to study habits, academic advising, major, class attendance, and course availability (Bean & Metzner, 1985). The second variable was background variables that included demographic characteristics, enrollment status, educational goals, place of residence, and high school academic achievement (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Thirdly, psychological variables referred to the utility of the college degree, the satisfaction of the role of student, goal commitment, and stress from college and outside of college. The last variable was environmental variables that included finances, work hours, lack of encouragement, family responsibilities, and the opportunity to transfer. Bean and Metzner (1985) suggested that environmental factors had the most effect on student persistence or decision to leave the college. A student experiencing a sense of belonging is the second important indicator of a positive transition to higher education and related to student persistence.

Sense of Belonging

For purposes of this study, sense of belonging was defined as "the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment" (Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier, 1992, p. 173).   Sense of belonging had two attributes: fit and valued involvement (Hagerty et al.,

1992). Fit was the perception that someone's values or characteristics were consistent with others (Hagerty, Williams, Coyne, & Early, 1996). Valued involvement referred to people's perception that they were valued, needed, and important to others (Hagerty et al., 1996).

Much of the research related to sense of belonging in education was not conducted at the college-level, instead, it was conducted with younger students (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007). However, sense of belonging in college students was associated with academic achievement as well as social interaction and acceptance (Freeman et al., 2007; Meeuwisse, Severiens, & Born, 2010), both factors related to student persistence.

Causal Mechanism: Why the Transition was Positive?

The transition process proved effective in this context for student veterans because of the support received from fellow student veterans at the college or university. This led them to shift successfully from identifying as a military service member to integrating their identity as civilian, veteran, and college student. The experience in boot camp and training instilled the traditional masculine norms of self-reliance (Alfred, Good, & Hammer, 2014; Green, Emslie, O'Neill, Hunt, & Walker, 2010), emotional stoicism (Alfred et al., 2014; Green et al., 2010), domination of enemy to avoid losing their lives (Alfred et al., 2014; Rueb, Erskine, & Foti, 2008), and domination of fears and weaknesses (Alfred et al., 2014; Rueb et al., 2008). Service members were expected to be the "rugged warrior ideal" and exhibit "violence, toughness, overt heterosexual desire, and risk taking" (Alfred et al., 2014, p. 95). When student veterans transitioned out of the military and entered college, they shed many aspects of this identity and embraced their identity as a student and a civilian. This role change could be difficult for them to experience and hindered the transition process (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). These characteristics were among those that student veterans suggested that civilians do not understand; however, fellow veterans shared in these experiences and understood the experience. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of all components of the SVCTM.
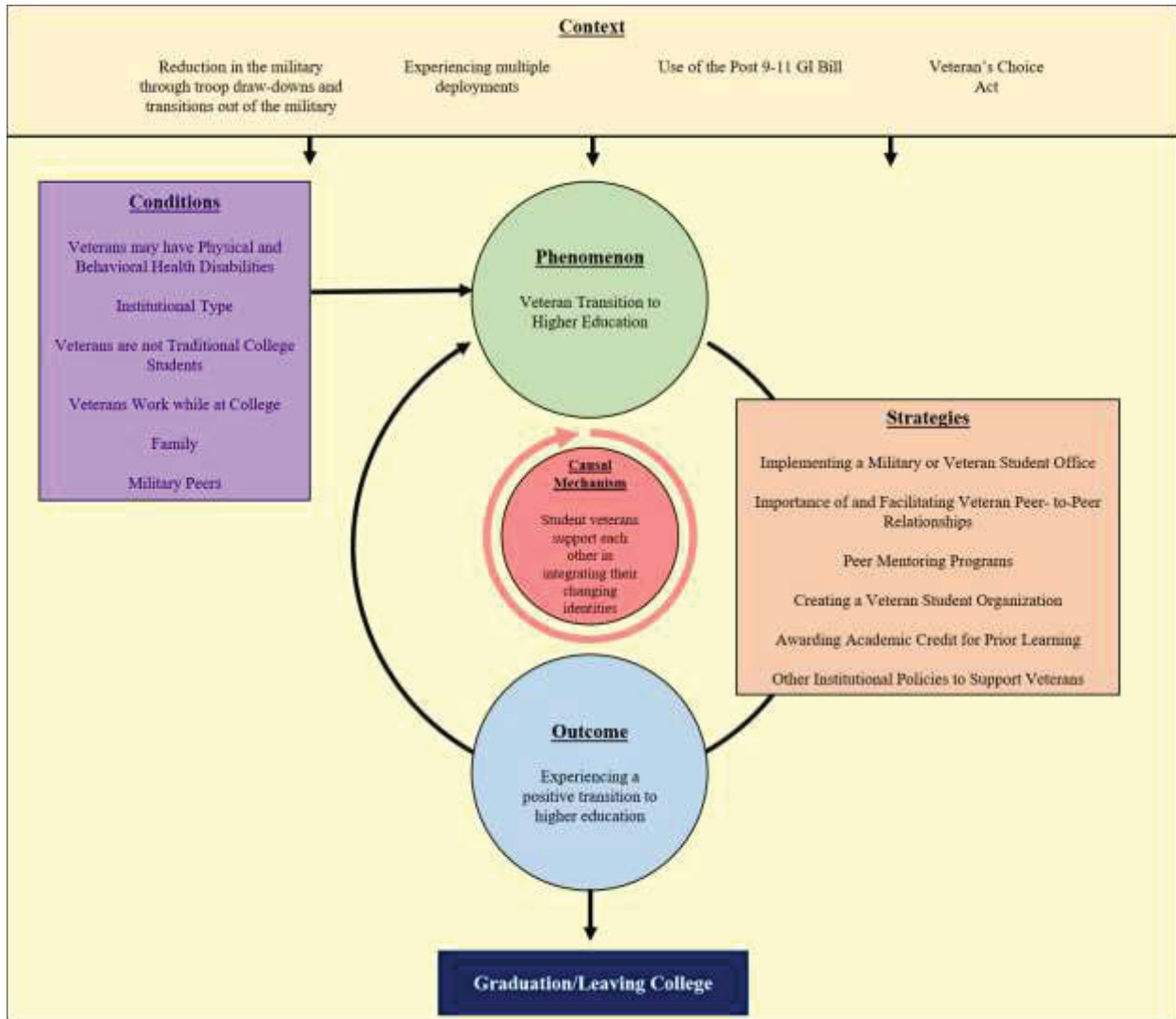
Figure 1. The Student Veteran College Transition Model (SVCTM)

Theoretical Literature: Schlossberg's Transition Theory

For my study, I would be remiss not to acknowledge Schlossberg's Transition Theory. It is the prominent theory about adult transitions. I did not focus on testing Schlossberg's work; instead, I used it as a sensitizing concept or as a theoretical starting place (Charmaz, 2014). The framework focused on "adult transitions" and was useful especially for those in the counseling, psychology, and social work fields. It is also useful for college administrators to use in understanding the transition experiences of college students. The theory consists of three major components: (a) Approaching Transitions: Transition Identification and Transition Process, (b) Taking Stock of Coping Resources: The 4 S System, and (c) Taking Change: Strengthening Resources (Anderson et al., 2012). For my study, I will focus on briefly reviewing the first two

components since the third component is contextual to the type of counseling strategies used and how to strengthen resources within the components of the 4 S System.

Approaching Transitions: Transition Identification and Transition Process

Transitions were defined as "any event or nonevent that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 39). To identify transitions within Schlossberg's Transition Theory, there were four ideas that scholars must examine. The first was the type of the transition that consists of Anticipated, Unanticipated, and Nonevent Transitions. The second idea was the perspective of the individual or was the transition positive, negative, or had no effect. The third idea was the context of the transition because these factors can influence how individuals cope and perceive the transition (Anderson et al., 2012). The last idea to understand an individual's transition was the impact of the transition on the individual or "the degree to which the transition alters one's daily life (Anderson et al., 2012, pp. 45–46).

The first stage of the Transition Process was Moving In. In this stage, individuals entered a new situation and learned the new norms and expectations of the situation. As individuals became accustomed to their new situation and learned to balance the new situation and other aspects of their life, they entered the Moving Through stage. The Moving Out stage occurred as the transition ended and a new transition process began. An important aspect of the Transition Process was that the larger the transition the more it affected an individual's life (Anderson et al., 2012). An example of the transition process for student veterans would be entering the military (Moving In) and becoming accustomed to military life through training and orders (Moving Through), and then choosing to leave the military and use their GI Bill to enter college (Moving Out and beginning a new Moving In stage). The next major component of Schlossberg' Transition Theory was Taking Stock of Coping Resources: The 4 S System.

Taking Stock of Coping Resources: The 4 S System

Four major factors influenced an individual's ability to cope with a transition (Anderson et al., 2012). The first factor was Situation and referred to the characteristics of the event or nonevent. Next, the Self referred to the personal characteristics of the individual. Support referred to the social support for each individual. Lastly, Strategies referred to the coping resources available to the individual. Each of these four interrelated factors served as an asset or a liability during the transition process for an individual (Anderson et al., 2012). Schlossberg's

Transition Theory serves as the basis for many empirical studies involving transitions of adults and college students including studies focused on student veterans.

Literature using Schlossberg's Transition Theory for Student Veterans

The literature about student veterans using Schlossberg's Transition theory in detail consisted of three articles. The authors discussed that being called to active duty and facing combat was a major transition that disrupts an individual's life followed by transitioning out of the military (DiRamio et al., 2008). While the researchers framed their findings using this theory, they did not do it consistently. Primarily, research focused on either the stages of the transition process or the factors in the 4 S System. Researchers placed student veterans and their experiences within different stages. In some cases, this caused problems because student veterans' experiences did not follow the sequential stages of Schlossberg's theory (Wheeler, 2012).

The articles that focused on the transition process for student veterans into higher education typically followed the Moving In, Moving Through, Moving Out stages, and sometimes a second Moving In stage outlined in Anderson et al. (2012). Figure 2 shows the common themes found in the student veterans' literature focusing on the transition process of Schlossberg's Transition Theory using the Moving In, Moving Through, and Moving Out headings (Anderson et al., 2012).
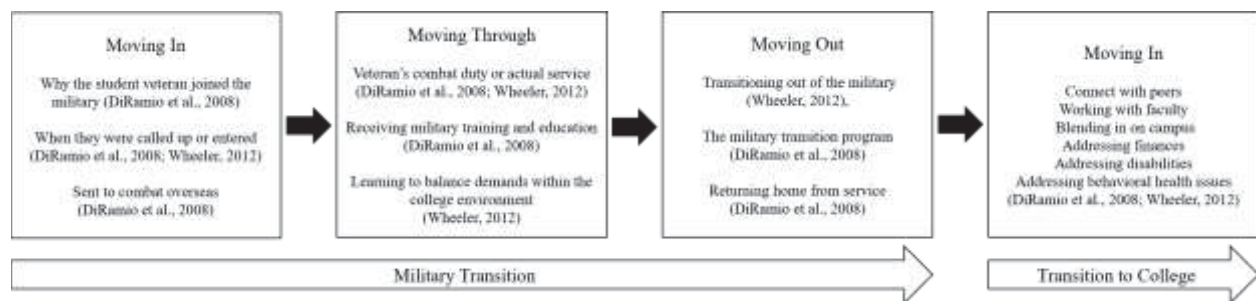
Figure 2. Common themes from the literature using Schlossberg's Transition Process for student veterans.

The articles that focused on the coping resources using the 4 S System for student veterans into higher education fell into Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies (Anderson et al., 2012). The literature focused primarily on student veterans once they were in college. Figure 3 shows the common themes found in the student veteran's literature focusing on the coping

resources for student veterans within Schlossberg's Transition Theory using Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies (Anderson et al., 2012).
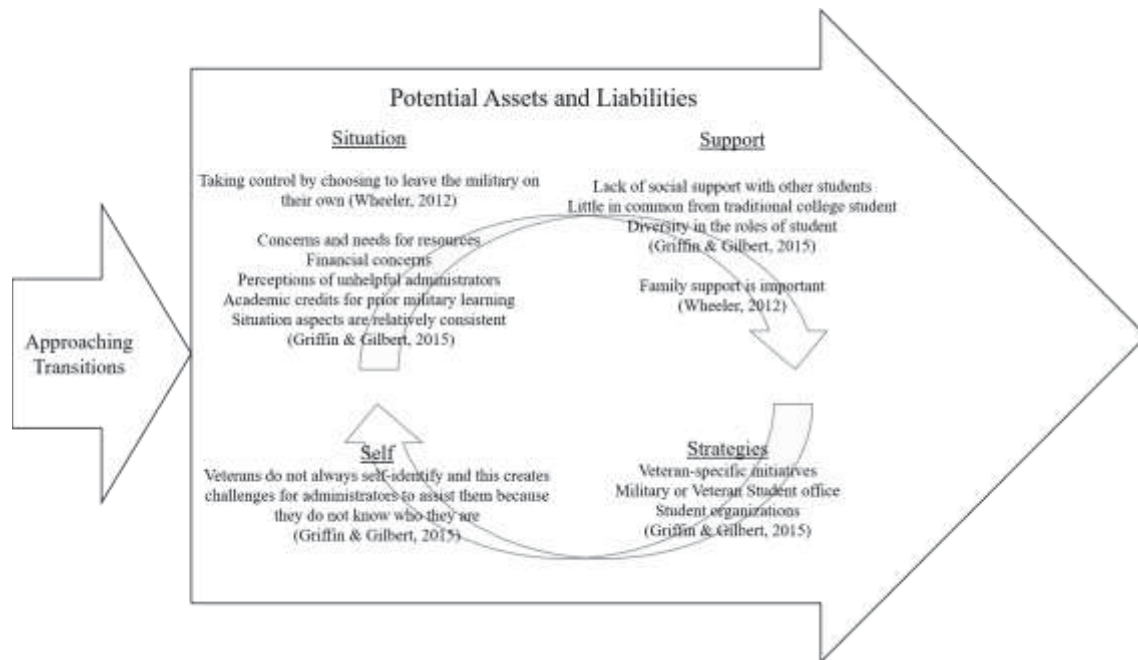
Figure 3. Common themes from the literature using Schlossberg's Coping Resources: The 4 S System for student veterans.

SVCTM Compared to Schlossberg's Transition Theory

In my study, I am not testing Schlossberg's Transition Theory; however, it is important to acknowledge that some aspects of my conceptual model of the literature about veterans' transition to college mapped to the work of Schlossberg with several major differences. Table 1 shows how components of the SVCTM are similar to the 4 S System of Schlossberg. The major difference in my conceptual model of the literature and Schlossberg's Transition Theory is the process itself. Schlossberg's Transition Theory progresses through a series of stages: Moving In, Moving Through, and Moving Out. These stages progress sequentially (Anderson et al., 2012). This model appeared to be overly simplistic and did not take into account that individuals do not all experience transitions in the same way and at the same entry and exit points in the model (Wheeler, 2012). My model is cyclical in nature where veterans enter and exit the cycle at different places. Essentially student veterans continue the cycle until they persist long enough to experience a positive transition and graduate from college.

Table 1

Comparison of Schlossberg's Transition Theory and the SVCTM

Schlossberg's Transition Theory	SVCTM
Situation	<u>Conditions</u> Institutional Type Veterans Work while at College
Self	<u>Conditions</u> Veterans may have Physical and Behavioral Health Disabilities Veterans are not traditional college students
Support	<u>Conditions</u> Family Military Peers <u>Causal Mechanism</u> Student veterans support each other in integrating their changing identities
Strategies	<u>Strategies used by Administrators</u> Implementing a Military or Student veteran Office Importance of and Facilitating Peer-to-Peer Relationships Peer Mentoring Programs Creating a Student Veteran Organization Awarding Academic Credit for Prior Learning Other Institutional Policies to Support Veterans

Literature Gap

Overall, there is not an abundance of empirical literature relating to student veterans and their experiences. The literature that does exist focused on descriptive information and descriptive statistics. A majority of the literature focused on best practices in higher education and student affairs and is not empirical in nature or consists of a single case or university. Additionally, the literature on student veterans was contextual to the time of its

publication. Typically, the literature emerged immediately during the Post-World War II era, Vietnam era, and the Post-Iraq and Afghanistan eras and conflicts with little literature produced during peacetime. My study sought to fill these gaps by examining the experiences of student veterans to build a conceptual model to explore student veterans' transition experiences.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the transition experiences of Post-9/11 student veterans from a military setting to a college setting. I used grounded theory methods to systematically review the literature about the transition of student veterans from the military to a college or university and create a conceptual framework for this study, or the Student Veteran College Transition Model (SVCTM). The SVCTM showed what strategies used by college and university administrators during a veteran's transition to college promote positive transition outcomes for student veterans within a number of conditions and contextual factors. This qualitative study used a modified version of Seidman's (2013) phenomenological interviewing and collective-case study. To collect information, I relied upon interviews. In the interviews, participants described their own experiences as student veterans and their transitions. Two semi-structured interviews took place with each participant.

Research Questions

My study examined two research questions:

1. How do Post-9/11 student veterans describe their experiences transitioning from a military setting to a college setting?

2. How do Post-9/11 student veterans perceive services provided by the college or university during their transition from a military setting to college setting?

In this chapter, I describe the methodologies employed in this study. This includes a description of the sampling of participants, data collection, data analysis, and ensuring trustworthiness.

Sample Selection

Qualitative research uses purposefully selected samples to select "individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell, 2013, p. 156). I conducted three sample selections for this study: a state sample, an institutional sample, and participants at each institution. First, I identified states with the greatest increase in the number of veterans using the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (NVCAS) (2014) veteran population data. I then cross-referenced these states with the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) regions used by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) of the U.S. Department of

Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to determine which region had the most states with the greatest increase in the number of veterans. I chose to use BEA's Southeast region because it contained the most states with the greatest number of veterans from the NCVAS data.

For the institutional sample, I downloaded a list of public four-year and two-year, private nonprofit four-year, and community colleges from IPEDS for the Southeast region consisting of 413 institutions total. The list consisted of 90 public four-year institutions, 157 public two-year institutions and community colleges, and 166 private nonprofit institutions. All of these institutions were eligible for use in this study; however, I chose to use institutions from one state to avoid differences in state governance of higher education. Most of the institutions enrolled larger numbers of 18- to 22-year-old students than other age groups.

Lastly, I chose a purposeful sample of six participants for multiple cases studies and cross-case analysis (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). I used the following criteria to choose a sample of participants: (a) were a veteran discharged from the U.S. Air Force, Marines, Army, Navy or served in the National Guard or Reserves on active duty after September 11, 2001; (b) completed at least 9 credit hours each semester for the last two consecutive semesters (i.e. 9 credits in Fall, 9 credits in Spring) during the 2015-2016 academic year; and (c) attended a public or private four-year or two-year institution of higher education in Virginia. I also asked participants to help identify potential participants using a snowball sample (Creswell, 2014). I sought also to select a diverse sample in relation to age, marital status, race, ethnicity, and gender. This was evident through the online Qualtrics registration and screening survey. Table 2 provides a rationale for the sampling criteria chosen.

Table 2

Selection Criteria and Rationale for Sampling

Criteria	Rationale for Criteria
Were a veteran discharged from the United States Air Force, Marines, Army, Navy or served in the National Guard or Reserves on active duty after September 11, 2001	The study looks specifically at Post-9/11 Veterans and their experiences after leaving the military.
Completed at least 9 credit hours each semester for the last two consecutive semesters (i.e. 9 credits in Fall, 9 credits in Spring) during the 2015-2016 academic year	I chose this criterion to ensure that the student veteran had sufficient experience in the college setting. I determined that two consecutive semesters at three-quarter time enrollment provided for sufficient experience for part-time and full-time students.
Attended a public four-year institution of higher education in the same state	I chose to focus on public and private four- and two-year institutions to ensure that participants had similar experiences and to control for institutional sector differences with private for-profit institutions.

I used three channels to recruit participants. First, I contacted directors of campus military or student veteran offices on campus and/or the GI Bill certifying official to help identify potential participants that are student veterans making academic progress towards their degree. Secondly, I contacted the leadership of the student veteran organization on campus to assist with identifying interested student veterans. In both cases, I answered any questions about the study and provided them with a recruitment flyer explaining the study and how to sign-up to participate (see Appendix A). Thirdly, I used snowball sampling and asked participants if they knew of other participants that may be interested in participating and asked them to share my information (Creswell, 2013). The following provides a list of systematic procedures for recruiting participants for the interviews:

1. I contacted each recruitment site via a telephone call or email to explain the study, asked for assistance in recruiting including allowing me to come to campus and recruit in their office, and discussed any questions they may have before committing to assist recruitment efforts (See Appendix B for the Institution Recruitment Script). Once they agreed to assist, I followed-up with an email with the recruitment flyer and invited them to contact me with any additional questions.

2. I contacted the leadership of the student veteran organization via email and Facebook to explain the study, shared the recruitment flyer, and invited them to contact me with any questions.

3. Personnel and leaders of the student veteran organization solicited interested participants by providing information about the research study (via a website, flyer, or word of mouth). I invited participants to contact me for further details and referred them to a project website that included an online Qualtrics survey used to register, screen for eligibility, and collect demographic information for participants (See Appendix C).

4. Within 48 hours, I contacted each participant who completed the online survey via telephone or email to confirm they met the eligibility criteria. For those that met the inclusion criteria, and I provided them with information for the informed consent process online via a separate Qualtrics survey as well as a hard copy of the informed consent for review (See Appendix D) and answered any additional questions.

5. Once participants met the inclusion criteria, and signed-up to participate in a WebEx or Skype interview, the screening tool provided them with information to use an embedded Google Calendar on the website to schedule an interview time slot. The calendar was only visible to me, and the participant only saw "Veterans Interview" time slots until they selected one, at which time the appointment updated on both their Google Calendar and to my personal calendar.

6. Once the first interview took place and transcribed, I contacted participants for a second interview. If they agreed to participate, they again went to the same website used to schedule the first interview and scheduled a second interview.

Interview Protocols

I developed two semi-structured interview protocols for data collection for all participants at all institutions based on Seidman's (2013) interviewing methods. Seidman's (2013) model of phenomenological interviewing consisted of a series of designed to explore the meaning that people place on their experience within the context of their lives. Seidman's (2013) interview one focused on the life history of participants. The life history interviews asked the participant to describe in detail his or her life in terms of the research topic up until the present time. The second interview focused on the details of the lived experiences of participants related

to the study's topic area. Seidman's (2013) third interview focused on participants reflecting on the meaning of their experiences.

The first protocol was a combination of Seidman's (2013) second and third interview types. It included seven questions along with prompts that I could use if appropriate to elicit responses related to the student's transition experiences from the military to college, their current experiences in college, and how they interpreted those experiences. Based on each individual's response, I followed up with additional questions to facilitate deeper and reflective responses from each participant. I developed this protocol to help build rapport with the participant before discussing the participant's life history to obtain data about the transition from the military to college, and data about the participant's experiences in college. A copy of the first interview protocol is in Appendix E.

The second interview protocol consisted of eight semi-structured questions with prompts focused on the student's life before joining the military, their military experience, and follow-up questions about their transition experience to college. Seidman's (2013) life history interview served as the basis for this protocol. As with semi-structured interviews, follow-up questions varied in content and emphasis depending on the particular participant. The complete second interview protocol is in Appendix F. I had a panel consisting of a qualitative methods expert and current and former military service members in academia review the interview protocol and provide feedback. I then piloted and practiced the protocols with a small sample of student veterans, who were not eligible to participate in the study, but were willing to offer feedback on the clarity of the questions.

Data Collection

The first step in the data collection process was to obtain permission to conduct this study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at my institution as well as approval from the IRB at the sample of institutions, if necessary (see Appendix G). I shared copies of my IRB approval with my contacts at each institution. Once the IRB approved the study, I collected and analyzed the data.

Two semi-structured interviews with each participant were the primary source of the data for this study. Each first round and second round interview used the respective protocol. The protocol included questions based on the SVCTM was consistent with Seidman's (2013) model of interviewing involving life history. This approach allowed for some standard questions asked

of each participant at each institutional site but allowed each participant to respond based on their experiences.

I conducted all of the interviews between September 2016 and January 2017. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. The interviews took place online via WebEx or Skype. Participants chose the time of the interview that was convenient for their schedule. Before the beginning of each interview, I had a casual conversation with each participant to build rapport and answered any additional questions the participant had. I confirmed with each participant that he or she had read the online informed consent form and asked if he or she was still willing to participate. I briefly confirmed information collected using the online Qualtrics registration/screening survey. I used a digital recorder to record the interview with the participant's permission. Once each interview was completed, I provided participants with a $10 Amazon Gift Card via email for their time and effort for a total of $20 in Amazon Gift Cards for each participant.

I used a third-party transcription company to transcribe each participant's interview. Once I received the transcript from the first interview, I sent it via email to each participant to verify the accuracy of the responses. In the email, I asked the participant to review the transcript and provide any changes to me within seven days to ensure the accuracy of the data. See Appendix H for a copy of the email sent to participants along with their transcript. If the participant had no changes, I finalized the transcript. If the participant did make changes, I incorporated those, and then finalized the transcript. Once each participant completed their second interview and I received the transcript from the third-party company, I constructed an instrumental case (Stake, 1995) for each participant presented in a chronological format to then analyze as a collective-case study.

An instrumental case is a type of case, or in this instance a person, where the focus is on a specific topic rather than the person (Stake, 1995). For purposes of this study, the instrumental case focused on the transition from the military to college for student veterans as the topic. By focusing on the transition topic for each participant, each instrumental case served as a means to provide data to explore the topic. I designed the interview protocols to bind the cases to the participant's military experiences and college experiences such that the topic would be the focus of the emergent data from the phenomenological interviews of each participant. The chronological format of the case consisted of the participants' pre-military experiences, military

experiences, and college experiences to allow for a consistently formatted narrative across all cases. Each participant reviewed his or her case study to ensure its accuracy as with the initial transcript review. I incorporated any changes into the finalized case for each participant.

Collective-Case Study

The qualitative method for data analysis in this study was a collective-case study. A collective-case study, also known as multiple case study, focused on a single issue illustrated through several cases to show different perspectives on the issue (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). In case study research, a case is the unit of analysis and exists within a bounded system. The case may be an event, process, program, or person (Stake, 1995). For my study, I selected the cases to illustrate the transition experiences of Post-9/11 student veterans. Six participants were used to illustrate the transition experiences of student veterans from the military to college (Stake, 1995). By choosing the collective-case study approach bounded by the military and college experiences of student veterans with the previously mentioned protocols, I was able to replicate the procedures for data collection and data analysis for each case (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014).

Data Analysis

The research questions and conceptual model of the literature provided the context for the initial data analysis of the collective-case study. I remained open to other emergent themes and patterns of data. Data analysis began as soon as I received the first transcript. After each interview, I completed a standardized memo with my initial impressions and interpretation of what I heard during the interview (see Appendix I for a copy of the standardized memo).

Data analysis took place in three phases: (a) within-case analysis, (b) cross-case analysis, and (c) assertions (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). Within-case analysis is "the detailed description of each case and themes within the case" (Creswell, 2013, p. 100). Cross-case analysis "involves examining themes across cases to discern themes that are common and different to all cases" (Creswell, 2013, p. 294). Assertions referred to making meaning of the case, or issue, by making sense of the data by providing an interpretation of the data within theories and constructs from the literature (Creswell, 2013).

To complete the within-case and cross-case analysis phases, I used a word table, created in Microsoft Excel. I included themes and propositions from my research questions and the SCVTM along the vertical side and the case, or participant, name running horizontally across the top of the table (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). For the within-case analysis, I systematically examined

the transcripts, notes from interviews, and the instrumental case for each participant and began copying direct quotes and statements into the appropriate cell of the table. For example, Mark said

> I'm 26 years old, so I'm significantly older than the average student, at least in my program. I think the oldest person I met so far is 23, and that's one individual. Especially coming in as a third-year transfer, I don't have the same social networks that a lot of other people do. So I came here and people expected that I should already know how to navigate everything well.

This quote specifically illustrates the theme in the conceptual model of the literature that student veterans are not the typical 18- to 22-year old college student. Therefore, I entered the quote into the word table in the column for Mark in the row for the theme "Nontraditional College Students."

After reviewing the transcripts and cases for the themes and propositions from the conceptual model, I reread the transcripts, the cases, my interview notes, and memos to identify any emerging themes or experiences not captured in the original conceptual model and research questions. For example, I noticed in my interview notes several participants discussed the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) they participated in as they prepared to separate from the military. Since TAP was not in the conceptual model of the literature, I created an emergent theme called "TAP Program" in my word table and copied quotes from participants referring to TAP. For example, I entered this partial quote for Catherine in the table, "So I did it [TAP] twice. The first time I did it and I specifically chose the education pathway because you could choose education pathway, entrepreneur pathway, and there was one other one." The word table allowed me to review each case in depth as I moved vertically down the table for each participant's column (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014).

The second phase of data analysis was cross-case analysis. To complete this phase, I systematically examined the data by moving horizontally across cases within a single theme looking for similarities, differences, and patterns in the data. For example, the following quotes talked specifically about age differences and were for the theme, "Nontraditional College Students." Mark said, "I'm 26 years old, so I'm significantly older than the average student, at least in my program. I think the oldest person I met so far is 23, and that's one individual." Catherine said, "Well, one, I am older, 43. But a couple of vets I've talked to, they're older as

well." Valerie said, "So transitioning to college where you're basically older and sitting in a class with 18- to 21-year-olds is very different. You're the odd man out." Tim said, "It wasn't the age differences that I wasn't prepared for because a soldier, it's actually-- pretty much there's constant turnover in the ranks, and they're always being replaced typically by younger people, so you're never not around 18 or 19 or 20-year-olds." Examining these quotes across the cases, I surmised that three of the participants felt their age was an issue that differentiated them from the typical 18- to 22-year-old student. However, Tim's quote provides an alternative perspective on the age issue. By examining the data this way, I was able to look for cross-case conclusions (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014).

The last phase of analysis was assertions. During this phase, I developed naturalistic generalizations from the data. I sought to apply what I learned from the data and apply it to the student veteran population (Stake, 1995). Figure 2 provides a visualization of the methods used in this study.

Ensuring Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness of the data, I used five strategies common to qualitative research: (a) expert review, (b) member checking, (c) peer review, (d) positionality and (e) bracketing. For my expert review, I had one faculty member with experience in qualitative research and two veteran experts review the interview protocol to make sure the questions asked would elicit data relevant to the research questions and my conceptual model. Additionally, I piloted the interview protocol with a small sample of student veterans who were not eligible to participate in the study.

After each transcript was developed for the first interview, I sent a copy via email to the student to make any corrections, changes, or additions to ensure that it reflected his or her comments and verify the accuracy of the findings from his or her standpoint (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Once the case was written, I sent it to the participant to ensure it reflected their experience (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). The next strategy used was peer review, in which I shared with my methodologist the created word table to review to ensure the information was accurate (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The last strategy involved was for me to understand my positionality and to bracket my experiences and assumptions that may affect the study (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2013).
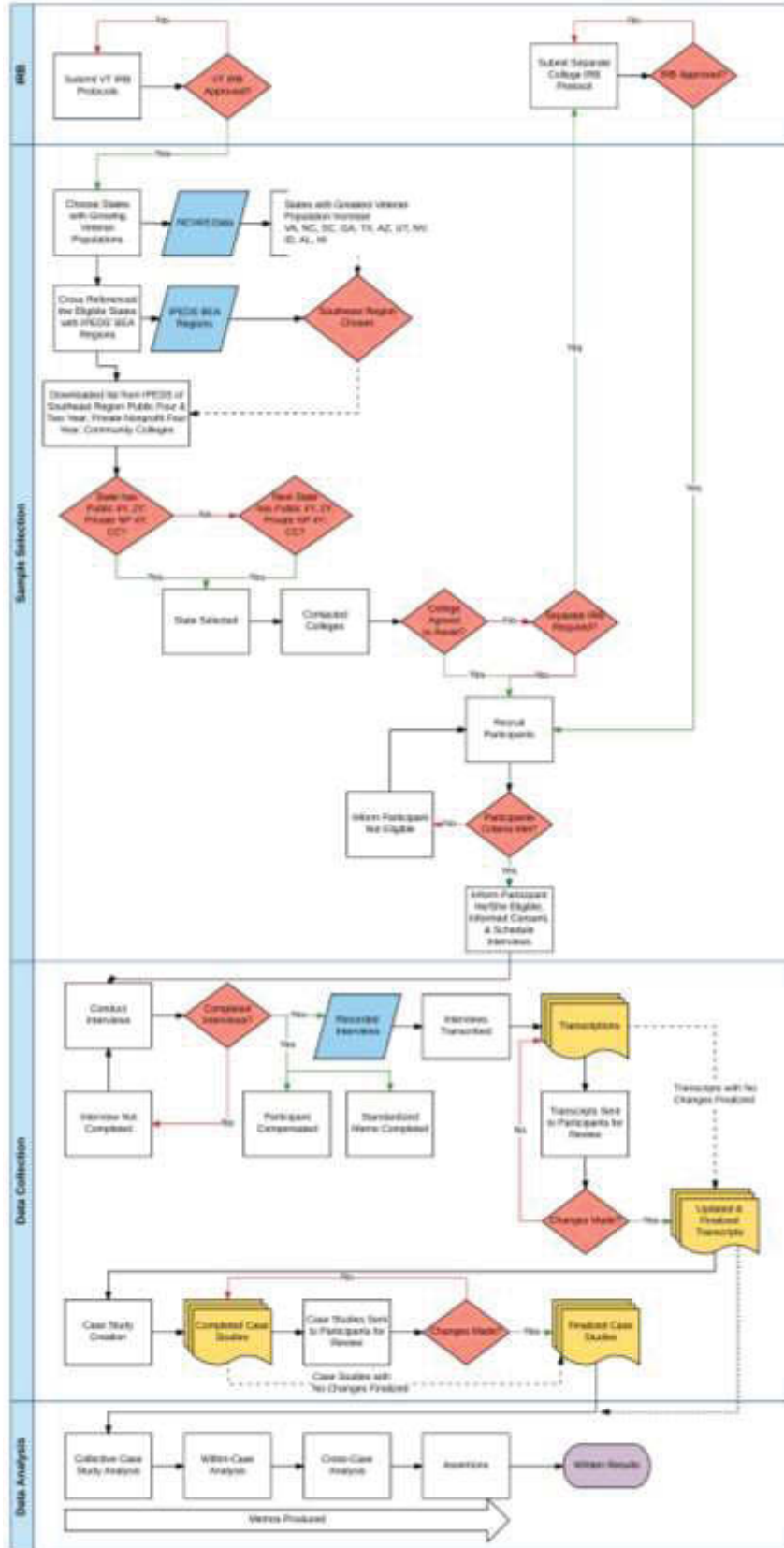
Figure 2. A systematic visualization of the methods used.

Positionality

   Positionality referred to role and position of the researcher played within the research study and how these views may influence data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2013). For me, this includes my philosophical and interpretative framework as a pragmatist influenced by constructivism and my previous experience with veterans. As a researcher, I hold an interpretive framework based on pragmatism influenced by constructivism. As a pragmatist, I choose to focus on the outcomes of the research. By focusing on research outcomes, I believe in choosing methods that are the best for addressing a research problem and questions that lead to practical implications of the research findings. However, I must acknowledge that "research always occurs in social, historical, political, and other contexts" (Creswell, 2013, p. 28). This acknowledgment may seem contradictory to the purpose of conducting a study trying to understand student veteran's experiences transitioning to college despite service era and combat service. However, I do not hold research beliefs that state there is an absolute reality regardless of context. This occurs because of the influence of social constructivism influences in my research paradigm. This influence includes the idea that I serve as both the researcher and instrument of research and rely on the participant's views and the meanings of their experiences. The meanings of these experiences are negotiated or constructed with the participant and me as the researcher (Creswell, 2013).

   I must also acknowledge my positionality with the topic of this study. Like many people, I have veterans in my family that served during World War II, Vietnam, and during peacetime; however, they did not influence my decision to pursue the topic of this study. As a civilian with no military experience, I became interested in this topic after working in a financial aid office at a large flagship institution in a state with a large military presence. In the financial aid office, I experienced working with student veterans that shared their frustrations about the university and the GI Bill certifying process. These feelings focused on how they felt administrators shuffled them from office to office without ever getting their questions answered. The second experience that influenced my interest was a position on a research team focused on assessing and evaluating education, training, transition, and entrepreneurship services for veterans in the Commonwealth of Virginia on behalf of the Virginia Community College System. Both my professional and research experience with veterans could influence how I collected and analyzed the data produced in this study. For example, my previous research experience provided me with

some of the military jargon used by veterans as well as an understanding on how to recruit student veterans for my study. As previously discussed, the protocol for recruiting participants is the result of learning from the missteps from my previous study. My professional and research experiences informed my assumptions about student veterans, which is why I must bracket about these assumptions.

Bracketing

Bracketing refers to discussing the researcher's "past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have shaped the interpretation to the study" (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). For this study, I must consider both my position as civilian and any assumptions that I have regarding the transition process for student veterans and their experience in college. These assumptions were:

1. Student veterans are only at college to complete a degree and they do not care about the extracurricular or co-curricular activities in which traditionally aged college students typically participate.

2. Student veterans have very little in common with traditionally aged college students.

3. Student veterans at college are just as diverse as civilian students are and represent a variety of ages, genders, races and ethnicities, and sexual orientations.

4. Student veterans attending college seek out the broader community more than other college students because of the shared common experiences with veterans off campus.

5. Student veterans may stop out of college due to financial and other personal concerns in their life.

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Data Security and Management

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To ensure security and manage the various forms of data, I took several steps. I destroyed any data collected from participants who were ineligible based upon the screening process. For all other data (audio files, screening and demographic information, transcripts, and case studies), I encrypted, stored on a password-protected computer, and copied to a secured server. During the semi-structured interviews, I worked with the each participant to choose a pseudonym for reporting purposes gave each participant a study identification number. I created the study identification and pseudonym key in an Excel spreadsheet, and I printed and stored the key separately from all other data in a secured lockbox safe. I was the only person with direct access to the all of the encrypted data files. An outside transcription service transcribed each

audio file into a Microsoft Word file. I required the transcription service to provide a confidentiality statement before proceeding with contracting the work.

Memos and Audit Trail

Throughout data collection and analysis, I used memos to develop an audit trail of the analytical process. After each interview, I completed a standardized memo to begin analyzing my initial thoughts on the data. Subsequent memos forced me to stop and begin analyzing the data to increase the level of abstraction from the data. These memos also allowed me to describe assertions as they emerged, identify gaps in the analysis, and ultimately my thoughts and questions about the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Delimitations

There were some initial delimitations to my sample selection and methods. First, the sample was a purposeful sample. I chose a purposeful sample that included only student veterans who had been enrolled three-quarter time for two consecutive semesters at public and private institutions because they were experienced with the phenomenon. Secondly, there is a self-selection bias within the sample because I focused on positive outcomes for student veterans. Therefore, I may have selected participants who provided a more positive presentation of their transition experience. The last delimitation revolves around the case study methodology. As a form of qualitative research, case studies are bounded by time and place (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014), and the context in which the researcher collected the data. Therefore, care should be taken before transferring the findings of qualitative research to other settings given the context and scope of this study.

Summary

In summary, I designed this study to gain an understanding of how Post-9/11 student veterans experience the transition from the military to college using collective-case study and a conceptual model created from the literature about student veterans and the transition to college. Figure 2 provided a visual step-by-step of the entire methodology designed to provide data relevant to my research study.

Chapter Four

Findings

This chapter summarizes the findings of this study designed to explore the transition experiences of Post-9/11 student veterans from a military setting to a college setting. The chapter begins with a summary of the sample of participants used for the study before presenting the six cases used for data analysis. I constructed the cases from the phenomenological interviews that took place with each participant. I presented each participant's case in a chronological sequence: pre-military experiences, military experiences, and college experiences.

I chose this sequence to allow me to trace events across time and to allow for possible causal events (Yin, 2014). A summary of statement concludes each case related to the outcome of a positive transition in the conceptual model illustrated by persistence and sense of belonging. The chapter concludes with findings of the cross-case analysis from the collective-case study to answer the two research questions and any emergent themes. The two research questions were:

1. How do Post-9/11 veterans describe their experience transitioning from a military setting to a college setting?

2. How do Post-9/11 student veterans perceive services provided by the college or university during their transition from a military setting to college setting?

Sample Participants

As outlined in the previous chapter, data for this study came from six purposefully chosen participants from various institutions within a single BEA Southeast Region state. Working with directors of MVSOs and/or GI Bill certifying officials, the leadership of VSOs, and asking participants to help make referrals, I was able to complete twelve 45-60 minute interviews with six participants that met the selection criteria. Table 3 provides demographic characteristics for participants including pseudonym, type of institution, class level, gender, marital status, race, ethnicity, age, and branch of service.

Table 3

Participant Demographic Characteristics

Pseudonym	Age	Sex	Race or Ethnicity	Marital Status	Military Branch	Type of Institution	Class Level
Mark	26	Male	Multiracial	Single	Marines	Four Year Public	Junior
Catherine	43	Female	White	Divorced	Marines	Four Year Public	Junior
Aidan	23	Male	White	Single	Army	Community College	Sophomore
Valerie	31	Female	White	Married	Navy	Four Year Private	Law
Tim	30	Male	White	Married	Army	Four Year Public	Graduate
Robert	27	Male	White	Single	Army	Four Year Public	Graduate

Mark

Mark was a 26-year-old man attending the University of the Mid-Atlantic (UMA), a public four-year institution pursuing his undergraduate degree in public policy and leadership. He previously attended Upstate Community College (UCC), his local community college, upon separating from the military and before transferring to UMA. Mark was a U.S. Marine, serving from 2009 to 2012. Before entering the military, Mark did not have any direct experience with family members in the military. His only exposure to the military was seeing the parades of the Russian military while living abroad as a child.

Joining the Military and Deployment

When Mark graduated high school, he joined the military during the surge of troops in Afghanistan as an infantryman. He later became a mortarman. In 2010, Mark deployed to Afghanistan where his platoon focused on foot patrols, engaged with the local Afghanis, and removed improvised explosive devices (IEDs). During his time in Afghanistan, his role changed

from strictly being a mortarman to focusing on intelligence. Mark described his role in Afghanistan as:

> I was not a squad leader at the time, but I earned the billing as an FDC member, the Fire Direction Center, which meant that I had a very high role in the platoon. I would receive information from forward observers and intelligence, and compute that information to the gun line, and often to higher authorities, as to where they could shoot and land artillery rounds and mortar rounds.

Once his deployment in Afghanistan ended, he returned home and then deployed again aboard a ship traveling to the Mediterranean Sea. His second deployment involved traveling to Jordan and Kuwait to "train local nationals" and "conduct amphibious landing operations."

Military Relationships

Along with the regimented life as a Marine, Mark grew close to many fellow service members in three ways. Initially, Mark and his fellow Marines were "Boots." The term Boot is "a derogatory term in the Marines for those Marines that have not deployed and haven't seen combat." Marines "hated" Boots and devalued them because they had not seen combat. However, Mark was not alone in this large group and formed close relationships with his fellow Boots because of the amount of time they spent together through the course of their duties. As a Boot, Mark and fellow service members "saw the best and worst of each other." They saw every aspect of each other's life and were "unable to hide anything personal."

The second type of relationship was with superiors. This relationship was a "psychological game" because superiors had the ability to either protect Mark or make his life "a living hell." During this time, Mark learned which superiors were true leaders who were there to train and protect him as a Marine. He built professional relationships with these Marines by continually meeting their standards to earn their respect. In turn, he earned his "value" in the platoon despite being a Boot.

The third type of relationships occurred during deployment. During deployment, there was no pretext of rank. He learned that you had to be "effective and be good at your job"; ultimately, was what mattered in battle. Mark's relationships focused on learning "who's the person you could trust in the fight" and who you could depend on. While there was no pretext of rank, he still had to please his superiors because he wanted to be the Marine "that people wanted to work with" and not the Marine that people did not trust.

Military Culture

Mark experienced two cultural aspects of his military experiences that entwined with his relationships and the regimented life of being a Marine: (a) having orders with little decision-making, and (b) the use of alcohol. Having orders meant, as a Marine, being told when to be somewhere and what to do. Mark learned superiors created objectives and directed him how to meet those objectives. He simply had to follow orders.

The second issue of alcohol was very common in the Marine Corps. Mark described himself as someone who "rarely drinks," but he said,

> In the Marine Corps, it's very accepted to be a borderline alcoholic, provided that you do your job and do it well. Provided that you show up exactly when you're supposed to - and you're not drinking in combat or something like that. But the consequences to drinking heavily are not really there, unless you make a mistake.

Leaving the Military and Going to College

Mark left the Marines in 2012 and decided not to take a gap year to readjust to the civilian world, as some of his fellow service members did. He decided that he would move back home and attend UCC for two years. He felt academically unprepared for college due to poor high school performance and a lack of critical thinking during his time in the military. He stated, "Well, when I got to college, I wasn't prepared academically. I had to put in way more hours than everyone else, simply because it's been so long since I've even addressed a lot of the subjects that they were talking about." However, Mark viewed UCC as a good way to prepare to adjust to civilian life and as a student.

> [I]t prepared me to be a student. I didn't know how to be a student. I didn't know how to schedule my time. The concept of you can wake up at 11 and show up to a class, that was alien to me. So it was a good way of introducing me to the college life.

While at UCC, he learned to adjust to a less regimented life but found it difficult to deal with ambiguity and make personal decisions. He was accustomed to having "specific objectives." UCC also provided him the chance to interact with civilians again from a variety of backgrounds and ages since many were older nontraditional students. UCC gave Mark the opportunity to meet many other veterans, including those through the veterans' student organization, "a second family" to him, because of shared experiences and backgrounds. After two years at UCC, Mark transferred to UMA.

UMA did not have a strong military student presence. Mark said, "There's no veterans club here or organization. It has been a little [chuckles]—I don't know what word to describe without sounding sad, but it's a little lonely." Mark experienced feeling out of place because he was older than the average student at UMA. Transferring to UMA prevented him from having the large social networks that many of his civilian peers had. Mark also did not have the same foundational knowledge about the workings of UMA as those who started there as first-year students.

One advantage that Mark did have over other transfer students at UMA was he transferred from UCC at the same time as another Marine and classmate, Catherine, into the same major. He and Catherine were able to navigate the complex organization of UMA together. However, even with this connection to Catherine, he did not feel like a part of the community at UMA. He stated, "I want to feel like I'm part of the community here, I don't feel like I'm a part of the team."

Mark perceived that by being an older student, having traveled the world growing up, and his military experience as an asset in his public policy program at UMA. He stated, "I've never met so many 20-year-olds packed in one room that know everything about the world and are so sure of it, too. I'm 26 and I'm still trying to figure out which way is up." He saw a large difference in the experience and culture of his classmates as compared to his own. For him, he learned what he called "intellectual humility" early in the Marines from "somebody like a squad leader or a sergeant or a staff sergeant say, 'No, you're not as smart as you fucking think you are, and you need to shut up and listen right now.'" These superiors made it clear that his place was to follow orders, not to think. This "intellectual humility" and military experience informed his perspective on college challenges that arose. He said,

> I've had some, some really rough, hard days before. Some really, really, long, bad days.
> Some things are more in perspective for me. I mean, there are things that don't bother me
> as much as I see them bothering other students.

Mark's perception about how he interacted with his professors was different from his perception of nonmilitary students. He saw himself as more mature and professional with his faculty members. Mark treated the standards from faculty the same way he did with superiors. He stated, "I don't ask for excuses. I don't ask for my excuses to be accepted, that's for sure. I don't give excuses. I think a lot of professors appreciate that." He said,

I show them a degree of respect that I don't think they're used to. I sir or ma'am the whole time. Whenever I speak, I stand up if I want to speak to them. I see a lot of teachers personally interacting with students that remain seated. To me, that's just incomprehensible how you can remain seated to somebody who's so much infinitely more accomplished than you.

Mark was very cognizant of the significant cultural differences between the Marine Corps and college. He explained, that civilians did not understand the "gross culture, the politically incorrect culture" of the military. He stated that some Marines "instead of accepting the fact that they're aliens, they think that society is the aliens. It's the reverse. The Marine Corps culture is the alien culture, and society is the normal one." He suggested that without learning to leave the military culture behind, a Marine would struggle outside of the military.

While UMA does not have a strong military presence and lacks services for student veterans, he seemed to like the idea of a program that links student veterans together for academic, social, and professional experiences.

I do believe that pairing them with veterans—I've heard of a program a long time ago that some schools were buying into, in which all the veterans they had for the first two years of their four-year institution, they would be linked together. They would track each other's improvement, and they would all be together and take the same general ed classes. I really like that idea.

By doing this, he thought that student veterans could help one another to navigate the ambiguity created by the institutional culture of institutions such as UMA instead of feeling as if they had no direction.

Mark persisted towards his degree; however, he did not feel like he has found his place or niche at UMA like the one he had at UCC. He ultimately found that he had to leave the ingrained military culture behind him while learning how to navigate the transition the military to college and learning to integrate his identities as a U.S. Marine, veteran, civilian, and student.

Catherine

Catherine was a 43-year-old woman attending the University of the Mid-Atlantic (UMA), a public four-year institution pursuing her undergraduate degree in public policy and leadership. She previously attended Upstate Community College (UCC), her local community college, upon retiring from the military before transferring. Catherine was a U.S. Marine,

serving from 1994 to 2014. Catherine did not have any experience or exposure with family members in the military before joining the military.

Joining the Military, Career, and Deployment

While a California community college, Catherine decided that she was going to join the U.S. Marine Corps instead of pursuing her education. After finishing basic camp at Parris Island, Catherine traveled to Tennessee for her Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) training school for a year. After finishing MOS training, the Marine Corps stationed Catherine at installations in California, Florida, and Japan. While in Florida, Catherine married a fellow Marine and had her first child while stationed in Japan and her second child when she returned to California. In 2008, she deployed to Iraq for six months before returning stateside and then deployed again to Afghanistan. During this period, Catherine and her husband divorced. After Afghanistan, Catherine returned to South Carolina and remained there until she retired in 2014. Over the course of her career, Catherine held various MOS positions and performed roles as an equipment instructor, Meritorious Sergeant, and First Sergeant before retiring along with other duties that all Marines perform.

Military Relationships and Military Culture

Catherine's relationships in the military and the military culture she experienced focused on her being a woman. Catherine saw the perception of male Marines that women were inferior. "The Marine Corps places a high premium on physical fitness. And the stereotype of females— and it's not always true, but the stereotype is they can't hack it, or they'll fall out of runs." An athlete throughout high school, Catherine was physically able to compete with her fellow Marines and in many cases was able to outperform both recruits and drill instructors. When she entered her technical school, she finished at the top of the class. After moving to her first duty station, she experienced challenges because she used different equipment at the air station than what she used during training:

> And even though technically I did really good in school, the on-the-job training part was challenging because the equipment I learned in school was different than the equipment at the air station where I worked at. So I didn't have a lot of confidence…So some of the -- my counterparts, I don't know, technically, they seemed to grasp it a lot easier. And so when you're young, a lot of side talking starts happening like, "She doesn't know her job."

To counter the competitive mentality of her fellow Marines she drew on her physical strengths again. "So that was kind of disheartening, but to counter that, I drew on my strengths again, which was my physical fitness. I enrolled in classes. My master sergeant put me up for meritorious boards." Catherine again excelled in the course and finished top of her class of 110 Marines. This helped prove that while she may not have been the most technically proficient on the equipment, she knew how to take advantage of her strengths. "So those things, where I shined, and excelled, they kind of helped balance out the fact that I wasn't that technically savvy on the equipment. Then like I said, I picked up meritorious sergeant in under three years, which was unheard of."

When Catherine left as a sergeant to become an instructor in Florida, she again saw challenges in her relationships because she was a woman. At her duty station, she was one of two women and the only female instructor. Again, she had to prove herself among her peers because she was teaching different equipment than she previously learned about and used in her previous post. She again had to work to avoid others labeling her as someone who did not know what she was doing. When she ended her time as an instructor, she left with a good reputation and a variety of curriculums used for instructional purposes.

Leaving the Military and Going to College

Catherine retired from the U.S. Marines in 2014 giving up the chance to be the "first female E9 rank in the Air Traffic Control community." However, she felt that she had peaked and it bothered her that she did not have her four-year degree:

I kind of felt it was untapped potential. But I also knew I put my heart and soul into the military and I really excelled. So I didn't feel guilty I gave my job and my duties in the military 110%. And I know myself. I'm pretty focused and one-dimensional, so I knew the time would come where I would want to finish my degree. So, I decided to retire.

Upon retirement, Catherine began looking at institutions and considered one school in Montana because of their veterans support program. At the Montana school, she found they had a house that served as a central veterans' hub with computers, lounge space, a kitchen, and a student veteran in a work-study program that worked with student veterans answering questions face-to-face and assisted student veterans with the VA processes both in and outside of the institution.

After looking at several institutions, she decided to attend Upstate Community College. During her time at UCC, she experienced an "awkward feeling, this like disconnectedness" feeling because of her age. The age difference became very apparent to her on the first day of classes. "And on my first day of school, I was mistaken for a professor." However, she found other student veterans at UCC to connect with on campus.

> [M]y first semester, my first class was English, and after we got to know a couple of the other students, it turns out there's three of us who were all Marines and we were all sitting in the front [chuckles]. So that was interesting. And then, another semester there was an Army vet in one of my classes. And so I sat in the front and he sat by the door because he wanted to watch the door [chuckles]. So when we do come across other vets, there's always this great connection though. Instant just talking, "Oh, where were you at?" There's kind of this instant trust factor, I guess, that makes conversation really easy, like someone gets you. But it's kind of like you discover the vets in your class. You can kind of pick them out sometimes. Well, actually, so far in all of my classes I've been able to.

Catherine said that she could pick out veterans in her course before based on how they carry themselves and has been right every time. She found that with fellow student veterans she had an instant trust with them, was able to have conversations easier with them, and that they were interested in her stories and experiences as she was with their experiences.

She did discover that as an older student her age was an advantage in connecting with faculty members because she was closer to their age range compared to the traditional aged college student. Some faculty members even asked her about her experiences in the military and seemed genuinely interested; however, she also had several bad experiences.

> I've had two occasions with professors that weren't on the up and up. Maybe I have high expectations of people who are holding leadership positions, and I view those professors as leaders. And I have had two occasions where I discerned they're not giving me their best. It's just not above reproach. Those instances really aggravate me. So that's been my experience so far.

After two years at UCC, Catherine transferred to UMA. At UMA, Catherine found no student veteran organization and a lack of support for student veterans on campus. She transferred to UMA along with Mark, from UCC, so she knew at least one other student veteran. However, she found herself disconnected and lonely at UMA, not only because she was older but because

of her experiences. Catherine realized she was no longer in a place that had the camaraderie like the Marine Corps and felt like people did not care about her experiences.

Her interactions with faculty and staff at UMA also were somewhat different from those at UCC. Catherine has found it difficult to communicate with the coordinator for veterans' benefits at UMA. She never met with the coordinator because the process was solely electronic through a generic email address. She felt that she only received canned responses despite the subject of the email. She described the frustration of trying to use UMA's early registration policy for student veterans.

> I'm having issues with the VA official here on the [UMA] campus. For example-- and this is the second time in a row, so it's a trend. So I submitted all my paperwork to enroll and I had already enrolled in my classes online. And I got to let her know what classes I enroll[ed] in. That's standard; it was at UCC as well. So I submitted all my paperwork to her November 22nd. At UCC, the VA rep would certify my enrollment within like 48 hours. For some reason she didn't certify my enrollment until January 6th. So what happens is, she certified my enrollment, then it goes to the VA. And the VA says, "We will process your request in the order it is received." Well, guess how many other requests they were processing, okay? And this is why it's an issue; because of that book stipend. Because I get that book stipend to buy my books. So I just got my book stipend yesterday, and classes started on Wednesday.

This example was the second time Catherine experienced a certifying issue and was unable to use UMA's early registration policy. The first time she was told, "You're not a third or fourth year," when she was actually a third-year junior when she transferred. These experiences left her feeling she had no voice and unsupported at UMA. Even though she had issues with the veterans' coordinator and did not feel supported on campus, she did find an ally in the dean of her school. The dean of her school of leadership and public policy, a former Army Green Beret, felt that student veterans were an excellent fit for his school because they "know something about leadership" and are an asset to the school.

One of the best experiences Catherine had that helped her cope with the feelings of disconnection from the UMA campus occurred in the community away from the university. While she was out shopping, she started talking to one of the men working in a store

and found out he was a retired military service member and commander of the local VFW. This experience left her

> [E]xcited because I've been wanting to get involved with vets, but I didn't know how to plug in. I am a member of the VFW at large too. So he gave me his card and he's like, "Listen, our chapter has tons of money, and we're anxious to spend it, and I could use the help." So, that lifted my spirits because I've kind of have felt a little like-- I don't know what the word is, since I have been here-- I guess I've felt disconnected since I've been here at UMA. Not only am I older, but I have all this experience. I went from the Marine Corps where you have lots of camaraderie to here where everyone's like - I don't know - don't really care.

While Catherine attended UMA without a great deal of support for student veterans, she believed that the support model for student veterans at the Montana institution she saw while touring schools was the best way to serve student veterans. However, she also believed that it was not solely on the institution to make a difference. She stated that the student veteran needs to be "proactive," "ask questions," become "organized," and take the initiative to learn how to navigate the system by using use the military reconnaissance skills and find the answers. Catherine also saw challenges as something that you should try to fix and give constructive feedback about the experience.

Catherine persisted in her education at both UCC and UMA; however, she has struggled to find a sense of belonging on the UMA campus. She explained that she still has things to learn about UMA like how to relate to nonmilitary students and faculty members, and how to navigate the administrative structure of UMA. While she does not perceive herself as having a strong sense of belonging on campus, she had hope that she could seek out opportunities to engage with veterans outside of UMA in local veteran organizations like the VFW.

Aidan

Aidan was a 23-year-old man attending Mid-Atlantic Mountain Community College (MAMCC), his local community college, pursuing an associate's degree. He was a member of the U.S. Army from 2012 to 2015, a member of the Army National Guard after separating from the military, and attending classes at MAMCC. Aidan's family exposed him to the military and veterans from an early age since they were a military family. Both of his grandfathers served in the military as well as his uncle. His father and aunt also took him to community service events

working with veterans starting at an early age. Aidan's family instilled a sense of service to country in him from an early age. This sense of duty led him to enlist in the U.S. Army.

Joining the Military and Deployment

Four days after Aidan's 18th birthday he enlisted in the Army; however, he had several more months of high school before he could actually go anywhere. He spent time training at the recruiting station in the Future Soldier Program to ensure he could pass the Army Physical Fitness Test. He also took several courses to prepare him for training. Thirteen days after he graduated from high school, he left for basic training. Aidan felt excited about leaving for basic training because he knew it would be a different experience; however, when he entered training it shocked him because of the abrupt change in lifestyle with an extremely regimented life.

After completing basic training, Aidan became a field artilleryman firing cannons that supported infantrymen and tanks for battle and received orders to a duty station in upstate New York near the Canadian border. While in New York, he spent the majority of his time completing physical training, maintaining vehicles and artillery, as well as completing tasks that "the new guys" had to do simply because they were the new guys. Aidan did not spend a lot of time doing his actual military occupation specialty until he deployed to Afghanistan.

During his deployment to Afghanistan, he and fellow gun crewmembers spent 24 hours doing their work and then would rest for 24 hours. Aidan described that during this time they "found a good routine" where there was time to be as comfortable as you can be in a war zone but "still 100% mission capable." During the down time, Aidan and his fellow soldiers spent a great deal of time doing "self-improvement activities" including "working out" and "online courses that would benefit" them when they "returned stateside for promotions" and for their future.

Military Relationships

Aidan described his years in the Army as some of the best years of his life because of the relationships he built with fellow soldiers.

> Those were some of the best, some of the best years of my life. Because I was with people that were sharing the same experience with me and they knew pretty much everything I knew and more. We fed off of each other when it came to intelligence and experience. The guys I served with were brothers to me, and that's not the cliché brothers-in-arms thing. That's, these guys are -- these were the guys I was willing to lay

my life down for. And I mean, you run into a couple people that you're just kind of like,
"Why is this guy here?" But everybody's got their role, so. Honestly, all in all, I had a
really strong bond with almost everyone I served with.

Leaving the Military and Going to College

Aidan described his decision to go to college as a way that could lead him to give back to
fellow veterans.

> So when I got out of the military, being a 13 Bravo, being a cannon crewmember, you
> don't really have a lot of transferable experience to the civilian side. And so I looked into
> education, and I looked into-- and I knew I had the GI Bill, and I knew I had to use it as
> soon as possible. So I said, "Why not get out now, go pursue an education. If I want to
> come back, I'll come back. If not, that's fine too." But I knew that I found a calling while
> I was in to help others with mental health issues like PTSD and things of that nature. I
> just kind of felt a need to help out that group of people, help out that issue at hand.

He decided that he would pursue his education by attending MAMCC in his hometown and if he
wanted to reenlist later, he could at that time.

Aidan found the transition to college a bit "difficult" because he no longer had the close
relationships he had with fellow soldiers that he considered brothers and sisters in what he
perceived as a "dog-eat-dog" world where he did not know many people initially at school. He
also found that civilians were not educated on the lifestyle and culture of the military or veterans'
issues. On more than one occasion, he received questions on whether "he had killed someone."
While he was open about his experiences, he found this among the dumbest questions a person
could ask a service member and it occurred "because people simply are uneducated about the
military."

While Aidan experienced a culturally unaware civilian population, he found that
MAMCC had a larger military population of veterans and dependents of veterans than some of
the local colleges. By finding this group of student veterans at his college through the student
veteran organization and the MAMCC Military Student Center, he found his niche with other
military students.

> Thankfully, I go to a school where our veterans—our veterans are very close knit and we
> have our own military student center, and things are just taken care of there because of
> fellow veterans. But if you go somewhere where there's not a heavy veteran population,

you're going to be a little lost in the sauce. You won't know who to talk to or how to get a hold of them and the proper channels and all that.

Aidan even started working at the Military Student Center on campus helping other student veterans navigate MAMCC.

Aidan also found that the financial aid officer that handles veterans' issues and paperwork at MAMCC to be a strong resource for him and fellow veterans. She understood the student veteran mindset and intentionally stayed connected with student veterans on campus and Aidan stayed connected with her. She was one of the people on campus that assisted him when he first enrolled in college because he separated from the military about a week before classes started. "I had like a week before school started…So I had a week to get ready for school and sign up for classes and everything. I didn't know how to do it, so I went to them for help" to get into and registered for classes at MAMCC.

Although Aidan was closer to his civilian counterparts at MAMCC in age, he found that the military mindset stayed with him and influenced how he addressed professors and his classes.

But the mindset of a lot of veterans when they come out of the military is they have to have a set schedule, and they have to push themselves to get things done. And so I spend a lot of time getting my schedule wrapped around my own head about when I need to be where. And honestly, I show up to class 15 minutes early most of the time. Now that I'm working at the school, I've taken that number down. That's probably about 5 minutes early, 10 minutes early. However, I don't think I've have been late to a class yet without having given warning to the professor. And then I see all these other students just kind of roll in whenever, or don't roll in at all, and still somehow get work done. So I mean it kind of bothers me that people aren't really taking it seriously, but there's not much I can do about that.

Aidan found a strong military presence at MAMCC with a number of services for student veterans. He believed that many of these services such as the student veteran organization and the Military Student Center were integral to his success.

Aidan persisted thus far and found his niche at an institution that intentionally and strategically supported student veterans. Finding this niche gave him a strong sense of belonging and purpose on campus. Aidan wished he had had a better plan before leaving the military that included doing more research on colleges, planning a budget and finances, and understanding

VA benefits. He suggested completing the plan four to six months before separating from the military. Despite these regrets, he found his way towards his goal of becoming a mental health counselor.

<center>**Valerie**</center>

Valerie was a 31-year-old woman attending the Capitol University, a private four-year institution pursuing her Juris Doctorate. She briefly attended college upon graduating high school but dropped out within her first year to join the U.S. Navy. She was a member of the U.S. Navy from 2009 to 2012. After her discharge from the Navy, she attended Colonial University, a public four-year institution and upon graduation started law school. Valerie had family members serve in the military; however, this did not play a role in her choice to join the military.

Joining the Military and Deployment

Joining the Navy for Valerie was a "roller coaster" experience with not a lot of support. She stated,

> I had several people telling me, "Oh, why would you as a female and a mother want to join the military?" and, "You shouldn't do this," and-- so there was a lot of that. There wasn't a whole lot of support for my decision. It was a lot of people questioning why I chose to do what I did. I just had to trust that I was making the right decision, and I had to get myself ready physically. And I had to sign a lot of papers and give my mom… temporary guardianship.

Along with having to prepare physically, she had to give temporary guardianship to her mother for her children, create a family care plan so that she just was not leaving her children in case of deployment, break her lease, and create a will before she could leave. She initially thought she had nine months before basic training. The Navy recruiter contacted her and told her there was an unexpected opening for the job she would be doing. Thus, nine months became one month to complete all of the legal paperwork to ensure her children were cared for while she was gone.

Once Valerie completed her basic training, she became a helicopter engine mechanic, a job that she absolutely loved. The job was maintaining all aspects of the helicopters including "everything from working on the rotors to the fuel systems to the engines to the tail section." While it was hard manual labor during 10 to 12 hour days, she enjoyed doing it. Along with her mechanic job, she had other duties including standing watch at the Quarterdeck of her squadron.

Valerie did not "acclimate to the naval command structure" well because she was older when she joined the Navy. She was 24 when she enlisted and had experienced the world outside of the military and school unlike those who enlisted straight out of high school. Since she enlisted later in life than many of her fellow sailors, she felt she was different.

Valerie experienced two deployments on cruises through the Mediterranean to float off the coast of Bahrain for six months as a rider. For her, she was a member of the aviation team that deployed aboard aircraft carriers within a group of naval vessels to service helicopters and jets. As a member of the aviation team, she simply rode the carrier and maintained the aviation equipment.

Military Relationships and Culture

Valerie's relationships in the military consisted of the relationship with her superior and focused on how she was a woman. She described her supervisor, a first-class petty officer, as someone "who kind of took me under his wing and really taught me a lot about the job and the way the Navy works. And he was amazing. He really helped me out a lot." The relationship with other sailors was more complicated:

> As far as the other females in the shop, it's kind of contentious because you're banded together as far as you're females in a male-dominated atmosphere. But it's a little bit of competition because you have to be the best. And when you're in an all-male mechanic shop, you just kind of have to adapt. You have to develop a really tough skin to things that are said and things that are done, and you can't take things personally. And if you do, you become ostracized basically. Nobody wants to work with you. You become that person. You know what I mean?

She said one woman who did not handle being in the male-dominated field well was placed in a position doing paperwork all day away from others because she was quiet and stayed to herself. Valerie said she did not want to be simply doing paperwork so she learned to put on a tough skin, listen to them, shrug it off, and move on.

Valerie described that overall you do find some form of support with one another in the Navy. She said that the "Navy becomes your family" away from home, especially when you are on a naval vessel. Since the boats provide cramped living quarters, you get to know other sailors really well, whether you want to or not.

Valerie described the Navy as a "love-hate relationship" because she "loved it at first." However, as time went on she had "trouble with the bureaucracy and political decisions made" that affected her. She grew disenchanted with the "do what I say and don't ask questions" mentality because of her tendency to ask questions about why they were doing what they were doing and how it could be better. This coupled with a knee injury led Valerie to leave the Navy.

Leaving the Military and Going to College

Valerie left the military because of her knee but she also grew tired of "sacrificing everything for the Navy." She felt that as a sailor she had to always put the Navy first, and being away from her children for seven to nine months on deployments became too much to handle. She was "no longer willing to sacrifice [her] family for the Navy." She also wanted to pursue the dream she had as a child of becoming a lawyer; however, life decisions stopped her from pursuing that directly. Those decisions led her to choose the military to better herself and life for her children.

The transition from the military to civilian and student was difficult at times because she encountered people that did not understand the culture of the Navy. They did not understand that "the Navy was a way of life." She disclosed that there were life experiences and things she did and saw during her time in the Navy that she could not talk about with anyone. The Navy required her to sign a nondisclosure agreement under penalty.

Valerie found there were benefits to her military experiences, training, and how she carried herself and "knowing how to speak to people, knowing when to be quiet and listen, knowing how to play the political game." These experiences provided an advantage for her with faculty and deans and in her pursuit of a White House internship, a court system internship, and the competition for an FBI internship.

During Valerie's time both as an undergraduate and in law school, she found three main forms of support that aided in her transition from the military to college. The first support Valerie had was the support from her husband and children. Her husband was an active duty service member and received orders to move to a base near Colonial University before she separated from the military. Once she received her discharge, she moved to be with him and chose to attend Colonial University for her undergraduate degree. Throughout her time at Colonial University, he supported her by providing encouragement telling her "Yes, you can do

this. Yes, you're on the right track" while feeling like she had "two full-time jobs" balancing the role of wife and mother and student.

The second source of support Valerie found came from professors. She found that professors could easily spot student veterans because of how they carried themselves and because of their non-traditional student experiences. She said, "I had one professor in particular who just mentored me. We had a bond and a relationship. She just really helped me grow as a person more than I ever thought possible."

The last form of support Valerie found came in the military office on campus. She received information as soon as they identified her as a veteran through their process. They provided her and other student veterans with "a military specific orientation" to the institution and educated them on navigating how Colonial University processed GI Bill benefits. The military office also kept in contact with students through emails to notify about deadlines. Valerie also felt like she could just call or go into the office and receive help navigating the system at Colonial University. The advantage to the military office at Colonial University was that veterans and student veterans worked in the office. She attributed the effectiveness of the office in part to the fact that they had veterans as employees. From Valerie's perspective, a military office staffed by veterans provided an automatic connection with student veterans on campus because of the shared experiences and backgrounds.

Valerie persisted through both undergrad and now in law school. Her sense of belonging came from the feelings of trust in the MVSO on her campus at her undergraduate institution. While she had challenges balancing her family and student life, she credited her time in the Navy as the thing needed to better her life for her and her family, allowing her to pursue her dream of becoming a lawyer.

Tim

Tim was a 30-year-old man attending Mid-Atlantic State University (MASU), a public four-year institution, pursuing his doctorate in geological sciences. He previously attended Mountain State University (MSU) in another state upon separating from the U.S. Army. Prior to entering the military, Tim did not have any direct experience with the military. His decision to enlist in the Army occurred in 2004 as he entered his first semester in college when he and his father had a disagreement that resulted in him no longer having funds to pay for college. He remembered a presentation in his high school's foreign language course about the Army's

linguist program. He decided that being in the Army would be his only viable option so he dropped out of school and began the process to enlist.

Joining the Military and Deployment

After Tim decided to join the military, he sought out a recruiter and took the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), the military entrance exam to determine qualifications of an enlistee. He found that because he scored so high on the exam he could essentially have any job of his choice so he chose to be a linguist. His recruiter told him that he could officially sign his contract the next day. Three days before his 19th birthday, he left for basic training not knowing what to expect fully but he was excited about the new adventure.

After the typical basic training in boot camp, Tim traveled to the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California where he spent 18 months learning Korean. The length of his workday ranged from 10 to 20 hours:

> Pretty much it was a six, seven hours a day of class, usually with one to two hours of a mandatory study hall at night…So pretty much, think about 10-20 hours a day of focusing on learning a foreign language. And then on top of that...[s]till had to do physical training, still have to do all the countless PowerPoint presentations on this regulation and that regulation and the CMJ. You still have to keep your barracks room all buttoned up and the bed made properly and everything. It's kind of like college, but if your college instructors were the authority over nearly every aspect of your life.

His first duty station in Alaska was "mundane" and a "crapshoot as to what [they] were going to do" day-to-day except for vehicle maintenance on Mondays. On the other days of the week, especially during winter months, Tim and his fellow soldiers would go to work and essentially do nothing all day. Among his extra duties, Tim maintained all the weapons for his troop (approximately 100 soldiers). Weapon maintenance was a complex endeavor because of the amount of paperwork completed, account for all weapons, and securing all weapons properly. Any mistake on any of these tasks could have resulted in disciplinary action.

From 2008 to 2009, Tim deployed to Iraq at the end of the 2007 surge of troops. At that time, Iraq was in even more turmoil with significant violence with the surge of troops fulfilling its purpose. Tim's role in Iraq was different from his role previously because Korean was not a language used there. He fulfilled a new role in intelligence. In this role and with his platoon he "conducted presence control" functions where they would walk around monitoring the area for

that day outside of the base beginning around 5:00 AM. In the afternoon, Tim and his platoon would conduct specific missions that typically involved "searching for weapon caches" to inform the explosive ordinance disposal team that would destroy the weapons with explosives. Tim got back to his base between 8:00 or 9:00 PM where he would go to the gym, de-stress, and then go to sleep before repeating these duties daily. Tim described his deployment as "the most typical thing" he did compared to his other soldiers because when he was stateside he was in small units on small bases. After Tim came back stateside from Iraq, he attended the Defense Language Institute again to learn the French language before separating from the military and working for a defense contractor.

Leaving the Military and Becoming a Civilian Defense Contractor

As Tim left the military, he made several difficult decisions about his and his family's future. During his time in the military, he met and married his wife and she gave birth to their daughter as he was separating from the military. He and his family returned stateside and set up a home and life as civilians. Tim received his acceptance to college and was ready to start when he made the tough decision to forgo going back to college because he "wanted a better quality of life" for his family. He decided to become a civilian contractor with a defense and intelligence contracting company.

Tim became an intelligence analyst in Afghanistan and remained there for almost two years for his family. He "loved the work" that he did in Afghanistan because it was both fulfilling and it gave him the opportunity to contribute to keeping his fellow military service members safe in the field. Tim believed that intelligence was "the way to help bring his brothers and sisters in the military back home safely." After serving in this position for almost two years, he reached the point where he needed to go home and spend time with his family, the reason he became a contractor in the first place to financially support them. This position also allowed Tim to have "training wheels" as he was able to "wean himself" off the military by having a job that was part civilian and part military.

Transitioning to College and Challenges

In 2013, he returned to the U.S. and because of the government's sequestration, he realized that being a civilian contractor for the government would not be a steady job. He decided to go back and pursue his degree at MSU while still looking for employment. Tim found his love for his major geological sciences early on because he saw the "benefits to

people's lives" as intelligence did for the lives of his military comrades. He said, "If the sequestration was my impetus to get back to school, finding a purpose in my major was what really cemented me staying."

Tim found four difficulties transitioning from the military back to school; however, he found that his military experience prepared him to cope with the stress and challenges he found. The first challenge was he felt unprepared academically:

> That was the hard part. It was at that point in time when I first started back, it had been just about 10 years since I had done any—outside of military life and schools and other military professional schools, it had been just about 10 years since I had done any academic schoolwork. And just getting able to even write in that style again and math. I never thought I [was] good at math, but starting back—I literally started back over.

The second challenge Tim experienced was the cultural difference between him and his civilian classmates. He said,

> It wasn't the age differences that I wasn't prepared for, because as a soldier, it's actually-- pretty much there's constant turnover in the ranks, and they're always being replaced typically by younger people, so you're never not around 18 or 19 or 20-year-olds…So going back to university, that wasn't the issue; it was the actual not really-- I guess it was not having that common culture. Yes, we're all American. Military culture—them not having that experience, and me honestly not-- I'd spent almost 10 years in the military or working with the military. That was kind of my culture for a decade. That's not always mainstream culture.

Tim was accustomed to having a set of rules that everyone follows, used to everyone dressing the same, and having "a hive mind" or collective consciousness. The military culture that Tim lived in for nearly a decade provided Tim with one of the biggest transitional challenges because he did not know where he fit in the new culture.

Tim's third challenge was balancing his student life and his family life. For him, the first year and a half he described himself as a soldier student and treated school like two full-time jobs. He spent 60 or 80 hours a week all in class, studying, reading, and completing assignments. Tim's days were "so focused and so involved in school [that he] would get up in the morning before anybody else. [He] would head into campus and most days [come] home after [his] daughter had gone to bed." This routine became exhausting for him and his family.

He decided that he had to prioritize and that class work no longer had to be perfect. He decided that he would allow a certain number of hours for school and work under that time crunch to complete his work as he had done many times in the military. The rest of the time became family time.

Ultimately, what got him through these challenges was relying on his military experience and mentality. He knew that he could not just walk away from school, as he could not leave the military so he learned to put things into perspective. He had moments where he would tell himself, "Yeah, this is a lot of work, a lot stuff I got to do [but] I'm not in Iraq. I'm not in Afghanistan. Nobody's trying to kill me today, so it's not that bad." He took school seriously; however, he understood that in the scheme of his experiences the worst thing that could have happened in Iraq is much worse than what could happen in class. For him, this made the classwork much less stressful.

While at MSU, he found that socially he did not fit in. He found that at first the only people he could connect with were other student veterans because of the shared experiences and cultural understanding. Tim became involved in the student veteran organization and began working "to rebuild" it and make it known to MSU administrators that student veterans on campus needed their support. The student veteran organization not only provided the social support for student veterans to connect with one another to build a sense of community but they were also successful in advocating for a dedicated student veteran's center on campus. Tim and others were able to convince administrators that a dedicated student veteran space was not only important to current student veterans but also benefit the university in their "student veteran retention problem."

Once Tim started getting into his major more, he connected with one of his faculty who mentored him both personally and professionally and this relationship helped him greatly in his transition. The other positive aspect of his major was that he received an invitation to start doing undergraduate research as a member of a research team. This opportunity along with the student veteran organization was instrumental in keeping Tim in school. Both of these organizations provided him with an outlet that allowed him to feel like a part of the campus and lead to his persistence in college and admissions into his doctoral program.

Overall, Tim's transition from the military to college was different from other participants because he chose to become a civilian contractor in a military setting. When he

transitioned to college, he built a niche on campus with the SVO. He persisted through his undergraduate program and entered a doctoral program where he continues to persist. With perseverance, the support of fellow veterans, an encouraging family member, and reframing challenges, Tim was able to rise to the occasion and persist through his undergraduate program to enter a doctoral program.

Robert

Robert was a 27-year-old man attending Mid-Atlantic State University (MASU) pursuing a master's degree. Before attending MASU, he attended New England College (NEC) in a different state. He was a member of the U.S. Army from 2012 to 2015 before becoming an Army Reservist and attending MASU. Robert had no prior experience with the military before enlisting. In 2011, when he graduated from college his intention was to join the military to gain the GI Bill benefits to pay for graduate school and to work in the intelligence sector.

Joining the Military

In February 2012, Robert left for basic training after completing his bachelor's degree in May of 2011. He went into the military at a higher ranking than those that came straight from high school because of his college degree. He found that being 23-years-old was sometimes a challenge and drawback.

> I was 23 at the time, so I'm having—people [in charge of] me who—especially once I've been in for a few years who [inaudible] several years younger than me and have very different life experiences. And then you're immediately like, if they know you can [inaudible] especially in basic training if you're an E4 [rank] instantly. There's a lot of sort of judgment and stigmas surrounding that, and at basic and all that training, people don't want to stand out. You want to look like everybody else. You want to be kind of one of the group. You don't want to be somebody singled out for special treatment.

Robert was an intelligence analyst in the Army. That was his desired job from the time he decided to join the military. He wanted to work in military intelligence so that when he transitioned out of the military he could focus on a graduate degree and look at jobs addressing issues of national security.

Military Relationships

Robert described his relationships from the military as some of the "best friends" he has "ever made in his life" because of being in the military. He built close relationships with

because he had to depend on them to do their job but also because they were around each other so much during training. While attending training at the National Training Center, he and his fellow soldiers were out in the Mojave Desert for 10 days at a time with five of those days spent conducting operations. He was with his small training group for 18-hour days so building tight-knit relationships were inevitable.

Leaving the Military and Going to College

When Robert left the military in 2015, he found the transition to be a little bit of a shock to get back into the student mindset but easier than those veterans that are going to college for the first time. He described his experience of transitioning to graduate school like going back to doing what he was doing before he entered the military. Robert said that in the military, his job "didn't let me stay up to snuff on critical reading and writing skills." However, he knew the culture he would be entering again at college. He understood that he would be leaving "a hyper-masculine, very aggressive environment to something that is the polar opposite" in higher education. Robert's military experience also prepared him for graduate school in many ways:

> But honestly, I think the military, particularly my job, prepared me really well for it because I had been in I guess you'd call it high-stress environments where there was lots of work to be done and there was a limited time to do it in, and very often you were trying to get stuff done on very little sleep.

The other experience that prepared him for graduate school was navigating large bureaucracies. One of Robert's duties included responsibility for the security of all company arms rooms for the infantry battalion ranging from $48 million to $60 million worth of equipment. The equipment came with long lists of criteria and involved multiple federal and law enforcement agencies to ensure they were up to regulations. He found that by learning how to navigate the massive federal bureaucracy was applicable to him navigating the complexities of graduate school.

Robert decided before he left active duty to return to graduate school that he would join the Army Reserves. He knew that as a graduate student he would have fewer opportunities to interact with other veterans on campus and that sometimes it is difficult to relate to civilians on campus. He said,

> one of the things I enjoy most about being in Reserves is I can—one weekend a month, I'm putting the uniform back on and I'm getting to relate to people who are—who it's easy

for me to relate to. Because I think once you go into the military, you kind of get

indoctrinated and assimilated in a way that really no other job is going to do. And then

when you get out, it's a shock to you to lose all of that.

Overall, Robert's transition from the military to college was different from because he

knew what to expect in the world of academia since he had already been there once

before. Given this advantage, he was able to reflect on what he would find beneficial had he

gone straight to the military before entering college as an undergraduate. He believed that an

advisor with broad knowledge about the institution and general advising could help a student

veteran finish college. He wanted to see someone that could help the student veteran identify

clubs and organizations based on interests, assist with personal were goal setting, and to help

guide the student to identify their purpose for college and career. He also believed that those that

take similar routes to him are to leverage every opportunity and internship that presents

itself. Robert said that for those like himself and for those going to college for the first time,

when classes and coursework become stressful, they should remember that in the military they

were in stressful situations before and had the resiliency to overcome them.

Findings from Cross-Case Analysis

This section provides findings from the cross-case analysis. Table 4 presents a summary

of the number of occurrences and sample quotations from the cross-case analysis, relating these

occurrences and quotations to components of the SVCTM. I follow the table with a more in-

depth description of significant data patterns organized by the two research questions for this

study that appeared in the SVCTM. The section concludes by focusing on emergent findings not

represented in the model of the literature. Table 4 provides a summary that shows how many

participants discussed each component of the SVCTM and a sample response.

Table 4

Cross-Case Analysis Summary with SVCTM Components

SVCTM Component	Number of Participants	Sample Response
Context		
Reduction in the Military	0	
Multiple Deployments	5	"My battalion was deployed in 2010 of March to Afghanistan...Our mission was to interdict weapons movement and drug movement between [inaudible] that connected the two provinces…I picked up the rank of corporal and deployed again on what's called the Marine Expeditionary Unit. I deployed to the Mediterranean and there we got off the ships and trained local nationals in Jordan and Kuwait and conducted our own amphibious landing operations." (Mark)
Post-9/11 GI Bill	3	"I joined for the GI Bill, so I could get a free master's degree, essentially." (Robert)
Veterans Choice Act	0	
Conditions		
Physical & Behavioral Disabilities	2	"In the Marine Corps, it's very accepted to be a borderline alcoholic, provided that you do your job and do it well. Provided that you show up exactly when you're supposed to - and you're not drinking in combat or something like that." (Mark)
Institutional Type	1	"I suggested to every service member that I know that's still in the Marine Corps. Community college really like-- it prepared me to be a student…There's always somebody at a community college there to help you navigate the situations…A regular four-year institution, is it doesn't have a very strong military presence." (Mark)
Nontraditional College Students	5	"So transitioning to college where you're basically older and sitting in a class with 18- to 21-year-olds is very different. You're the odd man out." (Valerie)

Family	4	"I felt like I had two full-time jobs. Being a student was a full-time job and being a mother and wife was a full-time job. So I would go to school. It was my job. I would study and come home, and then my family was my job." (Valerie)
		"Absolutely, my family played a role. I came back and they were here waiting for me. They've always been supportive of that. If they weren't supportive of me going back to school, it wouldn't have even been remotely possible." (Tim)
Military Peers	6	"Because one of the things I enjoy most about being in Reserves is I can-- one weekend a month, I'm putting the uniform back on and I'm getting to relate to people who are-- who it's easy for me to relate to. Because I think once you go into the military, you kind of get indoctrinated and assimilated in a way that really no other job is going to do. And then when you get out, it's a shock to you to lose all of that." (Robert)

Strategies used by
Administrators

Military or Student Veteran Office	4	"So [my school's] military office, they bring you in, and they send you emails, and you're added to their list, and they tell you about events and things that are going on, and they tell you when papers are due to the registrar's office and what do you need. So if I ever had a question, I could call their office and be like, "Hey, I don't know what I'm doing." (Valerie)
		"Then there's the Military Student Center and all these places where veterans can get together and share that dialogue. I would honestly say that that's probably the only thing that's really, really helped me with the transition." (Aidan)
Facilitating Peer-to-Peer Relationships	2	"I almost went there just because of the support that they have for vets. The vets have their own house. Not like a frat house or anything, but with computers and they have someone there who was on a work/study program." (Catherine)
Peer Mentoring Programs	1	"I do believe that pairing them with veterans-- I've heard of a program a long time ago that some schools were buying into, in which all the veterans they had for the first two years of their four-year institution, they would be linked together. They would track each other's improvement, and they would all be together and take the same general ed classes. I really

like that idea. The schools I applied to, none of them had that program. But for a lot of other veterans, I can see a problem with just being suddenly very alone and being told these broad objectives without any direction on how to complete them." (Mark)

Student Veteran Organization	5	"I also got involved with the Student Veterans Association at our school. Between having a group of people that I could go to and be a part of that had that similar background that I did, but then also having another connection to the school that was completely not related to that, that was actually just all about school, having that balance really made the transition a lot easier for me." (Tim)
Academic Credit for Prior Learning	1	"I know a lot of people that have done things that should be pretty equivalent to college courses, but because this or that excuse, like, 'No, we can't do it,' or they won't do it. I know people who went through Army Medic training or something. They get no credit for that whatsoever. In addition, they want to go to a nursing degree. It's not like they want to take that credit and apply it to an English major." (Tim)
Other Institutional Policies	1	"[T]hey have something here…where veterans can register early, and [inaudible] student that wasn't available to me which didn't make sense, because I was already accepted. You know vets - we only have so much time to use our-- well, not like so much time, but if we can't get the classes that we need, it can screw up our benefits." (Catherine)

Outcome

Experiencing a Positive Transition	3	"Because, for me, I knew that having that sense of community helped keep me in school, so I wanted to make sure that that was available to other people." (Tim)

Causal Mechanism

Student Veterans Support One Another	6	"The best source for transferring is just other veterans, in my opinion. And I'm sure many people share my opinion in this. It's just more comforting to talk to somebody who has an idea of what you know when you transfer; compared to somebody who's just going by what a book told them." (Aidan)

Research Question One: Describing Transition Experiences

Student veterans described their transition experiences from a military to college setting in multiple ways. These ways included categories that emerged both from data analyzed using the SVCTM as the analytical framework, and from other emergent themes about student veterans' transitions. The overarching categories were (a) the impact of the age difference, (b) differences in culture, (c) relationships with other student veterans, and (d) family experiences.

The impact of the age difference. The first way that student veterans described their experience transitioning from a military to college setting was the impact of the age difference between themselves and the 18- to 22-year old college student. Each student veteran in this study described himself or herself as both older and more experienced than the average student. These differences affected how they interacted with non-military students.

Relationship with civilian students. Across all participants, not having the same "social networks" that many students had when they initially entered college after leaving the military or after transferring from a two-year to a four-year institution because of age differences emerged from the data. In some cases, the student veterans felt they were the "odd person in the classroom," "lonely," and disconnected from civilian students because of their experiences. Many student veterans saw things in combat that the average person may never see in their lifetime. Some participants described how they were unable to discuss because of the classified nature of their work. These experiences were extremely different from their 18- to 22-year-old classmates that may have recently begun living away from home for the first time. Participants perceived themselves as "the adults" in the room as compared to their civilian counterparts who they saw as "kids" because of these age and experience differences.

Maturity level. Participants overall described themselves as "more mature" than their civilian undergraduate counterparts because of their military experience, which informed their worldview. The student veterans believed that how they presented themselves in class, their classwork, and how they interacted with professors reflected the maturity difference. Participants described their degree of self-discipline as different because they treated their courses as they treated their jobs in the military. They treated their courses with "precision," "efficiency," and the military mindset. Their self-discipline included: (a) being on time for classes, (b) turning assignments in on time, (c) avoiding excuses for unsatisfactory work, and (d) doing their work to the best to meet the standards of the professor, as they would have with a

superior officer. This discipline level, the level of respect for superiors, and age differences has allowed some participants to build a strong rapport with their instructors.

One example of the maturity and worldview difference is how Mark described the difference between his civilian classmates and himself. In both of his interviews, Mark discussed the difference between his maturity level and civilian students.

A lot of the students I've noticed, don't have that intellectual humility. They never had somebody like a squad leader or a sergeant or a staff sergeant say, 'No, you're not as smart as you fucking think you are, and you need to shut up and listen right now.'…There is [the] firmly [held] belief that, one, they know everything. I've never met so many 20-year-olds packed in one room that know everything about the world and are so sure of it, too. I'm 26 and I'm still trying to figure out which way is up. And I feel like that comes with age, that the older you are the more you realize…I find it difficult to accept from a 19, 20-year-old massive categorical statements about U.S.-Russia trade relations [for example] when I'm like, 'Well, I lived in Russia for six years. It's what my family's made their bread and butter off of was Russia-U.S. relations.'

While five participants focused on the age difference as the primary challenge with nonmilitary students during the transitions, Tim attributed the challenge to a difference in culture. He said that you always experience people "that are younger than you are" in the military. This occurs because of the "constant turnover in the ranks, new recruits are constantly entering the military, and many are 18- to 20-year olds."

Differences of culture. The second description from student veterans about their experiences related to the differences in the military, academic, and civilian cultures. All of the student veterans in this study talked about the culture shock of moving from the military to college. Robert described the general cultural differences between the Army and college as transitioning from a "hyper-masculine, very aggressive environment to something that's the polar opposite." The other student veterans described similar experiences across the branches of service they represented. Descriptions included how the military is an "alien culture" that civilians would not understand and how veterans should try their best to enter the "mainstream civilian culture." Beyond the general difference in cultures that participants described, several subcategories illustrating this difference emerged from the data. These included (a) a lack of

military knowledge and cultural awareness by civilians, (b) a difference in mindsets, and (c) navigating a highly regimented versus less regimented environment.

Lack of military knowledge and cultural awareness by civilians. All six participants in this study talked about the lack of cultural awareness and knowledge about the military they experienced with faculty, staff, and students on campus. This lack of cultural awareness and knowledge about the military stems from a lack of education on the military and student veterans. Examples of this included being asked inappropriate questions like "Did you ever kill anybody?" as well as experiencing hostile anti-military faculty members, and assuming that all student veterans have PTSD and are "loose cannons" that "are going to kick in your face" as Mark described.

Mindset differences. The second cultural difference between student veterans and civilian students was the difference in mindsets. The difference in the military and civilian mentalities was threefold: (a) the military perspective reframed challenges presented to college students, (b) social life, and (c) worldview.

As described by participants, military and civilian mentalities were completely different. The military perspective helped student veterans reframe challenges at college, yet this perspective but could also lead to frustration with civilians. Tim described how he

> would get frustrated because I would see people and-- it's really frustrating, especially as a recently separated veteran, who has been through combat and maybe lost somebody that they've cared about in combat, to hear people whining constantly about things that you consider fairly petty issues. But whining about it like it's honestly the end of the world, that's really frustrating for a veteran.

Tim reflected on how his nonmilitary student classmates could not understand the concept of being in a place where people were "actually actively trying to kill them…but based on their viewpoints and their life experiences, this [referring to whatever challenge nonmilitary students are experiencing] is serious to them. It's hard to get to that point, but I think that's the important tipping point." Tim's experiences and self-reflection provided a view that he believed many veterans should reach to navigate and resolve the differences between the military and civilian mindsets. It appears that Tim believed that this realization was important because it aided him in bridging the divide between military and civilians to resolve frustrations caused by the differences.

The second mentality difference related to the social lives of student veterans and nonveterans. Mark provided an account of the social differences, partly caused by PTSD, and provided an explanation for these differences. He described how someone with PTSD approached socializing. Mark noted that he remained quiet and reserved in social settings even though his girlfriend encouraged him to "smile more." He believed that nonmilitary students perceive him and others with PTSD as being "a loose cannon, [that is] going to kill us all" or "going to kick [their] face in if [they] make a loud noise or something" because they are veterans. For him, PTSD

> just means that we have experiences that sometimes surface when we drink a lot of alcohol. Which is maybe why when we go to your frat parties, we don't want to, to shot-gun nine beers in a row because then the aggression comes out, then we go to darker places.

He also discussed how nonmilitary students would not understand the desensitized mentality that includes "darker places," and a dark sense of humor that some veterans have. Mark told a story to illustrate the "darker places." The story was an example of integrating the military and civilian mentalities:

> For me, I see a lot of Marines who aren't necessarily doing well on Facebook sharing the most insulting things on Facebook. I mean, just brutally insulting things that in [UMA], or in college anywhere, would get you a lot of flak. Well…people will come to conclusions about a lot of these Marines are psychos or—excuse me. That stuff needs to leave. It was funny then [laughter]. There are dark sides of me that—I can be a dark individual where I still think they're funny, but I keep it very much internal and don't express that. And a lot of these Marines forget that. I think there is one thing that they really bring out of the Marines is they maintain a culture, and they expect everyone else around them to be in on that culture, to get it, and they're not going to. College students will not understand the Marine Corps culture. Don't try to make them understand it. They're not going to think your [inaudible] battles into the psycho jokes are funny. Marines are desensitized to death, so I'll see one of my Marines put up a video clip of an awesome badass moment where a Taliban guy gets his head blown off or something like that. I hate the Taliban, I'm proud that I killed some of them, and I feel great about that, but I don't need people that I'm friends with at [UMA] seeing me glorify somebody

getting decapitated. I'll take my personal joy knowing that somewhere out there, there's a man like me in the Marine Corps still killing Taliban. But I don't need the world to know that, and I've got a more mature way of expressing that. I want them to be defeated.

The last difference between student veterans and civilian students and faculty was the worldview including popular culture and politics. Several student veterans discussed not being aware of certain "pop culture references" that their fellow students made. The other major difference was political and civic engagement. Catherine found the difference obvious once she entered into her public policy courses as it related to the political world and civic engagement. She described that

in the military, the President is your Commander-in-Chief…So I think it's Article 91 of UCMJ, you aren't supposed to talk bad about the President…Because I'm in the military and, like I said, I'm kind of one-dimensional, and it was just mental energy I didn't want to expend.

Catherine quickly realized that by being in a public policy major, she would have to become more aware of the varying political views, political debates within the country, and become more civically minded about local, state, and federal communities. All of which were not something she spent a great amount of time focusing on while in the Marines.

Navigating regimented and unregimented lifestyles. The last difference in military, civilian, and academic cultures was the difference in the regimented lifestyle and culture of the military and the less regimented lifestyle of civilian and academic life. In the military, service members described the regimented life they lived, both in combat and stateside, as long days. Valerie referred to the military as

[A] way of life is what it is. I mean it's a language. It's how to write. It's how to speak. It's its own little world. So sometimes, stepping outside of that world, you find yourself having to explain things to civilians. I mean, it's nice to be able to walk around with my hands in my pockets, but at the same time, I carry a lot of the military with me always.

In addition to Valerie's description of the lifestyle Mark explicitly described something that all of the other participants only implied during interviews:

One of the biggest issues I had when I got out of college was that no one was talking at— when I got out of the Marine Corps, nobody was telling me what to do. I'd get these broad objectives like, "Get into [UMA]," and then I'd be like "All right, accomplished

that, now what's my next step?" And I would get very little guidance—I'd get a lot of big picture guidance like pick a major. But beyond that, I didn't get much guidance. And I feel like a lot of grunts are very used to a world that - when I say grunts, I mean infantrymen - are very used to a world in which we have a direction. It's a culture that does breed an element of—I don't know the best way to put it. But it breeds a kind of element in which we're not great thinkers on our own outside in the civilian world because we always had a structure and institution to work with, and that was very clear.

Mark's summary of the difference in culture provided a description of the consequences of the regimented lifestyle and the challenges it presented in the academic setting that others were not explicit about in their interviews.

Relationship with other student veterans. The third way that student veterans described their experiences transitioning from the military to a college setting revolved around their relationships with other student veterans. All six of the participants described the importance of their relationships with other student veterans during their transition experience. Participants described the "common language" and "experiences" of military service members as beneficial to the transition. These common experiences allowed student veterans to instantly have an "instant bond" on campus, "trust" one another easily, and have people to turn to for support as they navigated military, civilian, and academic cultures.

Family. The fourth way that student veterans described their transition experience from the military to college was in terms of their family. Family relationships included parents, significant others, spouses, and children. Student veterans discussed the support received from their family members and the challenges of having a family while in college.

Family support. Overall, students described their family as being supportive through the transition process from the military and while in college. Tim described his family saying, "Absolutely, my family played a role. I came back and they were here waiting for me. They've always been supportive of that. If they weren't supportive of me going back to school, it wouldn't have even been remotely possible." Valerie expressed very similar sentiments about how her husband had already moved to his duty station and she chose a school near his base. Mark's sentiments also discussed family importance,

> I can't over emphasize family. I feel terrible for the Marine that…especially if they've experienced a lot of combat, that doesn't have a family where they're going to school. I

would never suggest to a Marine to go to a school on the other side of the country, if their family—I mean, I don't know everyone's family situation, but family is like essential to helping the veteran readjust.

    Family challenges. In addition to the family as a support for student veterans, the family served as a challenge for some student veterans as well. Catherine described not having family in the same location as a challenge for her and how for her the lack of family support led to a feeling of loneliness. Two other participants described the challenge of being college students and having a family as two full-time jobs and finding a way to balance the roles of student, spouse, and parent. Tim said that he

> …treated it like two full-time jobs. I probably spent 60 or 80 hours a week all in school studying, reading, writing. That's what I did. And it was at that point in time that I noticed the negative effect that it was having on the socially and, in particular, with the family.

Valerie expressed her view of having two full-time jobs as well.

> I felt like I had two full-time jobs. Being a student was a full-time job and being a mother and wife was a full-time job. So I would go to school. It was my job. I would study and come home, and then my family was my job.

Without the support of their families, these student veterans would have had to navigate the transition experience alone as Catherine did.

    In summary, the student veterans in this study provided interview data that led to four overarching categories once I analyzed the data across participant experiences and saw patterns in participants' quotes and overlapping experiences. The first category was the impact of the age difference that included the impact on relationships with civilian students and illustrated through a difference in maturity levels. The second category focused on the difference in the military and nonmilitary cultures. These cultural differences included a lack of military knowledge and cultural awareness by civilians; mentality differences that reframe student veterans' perspectives, social lives, and worldviews. The third category focused on the importance of relationships with other student veterans. The last category related to a student veterans' experience is the role that their families played in their transition.

Research Question Two: Perceptions of Services Provided

Student veterans described their perceptions of two strategies used by college or university administrators during their transition to transition from a military to college setting. These strategies were (a) having a military and veteran student office (MVSO) and (b) veteran student organization (VSO).

MSVO. The first strategy that campus administrators implemented that student veterans perceived as beneficial on campus was having a MVSO, sometimes referred to as a military student center. Student veterans at institutions with these offices described these offices as a positive contribution to their experience on campus. Student veterans without these offices described what they knew about offices on other campuses and how such an office could have been beneficial to their college experience. According to the participants, the MVSO served two purposes: (a) as a place for student veterans to congregate and (b) as an administrative office for military and veteran-related matters on campus. Catherine described her visit to a school in Montana before attending UMA

> I almost went there just because of the support that they have for vets. The vets have their own house. Not like a frat house or anything, but with computers and they have someone there who was on a work/study program. So Marines or vets can go in face-to-face and get help with those things because sometimes the first couple of times you do the whole VA process, it can be overwhelming. So someone was there to kind of on-spot question. They had a kitchen, they had couches, dependents who were using their parent's GI Bill could be there, and really robust veteran student support. I loved it.

As a place for student veterans to assemble, offices tended to have lounge spaces, computers, and provided an atmosphere where students could share a common dialogue with one another. Military centers also tended to have an administrative function on campus employing full-time staff members and student veterans through the federal work-study program to certify GI Bill paperwork, answer military and non-military related questions about campus, and served as a common point of contact or clearinghouse and referral agent on campus. Valerie described the administrative functions for the MVSO at Colonial University as a benefit. She said,

> So Colonial's military office, they bring you in, and they send you emails, and you're added to their list, and they tell you about events and things that are going on, and they tell you when papers are due to the registrar's office and what do you need. So if I ever

had a question, I could call their office and be like, "Hey, I don't know what I'm doing. Help me." They'll be like, "Okay. You need to do this, and then this, and then that, and then you're good to go." So without that, honestly, without their military office, I think I would've been lost.

VSO. The second strategy that student veterans perceived as beneficial was the existence of a VSO on campus. Mark (referring to UCC), Aidan, Tim, and Robert discussed the ability to connect with other veterans with similar backgrounds through these organizations. VSOs provided them with a social outlet on campus. Mark and Catherine both said there was no VSO on the UMA campus and that this resulted in a sense of feeling "lonely" for them. Valerie did not mention a VSO in either of her interviews.

Tim went further and discussed how the student veteran organizations also served as an organization for advocating for student veterans on campus. He described his involvement as,

> When I really got involved with that organization, I actually became the president of it because membership was way down, and there wasn't anybody else who wanted to do that job. So I kind of kept that organization afloat and then rebuilt it as a partial social organization. Because I thought that, for me, that was the really important thing is to have a place where veterans could come and socialize and interact with other student veterans. Because, for me, I knew that having that sense of community helped keep me in school, so I wanted to make sure that that was available to other people.

Tim continued by discussing how the organization became a mechanism to advocate for student veterans by telling his undergraduate university administration,

> "Hey, we really could use a Student Veteran Center on campus because that might be part of your veteran retention problem." We weren't getting—nobody was listening to us when we said that, but since we were able to say, "Hey, there's 15 or 20 of us." And then, not only is it 15 or 20 of us, but they were bringing their friends - some who weren't even veterans - to things that we were doing to show like, "Hey, we really need a Student Veteran Center. Look at all the support we have for it."

He later said that the administration provided resources to have a dedicated space on campus for the student veterans to congregate.

In summary, student veterans in this study described their perceptions of two strategies used by college and university administrators to serve student veterans. They focused on the

MVSO as a place for student veterans to congregate and as an administrative office for both service and referrals on and off campus. Student veterans also discussed the role of a VSO as a social organization for student veterans to meet one another and as a potential advocacy organization on campus. In addition to the two research questions, additional findings emerged from the cross-case analysis, not originally presented in the model of the literature.

Other Emergent Findings

Two additional findings emerged in addition to the data for the two research questions of this study. The first finding related to questions on the first and second interview protocol asking the participants to give advice to both student veterans transitioning from the military to college and advice for administrators on how better to serve student veterans on campus. The second finding dealt with student veterans experiencing a positive transition in the conceptual model.

Advice to student veterans and administrators. The first emergent theme was that when asked, student veterans offer advice to both fellow student veterans and to administrators on the transition of student veterans from the military to college. Several participants discussed the importance of student veterans "doing as much research as possible" before entering college to prepare themselves. Participants also discussed the importance of continuing to "move forward" in their transition to avoid the "dark place" of depression, substance abuse, and other behavioral health issues caused by their struggle to transition from the military to civilian roles.

Participants also gave advice for administrators when given the opportunity. Mark provided an overarching summation for what campus administrators should do. He said, "I think that the schools need to have a more hands-on approach with veterans, often." This approach includes providing opportunities for veterans to interact with one another as well as with faculty, staff, and civilian students. This "hands-on" approach included examining policies on campus related to "GI Bill Certifications," "course credits for military experience," and increasing the cultural awareness for faculty and administrators about "veteran issues."

Persistence. The second emergent finding related to the outcome in the conceptual model, student veterans experiencing a positive transition illustrated by persistence and sense of belonging. In all six cases, student veterans persisted by reenrolling from year to year in college. However, all participants varied in their responses about their sense of belonging ranging from feeling "lonely" on campus like Mark and Catherine. Aidan's and Valerie's sense of belonging

emerged from their experience with a MVSO. Tim, Robert, and Mark's (at his community college) sense of belonging emerged because of their experience of VSO.

In summary, the findings emerged from the cross-case analysis through similarities, differences, and overlapping experiences. The findings showed similarities in how student veterans describe their transition experience from a military setting to a college setting, the services provided by college administrators, the willingness of student veterans to provide feedback for other student veterans, and experiences of a positive transition. The implications of these findings for future research, practice, and policy appear in the following chapter.

Chapter Five

Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the transition experiences of Post-9/11 student veterans from a military setting to a college setting. I used grounded theory methods to systematically review the literature about the transition of student veterans from the military to a college or university and create a conceptual framework for this study, or the Student Veteran College Transition Model (SVCTM). I used a modified version of Seidman's (2013) phenomenological interviewing and collective-case study. The presentation and analysis of data used a collective-case study methodology to answer the two research questions. The research questions were:

1. How do Post-9/11 student veterans describe their experience transitioning from a military setting to a college setting?

2. How do Post-9/11 student veterans perceive services provided by the college or university during their transition from a military setting to college setting?

I organized this chapter into five sections: (a) the discussion of the findings and their relationship to the prior literature; (b) the discussion of the emergent finding and its relationship to literature not used in the conceptual model (c) implications for practice, policy, and future research; (d) limitations; and (e) concluding remarks.

Discussion of the Findings and their Relationship to Prior Literature

The first section focuses on the findings that related to the prior literature illustrated in the conceptual model and the theoretical literature. I used the SVCTM as the conceptual framework.

Statement of the Original SVCTM

The framework suggested that five conditions shaped a veterans' transition to higher education (the phenomenon). The conditions were (a) veterans may have physical and behavioral health issues, (b) choice of institutional type, (c) veterans are not traditional college students, (d) veterans work while going to school, and (e) veterans have families. Contextual factors in the model influenced strategies to promote a specific outcome. In this study, the outcome was experiencing a positive transition to college that included persistence and sense of belonging. Contextual factors were the (a) reduction in the military through troop drawdowns and transitions out of the military, (b) multiple active duty deployments, (c) use of the GI Bill,

and (d) the Veterans Choice Act. The strategies were (a) implementing a military or student veteran office or MVSO, (b) the importance of facilitating veteran peer-to-peer relationships, (c) peer mentoring programs, (d) creating a veteran student organization or VSO, (e) awarding academic credit for prior learning, and (f) other institutional policies to support veterans. In the model, the transition process proved effective because the support received from fellow student veterans, facilitated by the strategies used by college administrators, led them to a successful change in their role and self-identity (Hachtmann, 2012).

During the initial analysis, I deductively applied the framework to the data and three key findings emerged. The findings were (a) student veterans persist in college while experiencing challenges during the transition from the military to college; (b) student veterans perceive MVSOs and VSOs as important to their transition; and (c) student's family and fellow veterans were critical to integrating the military, civilian, and academic identities during a student veteran's transition from the military to a college setting. The discussion of the findings relating to the prior literature section concludes by revising the SVCTM and relating the findings to Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Anderson et al., 2012).

Persistence with Challenges in the Transition

The first key finding related to student veterans persisted in college while experiencing challenges in the transition from the military to college. Data from the collective-case study illustrated that student veterans persisted from year to year, an indicator of a positive transition in the conceptual model (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). However, all of the participants experienced challenges in their transition because of (a) age differences between student veterans and civilian students and (b) military and civilian cultural differences that led to a lower sense of belonging on campus. Both of these factors consisted of data that were consistent with the general literature about the phenomenon about student veteran's transition experiences from the military to college (Ackerman et al., 2009; Morin, 2011; Olsen et al., 2014) and the lower sense of belonging on campus (Bean & Metzner, 1985).

Age differences. In this study, student veterans experienced challenges in their transition from the military to college because they had a difficult time relating to and building relationships with their nonmilitary classmates because of their military experiences. This led to a lower sense of belonging on campus. Their military experiences, including multiple deployments of combat and non-combat missions, shaped how they viewed themselves as more

grown-up, more mature, and more respectful than students who had not experienced the military. The findings about age differences negatively affected the relationship between student veterans and their nonmilitary classmates were consistent with the literature in the conceptual model (American Council on Education, 2014; Durdella & Kim, 2012; Elliott et al., 2011). The differences in perceived maturity levels was also consistent with the literature (Ackerman et al., 2009; DiRamio et al., 2008; Durdella & Kim, 2012; Livingston et al., 2011; Olsen et al., 2014).

Cultural differences. The differences in military, civilian, and academic culture emerged as the second challenge for student veterans. In this study, student veterans described a perceived lack of awareness and knowledge about military culture by faculty, staff members, and civilian students. Student veterans perceived that civilians on campus make broad assumptions that all student veterans have the same experiences. For example, the assumption that all student veterans have PTSD or are broken in some way is false. Some student veterans have PTSD and other physical and behavioral issues; however, not all of those diagnosed with PTSD present the same symptoms or experiences.

The difference in cultures also included how student veterans use the military perspective to reframe challenges they experience as college students, in their social lives, and their worldview. Stressful situations that involved coursework and other college experiences did not seem as important when the student veterans stopped and thought about them in the context of their combat experiences. Academia for them is not a life or death situation like serving in Iraq, Afghanistan, or other combat related missions. This difference was the cause of some division and frustrations between student veterans and their civilian classmates. Consistent with previous literature about the phenomenon and conditions (physical and behavioral health issues and student veterans are not traditional college students) in the model, the lack of military cultural awareness created challenges for student veterans on campus (Arminio et al., 2015; Durdella & Kim, 2012; Elliott et al., 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Summerlot et al., 2009).

Mindset differences. The military mentality also affected the social lives of student veterans when they compared themselves to non-veterans. Again, misconceptions about PTSD provided a partial explanation for differences in social interactions. Student veterans perceived that civilians equate a student veteran that is quiet or reserved as suffering from PTSD. They also perceive that civilians believe that someone with PTSD can become violent at any given moment after a triggering event. Social interactions between student veterans and civilian

students seemed to be limited because of the student veterans' desensitized mentality surrounding death and combat. Some veterans perceive this mentality as dark and something that civilians would not understand or be comfortable with encountering.

Differences between the regimented and unregimented lifestyles. The last cultural difference that provided challenges for a student veterans' transition was the conflict between the regimented life of the military and the unregimented lives as a civilian and student. Student veterans in this study described leaving an environment where the military dictated all aspects of their lives. Superiors told these student veterans exactly what to do, how to do it, and where to be with the expectation that they would complete orders without deviating. Military regulations dictated how student veterans could participate in social and political activities. This environment created a group of people that did not have to engage regularly in the critical thinking skills and choice making that is a hallmark of a college education. When student veterans in this study entered college, they experienced challenges because higher education values and expects independence and personal accountability with little to no direction from faculty or staff members. These findings confirm prior research about the conflict between the regimented and unregimented lives of student veterans (Arminio et al., 2015; DiRamio et al., 2008; Hinojosa & Hinojosa, 2011; Livingston et al., 2011; Olsen et al., 2014; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010).

Other conditions and contextual factors. My study confirmed the conditional factors that veterans were not traditional college students and family members and other veterans affected the transition process. However, other conditions or contextual factors did not emerge in the data from participants. While they mentioned the use of the Post-9/11 GI Bill and experiencing multiple deployments, participants did not go into detail about the importance of these factors in their transition. No participant discussed a reduction in the size of the military and the Veteran's Choice Act.

Some participants mentioned their time at a community college versus a four-year institution and the importance of attending the college that they chose. For Mark, Catherine, and Aidan, attending a community college seemed to provide them with a good starting place when they transitioned from the military to college. The only other data that emerged about institutional types were that the community colleges that some participants attended had better services for student veterans compared to the four-year institutions they attended after

transferring. Other conditions besides the institutional type did not emerge in the data except for physical and behavioral health issues. While not a prevalent theme in the study except that there were false perceptions of PTSD by civilians as it did in the literature about student veterans. No one mentioned working while in college.

These conditions and contextual factors may not have appeared in the data for a number of reasons. The most likely reason is that the student veterans in the study did not have experience with the factors. Another reason may be that the participants did not think about these factors and conditions as playing a role in their transition from the military to college. In this case, it is important to explore these contextual factors and conditions in future research.

Perceptions of Offered Services

The second key finding related to student perceptions of the services offered by administrators during the transition process. Consistent with the literature discussed in the Strategies section of the conceptual model, the data that emerged from the collective-case study focused on the importance of a MVSO and a VSO on campus especially with facilitating peer-to-peer relationships. Other strategies in the conceptual model were noticeably absent in the findings.

MVSO. The MVSO on campus served two purposes for student veterans. Consistent with prior literature, it first served as a place for student veterans to congregate with one another (Brown & Gross, 2011; Elliott et al., 2011; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; O'Herrin, 2011; Summerlot et al., 2009; Wheeler, 2012). The MVSO, like many other cultural centers on college campuses, provided student veterans with a safe space where they can congregate with people that have similar experiences, backgrounds, and can have candid conversations with fellow student veterans in their shared military language.

Secondly, MVSOs played an important administrative role for student veterans in this study. These offices typically employed veterans as full-time staff members and student veterans in work-study positions. MVSO staff members in these offices answered questions for student veterans, certified GI Bill benefits, and referred student veterans to appropriate resources both on and off campus. The MVSO appeared to be beneficial because student veterans perceived staff members as trustworthy and understanding because of their shared military backgrounds (Ackerman et al., 2009; Arminio et al., 2015; Brown & Gross, 2011; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Olsen et al., 2014).

VSO. In addition to MVSOs, campus VSOs served an important role in the transition process for student veterans. VSOs provided the mechanism to facilitate student veteran-to-student veteran peer relationships through the student organization. This is consistent with the literature about the importance of VSOs on campus for student veterans (Arminio et al., 2015; DiRamio et al., 2008; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Moon & Schma, 2011; Olsen et al., 2014; Summerlot et al., 2009; Tomar & Stoffel, 2014; Wheeler, 2012).

Other strategies used by administrators. While my study confirmed the importance of a MVSO and VSO to student veterans, other strategies used by administrators mentioned in the literature did not appear during the cross-case analysis. In some instances, a participant was aware of strategies that appeared in the literature even though they did not have experience with it. Mark mentioned that he had heard about peer mentoring programs (Branker, 2009; DiRamio et al., 2008; DiRamio & Spires, 2009; Elliott et al., 2011; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Moon & Schma, 2011). Tim discussed the need for awarding academic credit for prior learning (American Council on Education, 2016; Brown & Gross, 2011; DiRamio et al., 2008; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Mitcham, 2013; Vacchi, 2012). Catherine discussed her frustration with institutional policies like priority registration (Brown & Gross, 2011; Elliott et al., 2011; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; O'Herrin, 2011; Summerlot et al., 2009).

There may be several explanations for the absence of these strategies in my data. The participants may have attended campuses where these specific services and policies did not exist, they did not use the services, did not use the policies to their advantage, or they may not have known about the services or policies on campus. If students did not attend an institution where these programs exist, then it is logical they would not have discussed them.

It could also be that students may choose not to participate in these services to avoid self-identifying as a student veteran in a challenging campus climate (Summerlot et al., 2009). The service may not exist because the institution does not have a critical mass of student veterans that necessitates the need for these services. There may be a lack of awareness by campus administrators about how these policies could help student veterans (Mitcham, 2013; Vacchi, 2012; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). Lastly, institutional leaders may not prioritize student veterans because they see this group of students as an easy source of tuition funds through the GI Bill and do not care if they are retained or successful, only that they enrolled. These explanations could

pose problems for college administrators wanting the supportive or "military friendly" institution label.

Support during the Transition and Integrating Identities

The third finding related to how a student's family (a conditional factor in the model) and fellow veterans (a strategy and causal mechanism in the model) were critical to supporting the student veteran's transition from the military to college and helping to integrate their multiple identities. These identities included their military, civilian, and academic identities.

Student veteran's family. Findings from my study seemed to suggest that the support of a student veteran's family counterbalanced the overall challenges of integrating military, civilian, and academic identities. This is inconsistent with the literature that focused specifically on student veteran's families. In the literature, student veteran's families were a source of stress for the student veteran (Ainspan & Penk, 2012; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Brown & Gross, 2011; Dekel et al., 2005; Demers, 2011; DiRamio et al., 2009; Durdella & Kim, 2012; Elliott et al., 2011; Romero et al., 2015; Wilson et al., 2013; Zoli et al., 2015). In this study, the challenge of the family occurred Catherine because her family was not in the same geographic location. For Valerie and Tim, there was a constant tension to balance their student life and family life. Trying to balance these dual roles was challenging for student veterans; however, for both participants, their family support seemed to be more important than the challenge of having a family.

Student veterans in this study discussed the important role their family played by providing vital encouragement and support throughout the transition process as they pursued their education. The encouragement that student veterans received from their family is consistent with some of the prior literature (Barry, Whiteman, & MacDermid Wadsworth, 2014; Church, 2009; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Livingston et al., 2011). However, a majority of the prior literature specific to student veterans and their family used in the conceptual model did not discuss the support provided by a student veteran's family.

Other veterans. The support of other veterans seemed to be the most important support group for student veterans that matriculated into college after leaving the military. The findings seemed to show the support of veteran peers played an integral part for integrating student veterans' various identities. This occurred because student veterans could help navigate the institution and provide an outlet for social interaction on campus. Military peers outside of the

campus community also seemed to be important because they also provided student veterans with outlets for social interaction and support beyond the campus community. These peers appeared in organizations like the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) as in Catherine's case and in the National Guard or reserves like Aidan and Robert respectively. Participants described student veteran-to-student veteran relationships as important because of the shared common military identity. This type of camaraderie built in the military transferred into the college setting for student veterans confirming the importance of student veteran peer-to-peer relationships (DiRamio et al., 2008; DiRamio & Spires, 2009; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Livingston et al., 2011; Olsen et al., 2014; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Summerlot et al., 2009; Tomar & Stoffel, 2014; Wheeler, 2012). The relationships of student veterans to veteran peers external to the college or university did not appear in the literature.

Faculty and staff. While student veterans' family and fellow veterans were important to the transition process, faculty and staff members did not appear in the data from participants. Absent from this study's data were specific details about the role of faculty and staff outside of a MVSO for student veterans navigating the changing identities of student veterans in this study. The absence of this data is important because interactions with faculty or even the perception that faculty members are accessible to students has a positive effect on student persistence (Johnson et al., 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), one indicator of a positive transition to college. Catherine talked about how her dean, a veteran, was supportive of student veterans in his school but did not go into depth about her interactions with him. She also discussed a negative experience in more detail about the GI Bill certifying official at her university and the lack of support she felt. Valerie and Tim both discussed faculty mentors that helped them in both their academic and personal lives but did not go into depth about these relationships. Aidan discussed the relationship that he and other student veterans had with their GI Bill certifying official but only said that she communicated with them regularly about deadlines and events.

Several explanations may exist for the absence of specifics on the role of faculty and staff outside of a MVSO. First, I did not ask specifically about the role of faculty and staff in the interview protocols because I did not want to plant any ideas among the participants. Next participants may not perceive faculty and staff outside of the MVSO as supportive if they believe the individual's role is to support students in their official capacity and job. For example, if they encounter student affairs professionals within various higher education contexts outside of a

MVSO or SVO, it is logical that they could see these professionals as simply people doing their job, which is to serve all students. Lastly, there may be a lack of cultural awareness about the differences between the military mindset of the student veteran and those in higher education causing mistrust of administrators, which is consistent with other studies and literature (Arminio et al., 2015; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Livingston et al., 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010).

Findings Relationship to Schlossberg and the SVCTM

The key findings of my study were also consistent with components in Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Anderson et al., 2012). Student veterans in my study experienced Moving Out from the military, Moving In to college and Moving Through college (Anderson et al., 2012). Through this process, they learn to navigate and cope with their changing roles through the 4 S System. Student veterans in this study experienced all four components. They experienced Situation or the characteristics of the event; Self, or the personal characteristics of the individual; Support, the social support for each individual; and Strategies, or the coping resources available to them. Figure 5 shows the findings from this study as it relates to the coping resources within Schlossberg's Transition Theory using Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies (Anderson et al., 2012). While I did not test Schlossberg's Transition Theory, it was important to acknowledge that some aspects of the SVCTM and the findings mapped to the work of Schlossberg with several major differences. Table 5 shows how components of the SVCTM and the findings were similar to the 4 S System of Schlossberg.

Table 5

Comparison of Schlossberg's Transition Theory, the SVCTM, and the Findings

Schlossberg's Transition Theory	SVCTM	Findings

Situation	Conditions
	   Institutional Type
	   Veterans Work while at College	

Self	Conditions
	   Veterans may have Physical and Behavioral Health
	      Disabilities
	   Veterans are not traditional college students
		Persistence with Challenges in the Transition
		   Age differences
		   Cultural Differences
		   Mindset Differences
		   Differences between the regimented and
		      unregimented lifestyles

Support	Conditions
	   Family
	   Military Peers
	
	Causal Mechanism
	   Student veterans support each other in integrating their
	      changing identities
		Support during the Transition and Integrating
		Identities
		   Student Veteran's Family
		Other Veterans
		   Student Veterans Peers
		   Veterans External to College

Strategies	Strategies used by Administrators
	   Implementing a Military or Student Veteran Office
	   Importance of and Facilitating Peer-to-Peer
	      Relationships
	   Peer Mentoring Programs
	   Creating a Student Veteran Organization
	   Awarding Academic Credit for Prior Learning
	   Other Institutional Policies to Support Veterans
		Perceptions of Offered Services
		MVSO
		VSO

Discussion of the Emergent Findings Not Found in the Prior Literature

After deductively applying the conceptual framework of the literature during the within-case and cross-case analysis phases, I reexamined the data in the cross-case analysis, memos, interview notes, and transcripts for emergent findings not explained by the prior literature in the conceptual model or by the theoretical literature. During this inductive data analysis process, the clash between the military, civilian, and academic cultures emerged as disrupting the student veterans' ability to adapt to their new role as civilian and student. This clash of cultures seemed to appear because (a) student veterans viewed their college experiences through a military cultural lens and (b) the context of military culture does not fit with the context of higher education culture.

Viewing College Experience through the Military Cultural Lens

All six participants compared their lives as students to their lives as service members during their interviews. Sometimes this comparison happened without the participant realizing they were doing it. This is logical and expected since I asked about their experiences in the military, college, and the transition between the two lives. However, when they discussed frustrations and challenges with either civilians or processes at their institution, they all compared those experiences to how the challenge would not have existed in the military. For example, several discussed how they viewed and respected professors, as they would have their superior officers. They described their experiences in these terms because a hallmark of the military culture is to ingrain the values, norms, and a collective consciousness of military service and the specific service branch (Hinojosa & Hinojosa, 2011). Since student veterans in this study described their experiences through a military lens, it was a logical conclusion that their families and fellow veterans who experience and understood the same culture provided the significant support in the transition from the military to college.

Conflicts between Military and Higher Education Cultures

The literature about student veterans discussed the notion of this conflict of military and higher education and civilian culture as context for challenges in the transition process in the conceptual model (Ainspan & Penk, 2012; Arminio et al., 2015; DiRamio et al., 2008; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Hinojosa & Hinojosa, 2011; Livingston et al., 2011; Olsen et al., 2014; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Summerlot et al., 2009). However, the role of the military culture informs the military lens that student veterans view the world may serve to explain why student veterans

continue to describe their transition experiences as challenging and focus on MVSOs, VSOs, and student veteran peer-to-peer relationships as the most important aspect of their transition. Critical theories and conceptual frameworks could provide an explanation to support this idea. Both Ibarra's (2001) Multicontextuality framework and Veterans Critical Theory (VCT) from Philips and Lincoln (2017) both could provide better explanations for and navigating this conflict.

   Multicontextuality. Ibarra (2001) stated that higher education has not changed from the German research model embedded in the British colonial college system exported to America. America's model of higher education is a Euro-centric model that promotes a century-old, one-size-fits-all perspective for access to college, pedagogy, and as an extension, services that may not work for all populations. Instead, Ibarra suggested that members of academia should shift their paradigm to focus on context diversity. Context diversity is a transformative paradigm that focuses on reframing the individualistic academic culture to create learning communities that attract diverse populations. By incorporating this paradigm, college administrators can begin to understand how diverse groups interact with one another, process information, and respond to different teaching and learning styles to perform academically (Ibarra, 2001).

   This framework also includes other factors that students bring with them from their family, community, and experiences that shape their worldviews (Ibarra, 2001). Ibarra's (2001) work focused on underrepresented populations, specifically Latino students; however, components were applicable to student veterans in this study. Student veterans in this study brought their previous experiences from the military with them to college and this shaped how they processed information and expectations from faculty members and how to navigate the bureaucratic and individualistic nature of higher education. This framework helps explain both the literature about the experience of cultural conflict among student veterans and the descriptions provided by the participants of this study.

   Veterans Critical Theory. Philips and Lincoln (2017) proposed a new paradigm and framework using VCT to examine the experiences and services for student veterans on college campuses. Consistent with their statement, I concluded that the literature on student veterans in higher education was focused on demographic information and proposed services and needs (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017). VCT goes further to examine higher education structures and systems including academics, student affairs, and financial affairs. VCT challenges and changes

how college and university administrators and faculty teach and serve student veterans through its 11 tenets. These tenets address experiences of student veterans, who they are, how civilians control narratives, how higher education is a civilian built and ran industry, how the veteran culture is built upon a culture respect, honor and trust (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017). While VCT is a recent concept, it provides a strong explanation for the disconnect between the military and higher education cultures.

The Student Veteran College Transition Model Revisited

For this study, I created the Student Veteran College Transition Model (SCVTM) using grounded theory methods to systematically review the literature about the transition experiences of student veterans from the military to college. The SCVTM served as the framework during data analysis. While the purpose of the study did not focus on building and testing the SCVTM, I must discuss additions and changes to the model based on the findings of this study.

The first change to the model was the outcome of the SCVTM. Originally, the model focused on a positive transition experience as indicated by persistence and sense of belonging. While both persistence and sense of belonging emerged from the data, the transition experience for participants was not necessarily positive in nature. Participants persisted on campus with challenges. Participants all experienced sense of belonging differently. The new outcome for the SCVTM changed to persistence or "the progressive reenrollment in college, whether continuous from one term to the next or temporarily interrupted and then resumed" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 374).

The second change to SCVTM was the addition of other conditions. These conditions include veterans and military peers external of the university, such as those in veteran service organizations like the VFW as mentioned by Catherine. Conditions should also include items like gender because of the differing experience of women in the military, race, ethnicity, location of the university, and other contextual factors that emerged in the work of Ibarra (2001) and Philips and Lincoln (2017). I did not remove contextual factors, conditions, and strategies not discussed by participants because there was not enough data to make a determination on each component. Figure 4 provides a revised visualization of the SCVTM.
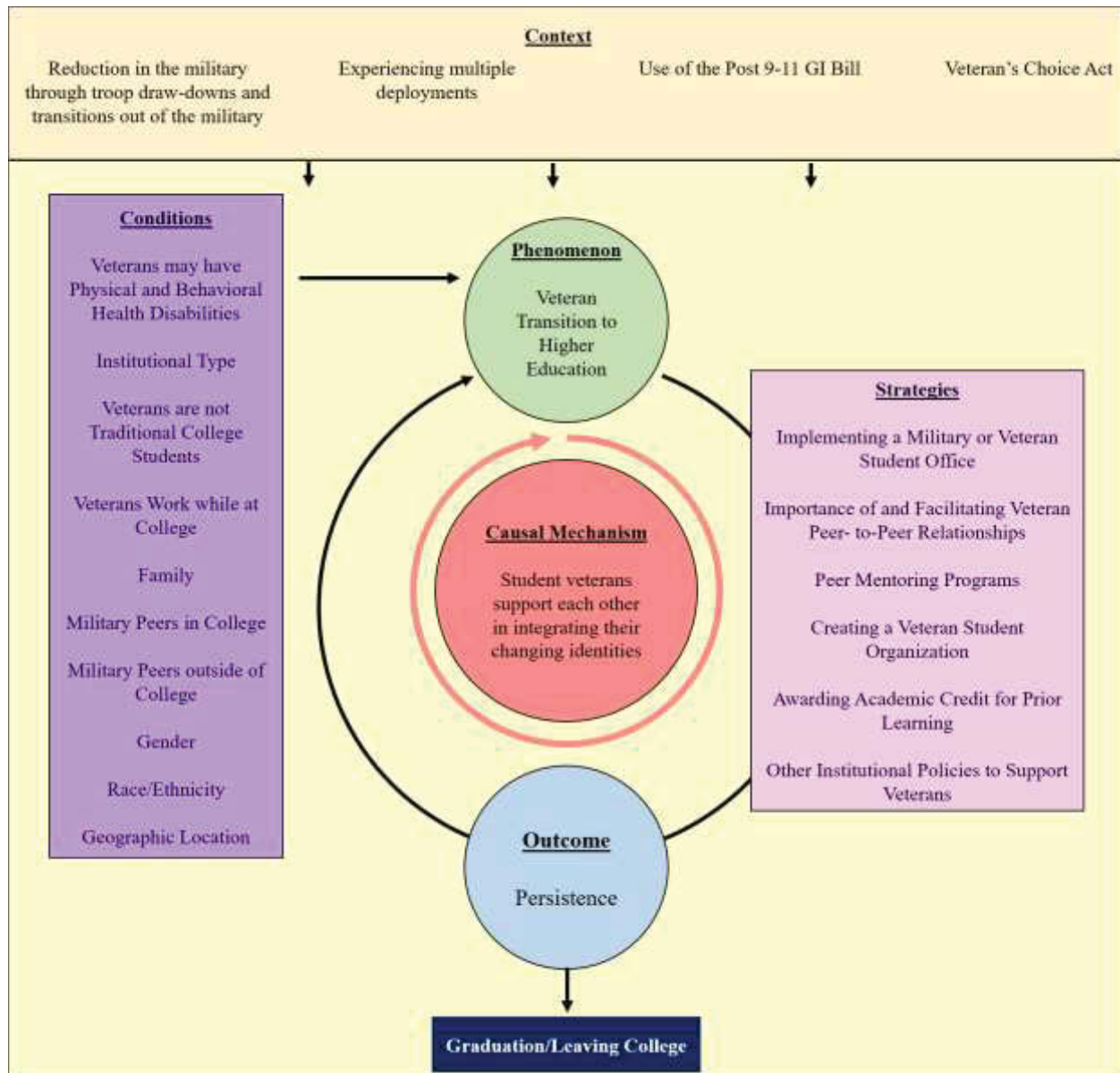
Figure 4. Revised Student Veteran College Transition Model

Implications for Practice, Policy, and Future Research

The findings of this study have implications for practice, policy, and future research. In terms of practice, college and university administrators have followed the best practices outlined by practitioners and researchers during the past decade typically focused on traditional practices used for civilian students. My study's findings may benefit several stakeholders: higher education administrators, faculty members, and student veterans.

The first implication for practice should be the simplest and easiest to implement. I found that student veterans would share their experiences and recommendations on how better to

serve them if given the opportunity. This is consistent with one of the tenets of VCT and campus administrators should work to gain valuable insights on how to serve this population from student veterans themselves (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017).

The second implication for practice relates to integrating student veterans' families into campus when possible to help with student veteran retention and success. My findings and the literature showed that while a student veteran's family could be a challenge to students (Braxton & Hirschy, 2005), families also provided the needed encouragement for student success. Student affairs professionals and administrators in the MVSO should work to integrate student veteran's families into the campus community. By integrating family members on campus, staff members may promote a supportive environment for the student veteran.

The third implication for practice relates to connecting campus veteran services and services for veterans in the surrounding community and integrating social networks. My findings suggest that military peers external to the university also played a role in helping student veterans as they transition to college. By connecting student veterans with veterans and services outside of the university, administrators can provide student veterans with social outlets and services and without having to invest large amounts of dollars into creating programs on campus. Making these connections in some localities may be easier depending on the number of veterans or military presence or installations in the surrounding area.

The fourth implication for practice related to cultural awareness for faculty, staff members, and students. These groups may benefit from continued education on military students' experiences. This education should go beyond just military experiences and health issues related to those that served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Instead, it should include other issues that affect student veterans such as the culture of the military, external resources for student veterans, and the importance of the encouragement from family members in reaching their educational goals.

The last implication for practice is administrators should assess and evaluate their programs and services. By doing so, administrators can learn about the effectiveness of their programs and if they are meeting intended outcomes. To do this, they should engage student veterans in the process because they appear to be willing to share their experiences and concerns about services for them. By assessing and evaluating these practices regularly and including

student veterans in the process the may provide a more welcoming and supportive campus climate.

This study also provides an implication for federal policy relating to accountability. Student veterans continue to experience a challenging transition from the military to college despite a decade's worth of literature focused on the needs and services for student veterans. The federal government has already provided measures for accountability as it relates to academic progress. However, the federal government should implement stronger accountability measures in addition to those found in Exec. Order No. 13607 (2012) to ensure that students have access to and receive a quality education. Academic progress and persistence are intertwined factors with the student experience and policymakers should consider quality of education and services provided by Post-9/11 GI Bill certified colleges and universities. Elements that policymakers may want to consider are mandatory training for GI Bill certifying officials and members of the campus community that serve student veterans. Other elements may include incentives for colleges that make veterans a priority on their campus and have certain success indicators such as graduation rates, gainful employment, student loan default rates.

Lastly, my study illustrates the need for additional research. This study confirms many of the findings from the scholarly and best practice literature from the last decade as well as the literature about student transitions, persistence, and sense of belonging. Research on student veterans and their transition experiences is relatively young but it is usually qualitative. The use of quantitative and mixed-methods research could help to broaden the scope of the literature in new and innovative ways and avoid repeating the same descriptive studies that have been so prevalent during the last decade. Additionally, the use of other conceptual frameworks outside of the traditional frameworks higher education frameworks would benefit the literature. Incorporating a framework such as Ibarra's (2001) Multicontextuality and Philips' and Lincoln's Veterans Critical Theory (2017) could help broaden the perspective of the experiences of student veterans and how to better serve this population. By using these frameworks as well as other factors like race, gender, university rurality and urbanicity, researchers may find other factors that affect a student veterans' transition from the military to college, These theories and factors take into account that the military and veteran culture permeates all aspects of the student's experience that many frameworks do not incorporate.

Limitations

The first limitation to this study is the small purposeful sample used. There is no set number of participants to use in the collective-case study methodology (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). The use of snowball sampling along with my own recruitment methods in this study may have produced a homogenous sample of participants in regards to race, gender, and age. A larger and more diverse sample size may have produced different findings.

The second limitation was the conceptual framework. The SVCTM emerged as a grounded theory model from primarily the higher education and student affairs literature. These bodies of literature limited the scope of the experience of student veterans and their transition. Literature from other disciplines such as sociology, psychology, or medicine, may have provided additional information about veterans and their transition experiences that could have been beneficial for this study.

A third limitation was the interview protocol. Participants may not have discussed every aspect related to the transition from a military setting or college setting because I did not ask about it or because they were not comfortable talking about it. I engaged two veterans and an Army officer in the creation of the interview protocol. The consultation helped me word the interview questions so that they would be understandable to those with military backgrounds. Participants may have interpreted the questions differently than I intended leading to different responses that could have influenced the findings.

Finally, my previous research experiences related to veterans and the transition from the military to education, training, the workforce, and entrepreneurship could have influenced the findings. My own preconceptions, even though I engaged in bracketing and drafting memos through the process, could have influenced how I collected and analyzed the data. This influence could have affected the findings and a different researcher may have found different themes during the cross-case analysis.

Conclusion

The findings of this study add to and confirm a decade's worth of literature about the transition experiences of Post-9/11 student veterans. As the number of Post-9/11 student veterans has increased on college campuses and will continue to grow in the future, little appears to have changed in the literature about student veterans' transition experiences. Student veterans continue to describe the importance of student veteran peers as the most important factor in their

transition and the integration of their military, civilian, and academic identities. Student veterans also continue to describe negative experiences with higher education administrators and nonmilitary classmates. College administrators should engage with various stakeholders within the university, including student veterans themselves, to create more supportive climates that promote student veterans integrating and navigating multiple cultures and their changing identities.

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Needed:
Veterans at Virginia's Public Colleges & Universities
For *Two* - 45 Minute to 1 Hour Online Interview
About Their College Experience for a Dissertation Study

Selection Criteria:
1. Are a veteran discharged from the United States Air Force, Marines, Army, Navy or served in the National Guard or Reserves on active duty after September 11, 2001;
2. Attended a public or private four-year or two-year institution of higher education in Virginia.
3. Completed at least 9 credit hours each semester for the last two consecutive semesters (i.e. 9 credits in Fall, 9 credits in Spring);

If you meet these four criteria and are interested in sharing your experiences transitioning from the military to college and are ok with being audio recorded, please register to participate in this study at Veteran Influx: Examining Student Veteran Transitions or follow the QR code. If you participate, your information will be kept completely confidential. Additionally, all participants will be given a $10 Amazon Gift Card for each interview they complete as compensation for their time. You will be contacted by your preferred mode of communication within 48 hours to schedule a time to discuss the interview.

For additional information, please contact:
Chris Davidson at chrid13@vt.edu or 540-320-4880
or go to https://sites.google.com/a/vt.edu/militarytocollege/

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Appendix B

Institution/Student veteran Organization Recruitment Script/Email

Greetings, my name is Chris Davidson and I am a doctoral candidate working on my dissertation examining the experiences of veterans transitioning to college. I found your information online as the [title of person] of [insert name of office/organization] at [insert name of college/organization] which has been identified as a [public four-year institution or agency] in [insert state]. I wanted to take a moment and introduce myself and I would like to know if you would be willing to assist me with recruiting veterans to participate in two 45 to 60 minute interview about their experiences. These interviews will take place online via Skype online.

If you are willing to assist in recruitment efforts, would you also be willing to assist me with setting up a location on your campus to recruit student veterans to participate?

Once the study is completed, I can provide you an executive summary of the findings if you would like to see them.

[If via telephone] I can provide you with a recruitment flyer that includes the recruitment criteria for inclusion in the study. Can you please share your email so I can send you the recruitment flyer. Do you have any questions at this point?

[If via email] I have attached a recruitment flyer that includes the recruitment criteria for inclusion in the study. Please let me know if you have any questions about this study.

Thank you

Qualtrics Registration and Screening Form Embedded in Project Site

Veteran Influx: Examining Student Veteran Transitions

Q1 Thank you for your interest in participating in this research study examining the transition experiences of student veterans and their transition to college. The purpose of this study is to test a synthesized grounded theory model of the literature about the transition of student veterans from the military to a college or university. The grounded theory model of the literature shows what strategies are used by college and university administrators during a veteran's transition to college to promote positive transition outcomes for student veterans within a number of conditions and contextual factors. This study is a part of the dissertation requirements for Chris Davidson and for academic journals and presentations

The following series of questions are designed to screen participants for the eligibility criteria, obtain contact information, and demographics information. The information you provide will be kept completely confidential and only accessible by the researchers and the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board upon request. Participants and institution names will be changed and given pseudonyms.

If you choose, not to participate or do not meet the eligibility criteria, your information will be permanently destroyed.

If you do meet the criteria, you will be provided a full Informed Consent information and upon agreeing to participate, you will be asked to participate in a one-hour interview to discuss your experiences about your experiences transitioning from the military to college either via an in-person interview or via WebEx.

If you have questions about the research or the sign-up and screening online form please contact Doctoral Researcher Chris Davidson at chrid13@vt.edu. You may also contact Principle Investigators and Faculty Members Steve Janosik at 540-231-5642 or Dr. Elizabeth Creamer at 540-231-8441 or Associate Vice President for Research Compliance David M. Moore, 540-231-4991.

Q2 Were you discharged from the United States Air Force, Marines, Army, Navy, or served in the National Guard or Reserves on active duty after September 11, 2001?
❍ Yes
❍ No

Answer If Were you discharged from the United States Air Force, Marines, Army, Navy, or served in the Natio... Yes Is Selected
Q3 Are you currently a full-time undergraduate student?
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q4 Do you attend a public four-year college or university?
- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Q5 What is your current class level?
- ○ Freshman (0-29 credit hours)
- ○ Sophomore (30-59 credit hours)
- ○ Junior (60-89 credit hours)
- ○ Senior (90+ credit hours)

Q6 Were you born between 1983 and 1994?
- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Q7 What did you do in between separating from the military and starting classes at your college?
- ○ Attended college directly after separating from the military
- ○ Worked full-time
- ○ Worked part-time
- ○ Other (Please explain in the box below) _____

Q8 You indicated the following in between separating from the military and attending college: "${lm://Field/1}." Please continue to the next page and complete the contact information and demographics questions. Chris Davidson will contact you regarding this answer to evaluate whether you meet the requirements to participate.

Q9 Thank you for considering participating in this research study. Unfortunately, at this time you do not meet the eligibility criteria.

Q10 Congratulations, you may meet the eligibility criteria for this study. Please include the following information that I may contact you to verify you meet the requirements and schedule an interview in-person or via Webex. For this study, you and the university will be given a pseudonym to help keep your responses confidential.
- First Name
- Last Name
- Email Address
- Phone Number
- College or University Name

Q11 What is your preferred method of communication?
- ○ Email
- ○ Phone
- ○ No preference

Q12 Would you rather participate in a recorded face-to-face interview in-person or online WebEx at a more convenient time?
- ○ In-Person (I will let you know of dates that I will be at your college for in-person interviews once they are determined).
- ○ WebEx (I will provide participants with information about using the free WebEx Web Conferencing service. All you need is a webcam, microphone, and internet connection)

Q13 Please indicate your gender.
- ○ Male
- ○ Female
- ○ Transgender
- ○ Other

Q14 Please indicate your marital status.
- ○ Single/Never Married
- ○ Married
- ○ Widowed
- ○ Divorced/Separated

Q15 Please indicate your race/ethnicity.
- ○ White
- ○ Black or African American
- ○ American Indian and/or Alaskan Native
- ○ Asian
- ○ Native Hawaiian and/or Other Pacific Islander
- ○ Hispanic or Latino
- ○ Two or more races/ethnicities

Q16 What is your age?

Q17 What was your Branch of Service?
- ○ Air Force
- ○ Army
- ○ Marines
- ○ Navy
- ○ National Guard
- ○ Coast Guard

End of Survey Message

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact Chris Davidson at chrid13@vt.edu or 540-320-4880, Principal Investigators Dr. Steve Janosik at 540-231-5642 or Dr. Elizabeth Creamer at 540-231-8441 or Associate Vice President for Research Compliance David M. Moore, 540-231-4991.

If you would like to participate in the online interview via WebEx, you may sign up using a Google account on the Online Interview Sign-Up in the navigation bar on the left hand side of this site.

I will follow-up with you within 48 hours to ensure you meet the selection criteria, schedule your in-person interview or confirm your online interview, and provide you with information you a copy of the informed consent form you will complete online.

Sincerely,

Chris Davidson

Appendix D
Informed Consent

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
Informed Consent for Participants in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

Title of Project: Veteran Influx: A Qualitative Study Examining Student Veteran Transitions to College

Investigator(s):

Chris Davidson	**chrid13@vt.edu/540-320-4880**
Name	E-mail / Phone number
Steve Janosik	**sjanosik@vt.edu/540-231-5642**
Name	E-mail / Phone number
Elizabeth Creamer	**creamere@vt.edu/540-231-8441**
Name	E-mail / Phone number

I. Purpose of this Research Project

This study was designed to examine the transition process for student veterans from the military to college including conditions that influence a student veterans' transition. Additionally, the study sought to understand how strategies used by college administrators support a student veteran's transition as well as examining how student veteran peers influences the transition process. Post-9/11 student veterans will be interviewed. Information for this study will be used for the purpose of completing a dissertation and may be used in academic journals and presentations.

II. Procedures

Should you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in two 60 minute interviews with Chris Davidson. As a semi-structured interview, responses to certain questions may lead to additional questions. The interviews will be conducted online using Skype and recorded using Audacity.

III. Risks

There are no perceived risks to the participants.

IV. Benefits

You may benefit only indirectly from this study. You may gain insight into your transition experience from the military to college. No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage you to participate. The findings of this study will provide information to other researchers and college administrators about student veterans. This may improve services provided to such students. You may contact the investigator at a later time for a summary of the research results.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

Your responses will be part of overall case-study analysis and reporting of all interview responses and will not list you by name or your institution. You and your institution will be

given a pseudonyms and details such as your military related experience and college related experience may be used. The Virginia Tech (VT) Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view the study's data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

VI. Compensation
Once each interview is completed, you will be provided with a $10 Amazon Gift Card via email for each online interview for your time and effort.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw
It is important for you to know that you are free to withdraw from the interview at any time without penalty. You are free not to answer any questions that you choose or respond to what is being asked of you without penalty.

Please note that there may be circumstances under which the investigator may determine that a participant should not continue as a participant.

VIII. Questions or Concerns
Should you have any questions about this study, you may contact one of the research investigators whose contact information is included at the beginning of this document.

Should you have any questions or concerns about the study's conduct or your rights as a research participant, or need to report a research-related injury or event, you may contact the VT IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore at moored@vt.edu or (540) 231-4991.

IX. Participant's Consent
I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

Q2 Please indicate the following information:
    First Name (1)
    Last name (2)

Q3 I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project, printed a copy for my records, and had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary electronic consent to participate in this study.
❍ Yes, I agree (1)
❍ No, I do not agree (2)

End of Survey Messages
For those that do not agree to the consent:
Thank you for your consideration to participate in this study. Unfortunately, without consent you are not eligible to participate. If you have any questions or concerns about the project, please feel free to contact Chris Davidson at chrid13@vt.edu, and I will be more than happy to answer any questions you may have. Or you may contact Principal Investigators Dr. Steve Janosik at 540-231-5642 or Dr. Elizabeth Creamer at 540-231-8441 or Associate Vice President for Research Compliance David M. Moore, 540-231-4991.

Sincerely,

Chris Davidson

For those that agreed to participate:
Thank you for your consideration and agreeing to participate in this study. I look forward to speaking with you about your experiences. If you have any questions or concerns about the project, please feel free to contact Chris Davidson at chrid13@vt.edu, and I will be more than happy to answer any questions you may have. Or you may contact Principal Investigators Dr. Steve Janosik at 540-231-5642 or Dr. Elizabeth Creamer at 540-231-8441 or Associate Vice President for Research Compliance David M. Moore, 540-231-4991.

Sincerely,

Chris Davidson

Appendix E

Interview Protocol One

Before we get started, I want to make sure you are still willing to participate and ensure you have no other questions.

Also, I just wanted to remind you that there are five broad questions and there are no right or wrong answers here. Every person has their own unique experiences. I want to know about your experiences. I want to hear your story. And this is meant to be a conversation between us. At the end of this study, I hope to make recommendations for student veterans/military offices and other college administrators so they create more positive experiences for student veterans in the future.

<u>Interview Questions</u>

1. Can you help me understand a little bit about your role as a service member?
   a. *Possible prompts: Were you in combat? What was your MOS/what did you do? How long were you in the military? What was your service like?*
   b. *Prompt: Was there something that was not the normal military experience?*

2. What has it been like for you going from the military to college?
   a. *Possible prompts: How have your academics been?*

3. What has helped you make this transition to being a college student?
   a. *Prompt: I'm not planting any ideas, but you didn't mention the role your family played in your transition.*
   b. *Prompt: You didn't mention any friends, what role did they play?*

4. What kinds of programs or events helped or hindered your transition to college and gotten you to today?

5. Who helped or hindered your transition to college and gotten you to today?

6. What else outside of college played a role in your transition to college and gotten you to today?

7. What would you tell a veteran that is getting out of the military and going straight to college? How can they integrate into this new role of college student?

Appendix F

Interview Protocol Two

Before we get started, I want to make sure you are still willing to participate and ensure you have no other questions.

Also, I just wanted to remind you that there are five broad questions and there are no right or wrong answers here. Every person has their own unique experiences. I want to know about your experiences. I want to hear your story. And this is meant to be a conversation between us. At the end of this study, I hope to make recommendations for student veterans/military offices and other college administrators so they create more positive experiences for student veterans in the future.

<u>Interview Questions</u>

1. What were your experiences with the military or veterans before you became a service member?
    a. *Possible Prompts: Did you have family members in the military growing up? If so, who? What was that like? How did that affect your choice to go into the military?*

2. How did you prepare to go into basic training and the military?
    a. *Possible Prompts: What was it like leaving home/family/etc.?*

3. Can you tell me more about your role in the military? What did your daily routine look like?
    a. *Possible Prompts: What did a typical day look like for you? What kind of activities were involved in while in the military outside of work?*

4. What was your experience like in the military?
    a. *Possible Prompts: What was your relationship with your fellow service members?*

5. What made you decide to go to college?
    a. *Possible prompts: What were the key factors for you going back to school? Anything in your transition out of the military?*

6. What tools did the military provide you to go to college? What were you not prepared for as a student? How has the military shaped you as a student?

7. We touched on this in a previous interview, what would your advice to a friend coming out of the military on how to integrate their military and student identities knowing what you know now?

8. What would you say to college administrators on how to help student veterans given your experience? What input would you give to make it easier for student veterans?

Appendix G

Institutional Review Board Approval
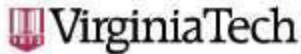
MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 17, 2016

TO: Steven M Janosik, Elizabeth Creamer, Christopher Todd Davidson

FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires January 29, 2021)

PROTOCOL TITLE: Veteran Influx: A Qualitative Study Examining Student Veteran Transitions to College

IRB NUMBER: 16-610

Effective June 17, 2016, the Virginia Tech Institution Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As:	Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 6,7
Protocol Approval Date:	June 17, 2016
Protocol Expiration Date:	June 16, 2017
Continuing Review Due Date*:	June 2, 2017

*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

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VirginiaTech

MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 20, 2016

TO: Steven M Janosik, Elizabeth Creamer, Christopher Todd Davidson

FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires January 29, 2021)

PROTOCOL TITLE: Veteran Influx: A Qualitative Study Examining Student Veteran Transitions to College

IRB NUMBER: 16-610

Effective July 20, 2016, the Virginia Tech Institution Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the Amendment request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

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Protocol Expiration Date:	**June 16, 2017**
Continuing Review Due Date*:	**June 2, 2017**

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FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

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VirginiaTech

MEMORANDUM

DATE:	September 9, 2016
TO:	Steven M Janosik, Elizabeth Creamer, Christopher Todd Davidson
FROM:	Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires January 29, 2021)
PROTOCOL TITLE:	Veteran Influx: A Qualitative Study Examining Student Veteran Transitions to College
IRB NUMBER:	16-610

Effective September 9, 2016, the Virginia Tech Institution Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the Amendment request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

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(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

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Protocol Approval Date:	**June 17, 2016**
Protocol Expiration Date:	**June 16, 2017**
Continuing Review Due Date*:	**June 2, 2017**

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FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

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VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution

VirginiaTech

MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 3, 2016

TO: Steven M Janosik, Elizabeth Creamer, Christopher Todd Davidson

FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires January 29, 2021)

PROTOCOL TITLE: Veteran Influx: A Qualitative Study Examining Student Veteran Transitions to College

IRB NUMBER: 16-610

Effective October 3, 2016, the Virginia Tech Institution Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the Amendment request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

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(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As: **Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 6,7**
Protocol Approval Date: **June 17, 2016**
Protocol Expiration Date: **June 16, 2017**
Continuing Review Due Date*:   **June 2, 2017**
*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

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———————————————— *Invent the Future*

VirginiaTech

MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 24, 2016

TO: Steven M Janosik, Elizabeth Creamer, Christopher Todd Davidson

FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires January 29, 2021)

PROTOCOL TITLE: Veteran Influx: A Qualitative Study Examining Student Veteran Transitions to College

IRB NUMBER: 16-610

Effective October 24, 2016, the Virginia Tech Institution Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the Amendment request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

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Invent the Future

MEMORANDUM

DATE: December 6, 2016

TO: Steven M Janosik, Elizabeth Creamer, Christopher Todd Davidson

FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires January 29, 2021)

PROTOCOL TITLE: Veteran Influx: A Qualitative Study Examining Student Veteran Transitions to College

IRB NUMBER: 16-610

Effective December 6, 2016, the Virginia Tech Institution Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the Amendment request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

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http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

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Protocol Approval Date:	**June 17, 2016**
Protocol Expiration Date:	**June 16, 2017**
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Invent the Future

Participant Transcript Check Email

[Date]

Dear [Participant's First Name],

I would like to thank you for your recent participation in the interview about your transition from the military to college. Attached for your review is your interview transcript. Please check to ensure that the transcript accurately reflects your thoughts on the topic. If you have any additions, deletions, or clarifications, please make those on the attached transcript and send it back to me by [Insert Date 7 Days from Date Sent]. If I do not hear from you by then, I will assume that you have no changes to make and that the attached accurately represents your comments. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. Thank you again for your assistance with my study.

Sincerely,

Chris Davidson
Doctoral Candidate, Higher Education
Phone: 540-320-4880
chrid13@vt.edu

Appendix I

Standardized Memo for Initial Impressions and Interpretation

1. What are/were my initial impressions from the interview?
2. What do I think influenced the participant's transition?
   a. Positive influence?
   b. Negative influence?
   c. Helped or hindered the participant?
3. What contextual factors influenced the transition?
4. Any ideas on the causal mechanism?

Appendix J

Cross-Case Analysis Table

Conceptual Model Component	Themes/ Propositions	Cases					
		Mark	Valerie	Catherine	Tim	Robert	Aidan
Context	Reduction in the Military						
	Multiple Deployments						
	Post-9/11 GI Bill						
	Veterans Choice Act						
Conditions	Physical & Behavioral Health Disabilities						
	Institutional Type						
	Nontraditional College Students						
	Working while in College						
	Family						
Strategies	Military or Student Veteran Office						
	Facilitating Peer-to-Peer Relationships						
	Peer Mentoring Programs						
	Student Veteran Organization						

	Academic Credit for Prior Learning						
	Other Institutional Policies						
Outcome	Experiencing a Positive Transition						
Causal Mechanism	Student Veterans Support One Another						
Emergent Categories	Emergent Category 1						
	Emergent Category 2						