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Veteran Transition from Combat to Campus: A Mixed-Methods Study

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VETERAN TRANSITION FROM COMBAT TO CAMPUS:
A MIXED-METHODS STUDY

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the Educational Leadership Doctoral Program
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

By
Joanna R. Jones

May 2019

VETERAN TRANSITION FROM COMBAT TO CAMPUS:
A MIXED-METHODS STUDY

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I dedicate this work to the past, present, and future veterans transitioning from military service. Also, all persons involved with supporting student veterans during their journey for success in postsecondary education and beyond.

Student veterans, all military members, and families who support and attended WKU, and all military members who serve or have continued to serve the United States of America Honorably.

-Semper Fidelis-

(Latin pronunciation: ['sem.per fi'de:lis] - Latin phrase that means "always faithful" or "always loyal." It is the motto of the United States Marine Corps, usually shortened to Semper Fi. It is also in use as a motto for towns, families, schools, and other military units.)

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Western Kentucky University

The current research was carried out to investigate the overall satisfaction and benefits concerning student veteran programs at a public university located in southcentral Kentucky and the possible correlation of effectiveness within the supportive transitioning assistance programs for student veterans. The study included survey(s) distributions to administrators of veteran programs and student veterans.

The descriptive investigative study involved both aspects of quantitative and qualitative design, hence categorizing the study as mixed-methods. Descriptive research design is considered a scientific method which involves observing and/or describing behavior regarding the subject without influencing it in any way. Surveys were used during this study to create a confidential and non-biased atmosphere.

Student veteran information was limited, yet the information provided was honored and is shared for possible future study. Most administrators of student veteran programs participated in the study; however, there appears to be some inconsistency in the information provided based on survey questions. Therefore, a bias is probable due to the administrator's position in particular student veterans' programs.

The findings indicate administrators need to become more familiar with the services on campus provided for student veterans, and there may be a lack of communication between departments that serve student veterans. Congruently, there is a

possibility of bias among the administrators, according to the student veterans' department for which they work. Also, the student veterans who participated in the study expressed a concern that information about student veteran services is not provided as well as it could be.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Countless veterans returning to the United States after serving their country cope with mental illnesses, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), anxiety, and/or depression. The veterans who return from combat into civilian life may choose to pursue postsecondary education. Yet, their struggles with the mental health issues may, without institutional awareness and support services, lead these otherwise capable students to fall behind academically and postpone or even fail to realize their educational goals. Thus, examining the experiences student veterans with combat history withstand during the transitional phase while attending postsecondary education could help colleges and universities better support them throughout their academic trajectory to ensure their success.

Statement of the Problem

Discovering insights pertaining to the issues many veterans experience during the transitional phase provides an opportunity for policy development and possible implementation of programs for assistance. In turn, support programs for recovering/transitioning veterans pursuing postsecondary education may improve the overall retention rates and assistance for student veterans seeking postsecondary education.

The overall purpose for this study is to improve the functionality and contribution of university/campus services that support student veterans returning from combat and transitioning to campus life. Such improvements may come in the form of policy or other changes in administrative procedures to more efficiently and effectively provide military student services on campus.

Although this study focuses on data gathered at one university related to veterans' experiences and the services they receive or need, the literature review provides additional empirical resources and information demonstrating the importance of such services.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this mixed-methods study is to understand, describe, develop, and possibly implement a resourceful environment for student veterans in the transition phase during postsecondary education. Building awareness of the issues (to be organized as themes) student veterans encounter, especially those who are experiencing symptoms related to PTSD and/or TBI from combat; understanding how these themes interplay with the overall student experience; and exploring how and why support services affect students' success should lead to higher retention rates which, in turn, promote the sense of accomplishment university leaders desire for these and other students.

Outcomes from this research can assist leaders of support services to align and adjust their offerings to more effectively reach and support the student veteran population. For instance, this study may reveal that student veterans are unfamiliar with all the services that are accessible on campuses. They may need to be informed or could be better informed during their entrance into postsecondary education about the services available to them. Results of this study may suggest that at meetings where student veterans talk to financial aid officers or someone specializing in VA or GI Bill benefits, they also could be informed of additional services available on campus, such as mental healthcare, student veteran organizations, the Veterans Upward Bound program, etc.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this study:

1. Regarding university support services for veterans,
 - a. How familiar are veterans and administrators with these services?
 - b. How satisfied are veterans with these services?
 - c. How beneficial do veterans find these services?
 - d. How well coordinated are these services?
2. Regarding veterans with disabilities,
 - a. Do the disabilities affect factors related to student success?
 - b. Do they receive information on the support services available to them at the university?
 - c. Do veterans find university personnel to be helpful?
3. Are there discrepancies between service providers and veterans regarding the adequacy or quality of the university support services?

General Methodology

This descriptive study relies on both aspects of quantitative and qualitative design, thus making it a mixed-methods approach. Descriptive research design is considered a scientific method that involves observing and describing behavior regarding the subject without influencing it in any way. This is a popular approach, especially in the social sciences, because it can obtain a general overview of the subject. The quantitative portion focuses solely on statistical data which have been previously gathered from the present through the last 5 to 10 years, as well as data gathered from student veterans through

surveys. However, the qualitative data portion is comprised of a descriptive study approach while using an analytical lens based upon experience in the field of study.

The central phenomenon being considered through this descriptive study approach involves disabled veterans at a public university located in southcentral Kentucky. The research on the student veteran population being considered is generally defined as a descriptive study. The methodology be used for this mixed-method research study is qualitative in nature and utilizes information gathered through questionnaires from student veteran support services administrators who serve the student veterans enrolled in programs located on campus.

The intent of the study is to gather information regarding mental health, success tactics, student support services, and retention rates among the student veteran population. This information will provide a view of the current and past statuses of the student veterans who have pursued or are pursuing postsecondary education. The research also provides insight into the success rate of those individuals who participate in the student support services for veterans. Programs that are considered include: Veterans Upward Bound, Military Student Services, and Veteran Affairs financial assistance programs.

The purpose of this study is to gather, analyze, and report information that may hinder the retention rate of the student veteran population. The study also reviews the current strategies that are implemented in providing resources to student veterans for success in postsecondary education. The focus is on administrators who work with veterans who have returned stateside in the last 5 to 10 years from a combat expedition.

The veterans have served in Iraq and/or Afghanistan and are involved in student veteran programs on campus.

The study allows for open communication with administrators who interact with these student veterans and provides flexibility by understanding the concerns of veterans outside the academic environment. Those concerns may affect the performance and success of the veterans attending postsecondary education. The researcher is attempting to improve understanding of the phenomenon surrounding the student veteran population. The study also may provide information on the overall effectiveness or ineffectiveness of assistance programs for student veterans.

Significance of the Study

Research regarding student veterans and the support services provided for them while in postsecondary education is important because it will add to the current literature available while providing more information regarding the influence and impact of student support services. This study also has the potential to improve the lives of veterans returning from combat who are in transition while using GI Bill benefits. Descriptive research may help veteran and non-veteran professionals understand current difficulties, the effects of transitioning, and overall functioning in postsecondary education after returning from deployment(s) in a combat/hazardous zone.

The study also may help in the development of improved student support services for transitioning student veterans and/or possibly prevent future problems many student veterans may face. This research may be used on a multifaceted level to improve awareness for instructors and professors, develop and/or improve university policy, and improve awareness and understanding of student support services.

Delimitations

Data are not collected on the exact amount of student veterans who have attended the university, as this action would be considered an inefficient use of time and is not needed for this project. Also, data over 15 years old are not considered because the nature of student services has changed and the researcher is exploring the current effectiveness of the programs, as well as the student veteran experience with such programs. Only one university is selected for the purposes of this study.

Limitations

This research does not involve any variable manipulation and inferential statistics. Consequently, some researchers may argue this descriptive lacks strength to draw strong conclusions. The data also are limited to one university; not all veterans are included due to the inability to separate GI Bill recipients from veterans and dependents of veterans. Only administrators of the student veteran support programs are interviewed versus all employees or volunteers within the service programs.

Definitions

Afghanistan War: An international conflict in Afghanistan beginning in 2001 that was triggered by the September 11 attacks and consisted of three phases. The first phase—toppling the Taliban (the ultraconservative political and religious faction that ruled Afghanistan and provided sanctuary for al-Qaeda, perpetrators of the September 11 attacks)—was brief, lasting just two months. The second phase, from 2002 through 2008, was marked by a U.S. strategy of defeating the Taliban militarily and rebuilding core institutions of the Afghan state. The third phase, a turn to classic counterinsurgency doctrine, began in 2008 and accelerated with U.S. President Barack Obama's 2009

decision to temporarily increase the U.S. troop presence in Afghanistan. The larger force was used to implement a strategy of protecting the population from Taliban attacks and supporting efforts to reintegrate insurgents into Afghan society. The strategy was coupled with a timetable for the withdrawal of the foreign forces from Afghanistan; beginning in 2011, security responsibilities would be gradually handed over to the Afghan military and police. The new approach largely failed to achieve its aims. Insurgent attacks and civilian casualties remained stubbornly high, while many of the Afghan military and police units taking over security duties appeared to be ill-prepared to hold off the Taliban. By the time the U.S. and NATO combat mission formally ended in December 2014, the 13-year Afghanistan War had become the longest war ever fought by the US (Witte, 2019).

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA): The second-largest Cabinet department, the VA coordinates the distribution of benefits for veterans of the American Armed Forces and their dependents. The benefits may include compensation for disabilities, the management of veterans' hospitals, and various insurance programs, as well as healthcare services for disabled veterans (VA, n.d.).

GI Bill: The Serviceman's Readjustment Act, commonly known as the GI Bill, created a comprehensive package of benefits, including financial assistance for higher education, for veterans of U.S. military service. The benefits of the GI Bill are intended to help veterans readjust to civilian life following service to their country and to encourage bright, motivated men and women to volunteer for military duty.

Iraq War (Operation Iraqi Freedom [OIF] and Operation Enduring Freedom [OEF]): A protracted military conflict in Iraq that began in 2003 with an attack by a coalition of

forces led by the US and resulted in the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime. U.S. combat troops were withdrawn in 2010 (*The Free Dictionary*, n.d.).

Military Veteran: A veteran is defined by federal law, moral code, and military service as "Any, Any, Any"... A military veteran is Any person who served for Any length of time in Any military service branch (Army; Navy; Air Force; Marines; certain Coast Guard personnel operating under the War Department, Navy Department, or Department of Defense). However, other uniform-wearing agencies that are allowed some military benefits by the VA are not military veterans (Public Health Service, Merchant Marine, etc.). Additionally, spouses and children of military veterans allowed some benefits by the VA are not military veterans (The American War Library, n.d.). A recently signed law gives official veteran status to National Guard members who served 20 years or more. Previously, Guard members were considered veterans only if they served 180 days or more in a federal status outside of training.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder/Syndrome (PTSD): A disorder that develops in some people who have experienced a shocking, scary, or dangerous event. It is natural to feel afraid during and after a traumatic situation. Fear triggers many split-second changes in the body to help defend against danger or to avoid it. This "fight-or-flight" response is a typical reaction meant to protect a person from harm. Nearly everyone will experience a range of reactions after trauma, yet most people recover from initial symptoms naturally. Those who continue to experience problems may be diagnosed with PTSD. People who have PTSD may feel stressed or frightened even when they are not in danger (National Institute of Mental Health [NIMH], n.d.).

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI): Traumatic brain injury usually results from a violent blow or jolt to the head or body. An object that penetrates brain tissue, such as a bullet or shattered piece of skull, also can cause traumatic brain injury. Mild traumatic brain injury may affect brain cells temporarily. More serious traumatic brain injury can result in bruising, torn tissues, bleeding, and other physical damage to the brain. These injuries can result in long-term complications or death (Mayo Clinic, n.d.).

Summary

This descriptive study reviews current data that involve matters faced by many returning veterans when pursuing postsecondary education. The study also explores the current effectiveness of student support services that are offered to help veterans during their transitional period while attending postsecondary education. The purpose of this study is to provide an informative review of the current conditions in the postsecondary environment for administrators involved in student support services. Information provided may be useful in the development and/or creation of future policy to improve or implement services for returning combat veterans.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Current Trends in Veterans Attending Universities

The Numbers

In recent years, the US has engaged in several combat expeditions that have led to an increase in the number of service members who have been in combat. According to a recent report by the American Council on Education (ACE; Molina & Morse, 2015), upwards of two million military veterans will take advantage of their government educational benefits and attend higher education institutions before 2020. Between 2000 and 2012, more than 900,000 veterans and military service members received education benefits through the VA (Sherman, Klein-Collins, & Palmer, 2012). The largest influx of beneficiaries occurred between 2009 and 2010, when a 42% increase was seen, due in part to the new Post 9/11 GI Bill taking effect. Although every state has veterans attending higher education institutions, 80% of the beneficiaries reside in just 23.

Veteran undergraduates make up roughly 4% of the national student body; although a relatively small percentage, the number is expected to increase as more service members return home from serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. Regarding degree attainment in the Post 9/11 Era, by 2011 more than 924,000 veterans had used the benefits offered through the Post-9/11 GI Bill (VA, 2011b). A report, prepared by the Pat Tillman Foundation and Operation College Promise, states that the number is rising as more veterans are discharged into a dissatisfying job market (Lang & Powers, 2011). At George Mason University in northern Virginia, for instance, the number of student veterans soared from 840 in 2009 to 1,575 in early 2011 (Boodman, 2018).

According to a survey by the ACE (2018), 62% of veterans and military service members are the first in their families to attend college, compared to 43% of non-military students. As this non-traditional student population continues to grow, colleges and universities will have to consider the support these individuals will need to successfully complete their new “mission”—earning a college degree.

Preparing to Serve Veterans

A key consideration when serving veterans involves issues that may hinder academic performance for those returning from service. Although the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have continued for more than a decade, colleges and universities often find themselves unprepared for the influx of this unique student demographic. The experience of being active in the military is distinctly different than that of attending postsecondary education. Professionals should seek to understand the connection veterans may make between what they experienced during their military service and how they relate to or may even shape the perceptions of their experiences as college students (Baechtold & DeSawal, 2009). Presently, this is a new area of concern that is deficient in research; however, a review of sources suggests needed research in the following areas: review of disabled veteran status, review of larger population, review of the transitional preparedness phase prior to exiting the military service, possible links between financial support, financial stress, academic success or failures, mental health concerns, and rate of mental health ailments among the student veteran population (Nyaronga & Toma, 2015).

According to Lighthall (2011), there are 10 simple notions to consider when educating and working with student veterans. First, student veterans are one of America’s greatest untapped human resources. These students often are emotionally mature, goal-

oriented, mission-driven, and experienced leaders. They have faced and survived many obstacles that some traditional students will never experience. These veterans are head-strong, strong-willed, and determined to complete the task. If they identify a goal and set their mind to it, they will accomplish it to the best of their ability, regardless of setbacks from injuries. Some injuries can cause the veteran to be discouraged, and they may need a change of pace. Yet, having a supportive social network can help them accept this transition and encourage them to have a positive outlook.

Second, Lighthall (2011) suggested veterans need supportive understanding, compassion, and respect. Most Americans do not choose to join the military, and the student veteran population is surrounded by others who lack the experience to relate and understand what they have experienced. To the outsiders of military service, they may find the veterans' behavior as strange, confusing, or even unstable. For instance, a student veteran may show up either late or early to class, just to find a seat that is in a "safe zone"—meaning an area where they can view the entire class or one near the exit. This may be due to the training and the environment in which they have experienced trauma from service.

Third, combat trauma should be considered as an injury, not a mental illness (Lighthall, 2011). Witnessing comrades becoming injured, becoming injured from explosives, and living in circumstances where this becomes the "normal" causes massive shock to the amygdala, the brain's emotional command and support center. After such an injury, this causes the brain to flood with a variety of chemicals and commands, leaving imprints for future survival instinct. However, recovery is possible; this process may take years and could even become a hindrance longer if a support system is not found. The

healing process could take much longer. Nevertheless, adaptation is possible, and a positive outlook should be reinforced to the student. For example, if a student is overwhelmed and having doubts of being successful, be a positive influence and let them know they are supported in their process for self-improvement through education and higher learning.

Fourth, they often want to go back to the war zone (Lighthall, 2011). This may seem to be a strange desire, but to the veteran this may be what they feel they excel in and they have become, in a sense, comfortable with this sort of environment. Combat veterans who struggle with transition usually miss the relationships they developed with their comrades and may feel as though those relationships are impossible to build with anyone else. If no one else understands them, this can lead to isolation and mistrust in building future relationships. Also on the other side of the spectrum, some student veterans may not want to develop relationships with other students because they have lost comrades and friends and may feel as if not connecting at all is less painful than connecting and losing someone they care for.

Fifth, according to Lighthall (2011), female veterans suffer deeply and almost always in silence. Women in the military make up a very small percentage, less than 20%. The military is still a male-dominated environment. Nonetheless, the women were of course aware of this every day, and it can be a challenging environment and at times damaging. The VA estimates that at least 22% of females who serve are sexually assaulted during their time in service (VA, 2011a). Just imagine the struggle a female veteran may experience while serving overseas during the Iraq era with comrades who have harassed and/or sexually assaulted her. This is a very heavy burden to carry; only

when the veteran returns home may she feel safe enough to begin the process to heal from the very complex experience. However, one should be aware of these potential issues and at the least provide information for resources for help and support.

Sixth, Lighthall (2011) suggested three things one should never say to a student veteran, even though they may hear them every day: “These wars were atrocities and a waste of human life;” “I don’t get why you’re having so much trouble, you volunteered, it was your decision, right?;” and, the worst question, “Did you kill anyone?” These questions not only wound the student veteran more, but they cause even more pain for those who are already burdened with distress and survivors' guilt. Universities may not always be able to filter or control the comments of traditional students, but awareness can create an environment that is not more harmful for the student veteran during transition. Such awareness also could be educational for a diverse culture and developing understanding for and of others; their culture could possibly provide change and hope for the future of all students by destigmatizing this population.

Seventh, veterans often are unaware of their mild traumatic brain injuries (Lighthall, 2011). When a mortar strikes, it has concussive impact on service members nearby. Therefore, returning home and transitioning into college can be overwhelming not only due to a life-changing environment, but also because of the unrecognized injuries with which many veterans are coping. These injuries due to a TBI may include a decrease in memory, attention and concentration, reasoning, and mental processing. They can have a major impact on overall learning if a supportive system and accommodations are not available to help them as they heal, cope, and progress.

Eighth, many student veterans can feel very alone on campus (Lighthall, 2011). Additionally, they may feel alone because tend to be older than their peers and may not trust of people who have not experienced life in such a manner.

Ninth, student veterans do not see themselves as victims (Lighthall, 2011). This warrior mentality can create an increased possibility of a “setback” accompanied with an unwillingness to seek help for their PTSD that can further hinder their transition. Once this is recognized and “adaptation” is the new motto, it may become easier for student veterans to accept the adjustments they may need to make in order to be successful and create an overall more rewarding academic life.

Tenth, Lighthall (2011) pointed out that student veterans are a highly diverse group; they represent America and are just as diverse as the US. No generalization can be made for this group, except a common desire to seek education for a means of self-improvement and a hope it will provide opportunities that are beyond their injuries, disabilities, and limitations.

Zinger and Cohen (2010) indicated the adjustment is not always easy, may be difficult, and is never completed. Veterans face many challenges when returning from combat and not all wounds are visible. Additionally, with a lack of student veteran social and postsecondary supportive guidance, many veterans have reported they had to undergo the administrative process alone. They would have been appreciative of more guidance and help during the transition from combat to a campus environment.

Transition and First-Year Services

Challenges in the Transition

With the influx of military members who served in combat and are returning home, the transition to a university lifestyle may be difficult. Student veterans are a diverse population with an incredibly wide range of experiences; it is impossible to take a one-size-fits-all approach to serving them. Hence, one of the most important steps campus leadership can take is to gauge the specific needs of veterans at their institution before devoting resources to new initiatives. Both student veterans and campus administrators have spoken to the success of efforts, with direct input from the enrolled student veteran population, to craft supportive programs.

Nevertheless, it can be very difficult to solicit input when no method exists to track or contact student veterans. Several institutions have revised admission forms to include an instrument to track incoming students with military experience and have followed up with these individuals as they make their way to classes. This system not only allows institutions to track veterans' success as they progress through academic programs, but also enables the institution to measure the effectiveness of resources and to quickly and easily reach out to veterans on campus.

Despite the differences among veterans, several themes have emerged. The following recommendations have been implemented by many institutions to ensure veterans are successful in higher education, receiving a great deal of positive feedback from students: (1) establish specific points of contact within campus offices; (2) create a campus working group that collaborates departments; (3) cooperate with community organizations to provide comprehensive services; and (4) ensure veterans receive a

thorough introduction to the university through an orientation (Association of American Colleges & Universities [AACU], 2011). Veteran success also could be improved through enhancing the campus climate by establishing a student veterans' group, educating faculty and staff about veteran-specific issues, and if possible creating a veteran-specific resource center or designated space. For example, Radford (2009) recommended investigating the possibility of creating veteran-specific learning communities on campus.

According to Bonar's (2016) study of veterans seeking postsecondary education, there are many gaps in the process regarding how veterans relate and understand their new lifestyle. Most service members are accustomed to a military-style regimen. Additionally, there are underlying obstacles veterans face when returning home, such as medical appointments, relating to others who have not served, awareness of their surroundings, and integrating back to a civilian lifestyle. Bonar suggested a mentor or a "transition coach" may be practical for the student veteran population. This coach could be tailored to the needs of each individual. Further, Bonar suggested the coach's proper training and/or experience should be considered for a successful outcome. The study recognized the need for mental health support, which is consistent with the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center (DVBIC, 2017) estimation that greater than 30% of returning veterans have a need for mental health services.

Some of the transitioning issues that may occur, according to research, are as follows: difficulty with relating to and/or connecting with traditional college students, finding importance and meaning in experiences and ideas that are not concerned with life-or-death situations, developing a sense of safety on campus, boredom, and anxiety

related to deployments and service, which can cause issues with developing new relationships with those who have not had similar experiences (University of Oregon Counseling and Testing Center, n.d.). Countless student veterans may experience emotional and cognitive impairment due to the stress and anxiety they face while transitioning with PTSD and/or TBI. This can affect their ability to learn and obtain information in order to be successful in school. As an experienced veteran on the matter, it can become overwhelming and challenging at times. There also are feelings of hopelessness that may occur due to the constant sense of overwhelming stress and the false belief that “everything needs to be perfect.” Yet, college is not a “life-or-death” scenario; it is a process of learning and should be an environment for such applied learning. For many returning veterans it is a learning process of transitioning into becoming a civilian again.

Nevertheless, becoming a civilian does not ever really occur to the fullest, as once a veteran has served and had such an experience, it remains a part of who they are and shapes their personality and forms part of their identity. However, adaptation to the new lifestyle is possible with support. While adapting to new surroundings and a lifestyle can become difficult and challenging for student veterans, there are encouraging implementations that can be adopted at universities willing to help and maintain their student population who carry the burden of PTSD and/or TBI.

Diversity of Needed Services

Vaccaro’s (2015) study of the perceptions of 11 student veterans regarding their college experiences found similarities and differences among them, suggesting that one-size-fits-all services may not meet their needs. The framework that guided this study was

constructionist epistemology, which emphasizes that meaning making is not solely an individual process but, rather, is shaped by social influences and/or environments. Data were collected through a semi-structured individual interview process lasting from an hour and a half to two hours and audio recorded. Numerous techniques were implemented to ensure trustworthiness of the findings. Vaccaro's study recommended against assuming sameness: "Student veterans in the study felt faculty, staff, and civilian peers viewed them through a homogenizing lens. Although they were proud to be recognized, student veterans felt the 'veteran' label came from an assumed level of sameness that did not exist" (p. 351).

Conceivably, a methodology of building and creating a "university-social support system" also could influence the necessity and importance of universities offering mental health services to all students in need. Some universities have acknowledged their student veteran population and provided resources that are easily accessible online. An example is the admissions page of the University of Oregon (n.d.), which has summarized the matters veterans face when they return to the civilian and/or college campus lifestyle.

Socialization and Success

Whitman, Barry, Mroczek, and Wadsworth (2013) conducted a study on the military and veteran student population transition and ecological socialization concerns regarding success or non-success in higher education, with emphasis on the emotional support from peers. Using a longitudinal quantitative approach, the researchers explored the developmental process through which emotional support was processed by those students based on the degree of understanding/assistance received from their peers and

how it affected adjustment and academic performance. The study was conducted over a 12-month period, with data collection occurring over three consecutive semesters.

Participants in the Whitman et al. (2013) study included those from all branches of service: Air Force, Army, Marine Corps, Navy, National Guard, and Coast Guard. Data were collected via student veteran responses to a series of survey questions that, along with background and demographic information, related to their adjustment to university life, including their perceptions of their peer emotional support, mental health, alcohol use, and academic functioning. Compared to civilian students also receiving peer support, veterans reported less emotional support from university friends; however, the emotional support increased over the three-semester period. Perceived emotional support was related to age, gender, part-time/full-time student enrollment status, and military affiliation. Concerning the three survey measurements, veteran and civilian students reported a similar growth rate in receiving emotional support from peers (Whitman et al., 2013). Related to mental health findings, women and unmarried student participants reported greater psychological distress, which was consistent with the indication that participants who reported more social support demonstrated fewer symptoms of distress. Interestingly, the researchers found student reported use of alcohol increased over the three semesters. Additionally, GPAs were found to be higher for those who reported having more emotional support.

Results from Whitman et al.'s (2013) study indicated a positive relationship between emotional support, academic adjustment, and academic performance. However, returning veterans who have served in a combat environment, such as operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, were more likely to suffer from PTSD and other mental illnesses

associated with depression and anxiety. Therefore, further study and evaluation is recommended because the stress level reported in this study may not be related to the campus experience.

Continued Support Services

General Strategies

Whereas the Whitman et al. (2013) study addressed an important issue and was the first-known longitudinal investigation of a student veteran population in this area, it did not address the length to which student veterans had been exposed to the campus environment. Another possible limitation of the study was that data were gathered via only a web-based survey.

Conversely, DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell (2008) examined the transition of military veterans into the environment of campus culture based on a grounded theory paradigm using qualitative methodology. Following an epistemological approach, the researchers sought to distinguish between justified beliefs versus opinion-based objectives. The participants consisted of 25 veterans aged 20-34 who had served active duty in Iraq and Afghanistan between the years of 2003 and 2007. Sampling procedures followed the snowball technique—participants referred others to participate. To recruit and inform potential participants, flyers were posted around several locations on campus, as well as distributed by the financial aid office and veteran services administration. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, and interviewers employed a procedure known as "active interviewing" that allowed for the use of "storytelling" or narrativity when providing the information. Pattern coding also was a technique used to evaluate and group data into segments and smaller themes.

The DiRamio et al. (2008) study findings demonstrated the need for a holistic and comprehensive system in order to better assist and determine the needs of veterans in postsecondary education. It should be noted, however, the study excluded military veterans who were still considered active duty. These individuals could possibly have given additional insight pertaining to the link or disconnect from time of service versus being discharged.

Additional limitations of both the DiRamio et al. (2008) and Whitman et al. (2013) studies included financial funding/resources for veterans and employment status, which were not addressed. The interview questions were survey-oriented yet followed a narrative approach, which allowed for the possible inconsistency of gathering and interpreting data.

Services Related to Identified Service-Related Disabilities

Numerous veterans will be returning from an extended period of exposure to severe emotional or mental trauma, hypervigilance, and highly stressful working and living conditions. OEF/OIF service members are at risk for death or injury. They may have seen others hurt or killed during their deployment. The duties of their military occupation may have ordered some to kill or wound others. Therefore, these veterans may have the mindset to stay on alert all hours of the day. These and other factors can increase their chances of having PTSD, anxiety or panic disorders, and other mental health problems that may affect their sleep patterns.

For many service members and veterans, being away from home for long periods of time can cause problems at home or work. They can add to the stress these individuals are already experiencing. Relative to environmental socialization, this may be even more

so for National Guard and Reserve troops who had not expected to be away for so long. Almost half of those who have served in the current wars have been Guard and Reservists.

Another cause of stress in Iraq and Afghanistan is military sexual trauma (MST; VA, 2011a), which is sexual assault or repeated, threatening sexual harassment that occurs in the military. MST can happen to men and women and can occur during peacetime, training, or war.

Litz and Schlenger (2009) looked at the mental health of service members in Afghanistan and Iraq. The study asked soldiers and Marines about war-zone experiences and their symptoms of distress. Soldiers and Marines in Iraq reported more combat stressors than those in Afghanistan. Litz and Schlenger concluded soldiers and Marines who had more combat stressors also experienced more mental health problems, with those serving in Iraq displaying higher rates of PTSD than those who served in Afghanistan. Litz and Schlenger found 10% to 18% of OEF/OIF troops are likely to have PTSD after they return. In addition to PTSD, these service members are at risk for other mental health problems. Although studies vary widely in terms of methods used, estimates of depression in returning troops range from 3% to 25%. In order for veterans to cope with stressors, the study determined excessive drinking and use of tobacco also may be problematic. In addition, service members reported concerns over conflicts with others.

Additional research has analyzed the response to war stressor changes over time. PTSD symptoms are more likely to surface in returning OEF/OIF service members after a delay of several months. Using a brief PTSD screen, service members were assessed at

their return and then again six months later. They were more likely to have a positive screen, i.e., they showed more PTSD symptoms at the later time. This outcome was due to the transitioning stage of returning from deployment and adjusting while processing what the veteran experienced while on deployment. However, many service members who screened positive (had more PTSD symptoms) at their return showed fewer PTSD symptoms after six months. Overall, it should be noted that most returning service members screened negative for PTSD at both time points. Research studies have found certain factors make it more likely OEF/OIF service members will develop PTSD. These factors included longer deployment time and more severe combat exposure, such as deployment to "forward" areas close to the enemy, seeing others wounded or killed, more severe physical injury such as traumatic brain injury (TBI), lower rank, lower level of schooling, low morale and poor social support within the unit, being unmarried, and family problems.

In their study, Elnitsky, Belvins, Findlow, Alverio, and Wiese (2018) examined the effects of campus services on the health of veterans with traumatic injuries and comorbidities as they returned from military service and entered college. Using a cross-sectional internet survey based on a mixed-methods analysis approach, Elnitsky et al. studied 127 veterans returning from active military duty and attending a four-year urban research university in the southeastern US. Survey items were built around the PCL standardized measures of health status, traumatic injuries, and functional impairment. The PCL is a standardized self-report rating scale for PTSD comprising 17 items that correspond to the key symptoms of PTSD. Two versions of the PCL exist: (1) PCL-M is specific to PTSD caused by military experiences; and (2) PCL-C is applied generally to

any traumatic event. The PCL can be easily modified to fit specific time frames or events. For example, instead of asking about “the past month,” questions may ask about “the past week” or be modified to focus on events specific to a deployment. The Veterans Health Administration TBI screen is the Veterans RAND-12. The Veterans RAND 12-Item Health Survey (VR-12) is a brief, generic, multi-use, self-administered health survey comprised of 12 items. The instrument is used primarily to measure health related quality of life, to estimate disease burden, and to evaluate disease-specific benchmarks with other populations. The 12 items correspond to eight principal physical and mental health domains, including general health perceptions, physical functioning, role limitations due to physical and emotional problems, bodily pain, energy-fatigue, social functioning, and mental health. The items are summarized into two scores: a Physical Health Summary Measure (PCS-physical component score) and a Mental Health Summary: Measure (MCS-mental component score). These scores provide an important contrast between physical and psychological health status (Selim, Rogers, Qian, Brazier, & Kazis, 2011), as well as items related to use of, perceived effectiveness of, and additional recommendations for campus services that support reintegration into the university. Findings revealed student veterans experienced high rates of chronic pain that interfered with their daily functioning (92.7% of respondents), symptoms of PTSD (77.9%), TBI (26.0%), and comorbidities such as the Polytrauma Clinical Triad (14.2%). Despite the high prevalence of pain, PTSD, and TBI, few students reported using disability services (5.2%), counseling services (18.8%), or student health services (36.5%). Students reported experiencing challenges accessing needed health services when reintegrating from the military to the university, including multiple university service factors. These

findings indicate campus services should address the needs of student veterans and the need to determine the services that should be offered to help this population cope with injuries and succeed in college.

Counseling Services

As mental health greatly affects student veteran reintegration, assessment of the health status among the student veterans within a campus environment is essential for long-term success. In their health assessment of veterans, Misra-Hebert et al. (2015) found reports of depression and unhealthy behaviors were high. Similarly, many veterans reported physical and emotional limitations and pain interfering with work. The results of the study suggested further exploration of health needs of the student veteran population, and if healthcare support such as mental healthcare was provided through a possible partnership with VA Medical Health Centers, the veteran population may have had a higher success rate in postsecondary education.

In addition, 9% of veterans may have post-traumatic symptoms (PTS) *before* deployment, possibly due to employment in hostile work environments (National Institutes of Health, 2010). In their cross-sectional study of veterans with PTS before and after deployment, Hoge et al. (2004) surveyed 900 student service members actively enrolled at SUNY Empire State college in 2011. The purpose was to reveal the correlations of student veterans and PTS by demographic factors (e.g., age, gender, race, marital status), as well as other hypothesized risk factors such as the military branch in which the veteran had served and the nature of deployment (i.e., whether the veteran served in a combat zone). Of the 900 veterans surveyed, 144 responded to the questions specifically related to the severity of PTS. Although most demographic variables were

not significantly associated with PTS in student service members, it was found that marital status, including whether service members were divorced or separated, was significantly correlated with PTS scores. Hoge et al. suggested accommodations for student veterans may be based on individual circumstance and need, rather than grouping them into categories and then providing one-size-fits-all support structures. Their findings further suggested improvement of student veteran services through a collaborative approach with the mental health services on campus while gaining or obtaining a "student success coach" for veterans pursuing their postsecondary education.

One university has developed an incentive for students and student veterans in distress to reach out. The Office of Counseling at the The College of New Jersey (n.d.) also focuses on the importance of student wellness while providing high quality and culturally sensitive services for optimal functioning for the whole person. This university even has a text hotline that is available to both students and non-students. This is an approach that many other universities could follow and would give the students who are certified in counseling and possibly working on their graduate or terminal degree an internship-type opportunity while helping students, such as veterans, with crisis moments during an anxiety episode, panic attack, and/or PTSD event. Leaders in postsecondary education may be concerned with the possible restraints regarding ethical and legal issues relative to providing services across state lines. However, these "help lines" involve conversations that are anonymous both ways. The counselor does not know the person texting and vice versa; therefore, no patient relationship is built. The text hotline is a communication tactic for the distressed student to not feel alone and hopeless because no one may be present to talk to them during a struggling time. The Crisis Text line that is

available 24/7 can be very beneficial for students, such as veterans who have difficulties with panic attacks and “breakdown” episodes.

Symptoms and flare-ups do not usually occur during the normal business hours, but more so during the late-night hours and after the day has “settled” and the veteran reflects upon the day or has a period of “slowness”—the time most often referred to in the veteran community as “downtime.” Downtime in the military is considered time when there is no assigned work to be done and veterans have nothing to occupy their mind or on which to focus. Veterans and military members are accustomed to a go-go-go environment and when no work is required, it can be difficult to focus on the present moment. Consequently, the downtime moment may cause a distressed veteran/student to have thoughts that may be intrusive, another symptom of PTSD and/or TBI. A veteran may feel unproductive and symptoms may arise due to the change of status in their situational environment and overall well-being. It is important for universities to recognize and understand the circumstances students face during the postsecondary education experience; many returning veterans are distressed students, whether they admit it or not.

Nonetheless, open awareness and reputable supportive communication can break the barrier and influence positive outlooks for students. Also, bringing awareness to the instructors, professors, and staff can help them better understand the circumstances and become more aware as well, while providing them with information for improved communication and influence for the students’ learning and success in their classrooms.

Postsecondary education students who have PTSD and are seeking to improve their life most likely will have signs of distress. The added stress of the postsecondary

education culture can exacerbate the existing stress if a social support system or network of accessible resources is not available. College presents many opportunities that may provoke increased stress, which may lead to distress or impairment (Galatzer-Levy, Burton, & Bonanno, 2012; Watson, 2012). Students with PTSD also may experience a loss of interest in activities, irritability, difficulty sleeping and concentrating, and hyper-vigilance or nervousness around others (Sharkin, 2006). These experiences can cause a loss of interest in completing their postsecondary education and a decrease in retention rates within universities. Another issue is that many are hoping the college experience will ease their transition process; however, a supportive and informed university culture is a major player in their success rate.

Student Veteran Programs Established at the University of Study Veterans Upward Bound (VUB)

Veterans Upward Bound (VUB) is a program on campus that assists veterans during their transition from military life. The overall goal is to increase retention rates among student veterans and to help them complete their postsecondary educational programs. The VUB program was created as a liaison for college transitioning and readiness for veterans (U.S. Department of Education [U.S. ED], 2017). Services provided by this program include educational tutoring and counseling services.

VUB is a permitted U.S. ED TRIO program designed to help eligible U.S. military veterans enter and succeed in the postsecondary school of their choosing. The program was designed in the 1960's and has a progressive history. It began with Upward Bound, which emerged out of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 in response to the administration's War on Poverty. Educational Talent Search, the second outreach

program, was created as part of the Higher Education Act in 1965. In 1968, Student Support Services, which was originally known as Special Services for Disadvantaged Students, was authorized by the Higher Education Amendments and became the third in a series of educational opportunity programs. By the late 1960s, the term TRIO was coined to describe these federal programs. (U.S. ED, 2013).

Currently, there are 49 VUB programs nationwide, including Puerto Rico, that are ready to assist veterans. The services provided by VUB projects include academic preparation, assessment of academic skills, and academic refresher courses. To benefit from the free educational services offered by VUB, veterans must meet a few eligibility requirements: have 180 or more days of active duty service or, if less than 180 days, must be discharged or released because of a service-connected disability, or be member of a reserve component of the Armed Forces called to active duty for a period of more than 30 days, or be a member of a reserve component of the Armed Forces who served on active duty in support of a contingency operation on or after September 11, 2001.

Military Student Services

The objective of Military Student Services (MSS) at the university under study is to provide comprehensive support for students to succeed from the point of admission through graduation and ultimately on to a productive career. MSS on campus began serving student veterans and their dependents in 2011. The program provides free textbooks for eligible military students through Textbooks for Troops, support and guidance with GoArmyEd and Teaching Assistant requests for all branches of the military, and a Veterans Resource Center space on campus. The Veterans Resource

Center was created and supported by a student veteran program on campus known as the Student Veterans Alliance (SVA).

Yellow Ribbon Program

This program includes those who served 36 months (may be aggregated) on active duty; Purple Heart recipients with an honorable discharge and any amount of service; those discharged after 60 days with a service-connected disability and served 30 continuous days after Sept. 10, 2001; children using transferred benefits; and children using transferred benefits if their service member transferor is at the 100% level (36 months served). Effective August 1, 2022, service members at the 100 percent level and transferee spouses whose transferor is at the 100% level also are eligible (VA, n.d.).

Financial Aid for Veterans

The Office of Veterans Affairs (VAO) at the public university under study is located on campus to provide assistance and to serve as the liaison for eligible veteran students and their dependents during the application process for receiving VA educational benefits/funding for tuition expenses. The program assists students with the processing of forms for VA educational benefits, advises students about certain procedural requirements, and certifies enrollment of veterans and dependents to the VA.

Student entitlement is based on VA regulations, and monthly payment is determined by the number of credit hours for which the student is enrolled; this payment system is directly through the VA. The VAO also monitors each veteran's enrollment status and academic program according to VA reporting guidelines.

Student Support Services

Student Support Services (SSS) is one of the original three TRIO programs, along with Educational Talent Search and Upward Bound. SSS was first funded at the

university in 1980. Services include academic advising, personal counseling, and tutoring, as well as opportunities for grants and scholarships.

Opinions of Experts Outside the University

The following two expert opinions relate to the needs of student veterans while transitioning into the university lifestyle. Included in this section is a current student veteran's openly shared opinions explaining possible way to make the transition from military to campus easier. The individual is not known personally by the researcher; her ideas were shared by an expert third party. The student indicated being integrated in the new school year has been hectic, and her transition would have been easier if she had a counselor with prior military service who understood veterans and had access to needed information, rather than telling the student to see other people or go other places for this information.

The first expert was an officer of rank in the United States Marine Corps (1992-2000), with many subsequent years as the Deputy Director of Public Affairs at Walter Reed National Military Center located in Bethesda, Maryland. This individual worked with many organizations to assist wounded veterans during the transition process after one or more combat tours.

The second expert opinion was from an individual who is a veteran and has founded a very successful organization for returning veterans. The nationally-recognized organization provides an environment for meaningful, open conversation about the nature of human experience and offers novel, judgment-free solutions to returning veterans, active duty service members, and first responders with PTS.

The opinions were gathered by asking a general question intended to be non-biased and non-leading. A review of the opinions revealed several emerging themes. It is important to note the two participating experts did not know one another, and, therefore, the similarity in the two responses demonstrates a need and concern. Themes that emerged from both experts responses included the following: A “one stop” information resource; a coach and/or mentor; involvement in veteran associations and networking; counseling and mental health services; accommodations and a peer mentor (or in military lingo, a “battle buddy”).

Summary

The area of focus chosen for this study was because of the lack of current information. Sharing of this research will fill gaps in the social sciences within the scholarship domain. The areas involving social science could influence the overall transitioning process for student veterans while submerged in the postsecondary education lifestyle.

Due to the growing student veteran population and the increase of wounded warriors who have been diagnosed with PTSD and/or TBI, there is an obvious need for more universities to provide an alliance or to consider accepting the healthcare programs available to veterans through the VA. Most VA facilities are not located near veterans; those that are near may not have specialty care services.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

Overall, the literature review suggests a need for improved services and/or an improvement in providing the services and resources to the student veteran population based on more engagement with and social understanding of this underserved population. The focus for this research was to gather information through a descriptive study using mixed-methods measures that included an electronic survey for student veterans and a questionnaire for administrators of student veteran programs. The questionnaire offered an option for face-to-face interviews and open-ended conversation. The veteran population was comprised of those who met the criteria of being veterans currently or previously enrolled in postsecondary education with the university. Other participants included student veteran support services administrators.

The potential benefits of the research are that results may lead to instructors, professors, and university administrators developing a greater awareness of student veteran needs; the development and/or improvement of university policy related to veterans; and student support services organizations' greater awareness and understanding of student veteran needs to matriculate through the university system successfully.

Research Questions

The following questions were used to coordinate the comprehensive questions on the surveys that were distributed to participants (see Appendices A and B).

1. Regarding university support services for veterans,
 - a. How familiar are veterans and administrators with these services?
 - b. How satisfied are veterans with these services?

- c. How beneficial do veterans find these services?
- d. How well coordinated are these services?
- 2. Regarding veterans with disabilities,
 - a. Do the disabilities affect factors related to student success?
 - b. Do they receive information on the support services available to them at the university?
 - c. Do veterans find university personnel to be helpful?
- 3. Are there discrepancies between service providers and veterans regarding the adequacy or quality of the university support services?

Research Design

Data collection differed for the quantitative and qualitative portions of this mixed-methods study. The quantitative portion relied on a combination of statistical data that had been previously gathered from the present through the previous decade and survey data collected from student veterans and student veteran support services administrators. For the qualitative portion, data collection and analysis included a more personalized process in which the researcher not only documented student veterans' university experiences through a survey, but also used self-reflection on her personal experiences in navigating the university landscape as a lens to develop themes.

The researcher interviewed support services administration and staff to understand their perspectives and challenges in meeting the needs of student veterans. The researcher also communicated and interviewed experts outside the university in fields of management with wounded transitioning veterans; this portion of the study was included in Chapter II.

Setting

The study occurred on a postsecondary education campus that actively recruits student veterans and provides general and specific support services to them.

An empirical example that guided the study was Covert (2002; also see Ursano & Norwood, 1996) who discussed the mental health concerns for returning veterans transitioning to the postsecondary educational environment. In addition to these challenges, the transition process may influence the student veterans' career decision. However, limited research exists on how this transition influences career decision making and choices for their future endeavors. This is an area recommended for future research. The study was based on limited resources and literature regarding military members making career choices as they related to their transition back into civilian life.

This study could have included 1000 or more student veterans; however, the turnout of numbers was less favorable. The method used by Covert (2002) consisted of 100 self-identified military service members from a large public Midwestern university who participated in the study. Limitations were related to the academic information regarding the population during the time of the study. Findings provided insight into student social engagement, career exploration possibilities, tutoring, student services assistance, and effectiveness of services. As suggested by Covert, a need was noted to incorporate other factors for improved data collection and analysis. This information included factors such as the experiences of student veterans in choosing their majors and careers, as well as understanding the reason the study and postsecondary career choice.

Another issue was that some universities or college campuses may propose they are military friendly, yet those campuses lack the resources for students who are military

connected and/or veterans. Also, it is insufficient to rely on a support office as the only resource for campus awareness; alignments and collaboration should occur between all military friendly resources on campus. Covert (2002) also supported the initiatives to train institutional personnel as mentors, allies, and peers to be competent in the specific culture of student veterans. The data gathering process involved face-to-face interviews with open-ended questions.

Participants

The study population consisted of student veterans enrolled at the university who had used or were involved in student veteran support services. The participants had served in OIF/OEF and/or Afghanistan operations in a combat zone within the last 10 years and were now pursuing postsecondary education. Additionally, administrators and staff of the student veteran support services were included and were interviewed according to the services they provided.

To identify the participants for the veteran survey, an email address list was used that had already been developed through an on-campus student veterans' group. The administrator participants of student veteran support services were contacted through email information, which was found on the institution's website by searching each student veteran support department, as well as using the email for administrative contact found on the university's MSS webpage.

The expert opinions were from outside sources not related to the university; therefore, their opinion should not have been biased regarding the current services offered at the university. The experts also were individuals who work with veterans on a daily basis but were not in any way affiliated with the university under study. However,

because of their experience and expertise from working with veterans during the transition process, they were considered to possess insights that were beneficial from a holistic viewpoint.

Instruments

The instrumentation consisted of two questionnaire/survey methods, one for student veterans and another for student veteran support services administrators. The student veteran survey relied on a Likert scale to evaluate the percentage of individuals using student veteran support services and their satisfaction with such services. Survey questions were based on a 3-point (1 = Unfamiliar, 2 = Somewhat Familiar, 3 = Familiar) or 4-point scale (1 = Very Unsatisfied, 2 = Unsatisfied, 3 = Satisfied, 4 = Very Satisfied) in addition to a “Don’t Know/Not Applicable” option. It also included open-ended questions in which student veterans could describe their experiences with university student services and their concerns outside the academic environment that affected their performance and success while attending postsecondary education. The second survey to administrators consisted mainly of open-ended questions. The questionnaires/surveys were delivered electronically, with an invitation for face-to-face interviews upon request to clarify and verify information. However, no face-to-face interviews were conducted during this study.

Procedures and Data Collection

Data were collected via two surveys. Informed consent information was included as part of each survey. Prior to any interviews, participants were asked to sign a letter of informed consent, which served as verification of the respondents’ agreement to

participate in the study. The letter included the purpose of the study, confidentiality, lack of penalties, and voluntary nature of participation.

Expert opinions were collected without confidentiality and with open discussion when chosen. All respondents received the same questions and did not know the other individuals. Themes and similarities were sought during the analytical review process. The experts' opinions were discussed in Chapter II.

Data Management and Analysis

Collected data were screened and checked for accuracy prior to analysis. The researcher analyzed quantitative data using descriptive statistics. For qualitative analysis, all information was logged and converted into text before beginning. Once the data were converted and labeled for reconstruction and citation purposes, the analysis moved toward comparing the data to other data sources and identifying themes based on frequency of use. The research that was reviewed also was used to describe the self-reflection of the researcher's experiences based on over a decade of integration in the postsecondary education system.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Introduction

This research may be used to demonstrate the need for student veteran support services to become aligned and adjusted, or as administrators and future leadership sees fit—the outreach in which they operate. The information provides a more active approach for the student veteran population, as well as an educational resource for student veteran services and operations in postsecondary education.

Procedures of Data Collection

After the study topic was chosen, the researcher reviewed the literature and developed questions surrounding the topic that emerged from the review. After careful consideration of the value of each question and the possible response time in completing the survey, the proposed study and survey were submitted for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (see Appendix C).

For ease of data collection, the survey was developed using Qualtrics. An invitation to complete the survey (along with required IRB information) was shared via social media (the institution's VAO and VUB Facebook pages), as well as a student-all-email and an email to all self-identified student veterans. Respondents were given a time frame of two and a half weeks to complete the survey.

The research questions that guided the study were:

1. Regarding university support services for veterans,
 - a. How familiar are veterans and administrators with these services?
 - b. How satisfied are veterans with these services?
 - c. How beneficial do veterans find these services?

- d. How well coordinated are these services?
2. Regarding veterans with disabilities,
 - a. Do the disabilities affect factors related to student success?
 - b. Do they receive information on the support services available to them at the university?
 - c. Do veterans find university personnel to be helpful?
3. Are there discrepancies between service providers and veterans regarding the adequacy or quality of the university support services?

Student Veteran Findings

A good-faith effort to gather data from student veterans on campus consisted of two opportunities to participate in the study via social media veterans groups associated with the institution, a student veteran email contact list, and an all-student email. Both attempts were open for at least a 2-week window; however, the responses were limited and, thus, did not provide enough evidence for quantitative statistical information. The qualitative data collected was from only four participants, and the researcher chose to honor the feedback from those student veterans by reporting their comments.

According to the limited data collected from the student veteran open-ended questionnaire responses, the Textbooks for Troops program was not helpful and the most beneficial program was the financial aid assistance program, which is linked to the GI Bill and Post-911 benefits program that is through the VA and connected with VAO located on campus. Also, it appears that the Yellow Ribbon Program has not been implemented to the fullest. Feedback also suggested a brochure regarding all benefits and accommodations for student veterans has not been implemented to the fullest and would

be a simple solution for these students to receive all information about services provided on campus.

Three out of the four participants indicated they are disabled veterans and their disability may include PTSD and/or TBI. Therefore, information pertaining to accommodations could be beneficial in the future servicing of these students. The open-ended questionnaire responses included student veterans experiencing occasional issues in attending classes due to their disabilities; yet no specific reasons were given. This issue is recommended for further investigation. School performance also can be affected due to such disabilities. Accommodations may be helpful, such as extended due dates for assignments and excused absences due to doctors' appointments. Also, the student veteran participants noted they were not highly informed regarding accommodations for their disabilities, such as mental health and parking/transportation services.

Furthermore, the professors and staff were very helpful to the student veterans during their educational experiences, which suggests that professors and staff support these students as they transition into a different lifestyle and provide the accommodations needed by these students. Yet, students are required to obtain an accommodations letter from the Student Services Center to be provided to the professor/staff.

Additionally, no mentor or coach program exists on campus. The feedback from veterans suggested a need for such a program, which could be beneficial to the transitioning process as well. Another consideration based on veteran feedback is that mental health counselors may want to be more active in programs affiliated with the student veterans on campus, which could increase student veteran awareness and concerns.

Student Veteran Support Services Administrator Findings

Scaled-Item Responses

Of the 29 administrators invited to complete the survey, 23 provided sufficient information for their data to be used in the analysis. The results follow.

Related to Research Question 1a – *Regarding university support services for veterans, how familiar are veterans and administrators with these services*, administrators were asked to rate their familiarity on a scale of 1 = Unfamiliar, 2 = Somewhat Familiar, and 3 = Familiar with the campus mental health support, tutoring support, educational counseling, financial aid, and career services. Table 4.1 delineates these results.

Table 4.1

Administrators' Familiarity with Campus Support Services

Support Service	Unfamiliar		Somewhat		Familiar		Total
	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	<i>N</i>
Mental health support	48%	11	35%	8	18%	4	23
Tutoring support	32%	7	32%	7	36%	8	22
Educational counseling	32%	7	50%	11	18%	4	22
Financial aid	22%	5	39%	9	39%	9	23
Career services	35%	8	35%	8	30%	7	23

Most administrators were at least somewhat familiar with tutoring, educational counseling, financial aid, and career services support. However, nearly half were unfamiliar with campus mental health support.

Related to Research Question 1b – *Regarding university support services for veterans, how satisfied are veterans with these services*, administrators were asked to rate how satisfied student veterans were on a scale of 1 = Very Unsatisfied, 2 = Unsatisfied, 3 = Satisfied, and 4 = Very Satisfied with the campus mental health support, tutoring support, educational counseling, financial aid, and career services. Table 4.2 delineates these results.

Table 4.2

Administrators’ Belief of Satisfaction of Services among Student Veterans

Support Service	Very Unsatisfied		Unsatisfied		Satisfied		Very Satisfied		Total
	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	<i>N</i>
Mental health support	0%	0	0%	0	90%	9	10%	1	10
Tutoring support	0%	0	17%	2	50%	6	33%	4	12
Educational counseling	0%	0	8%	1	62%	8	31%	4	13
Financial aid	6%	1	6%	1	56%	9	31%	5	16
Career services	0%	0	15%	2	54%	7	31%	4	13

Most administrators were generally satisfied with mental health support and educational counseling. Yet, administrators were unsatisfied with tutoring support and career services.

Related to research question 1c – *Regarding university support services for veterans, how beneficial do veterans find these services*, administrators were asked to rate their belief of each service’s benefit to student veterans on a scale of 1 = Very Unbeneficial, 2 = Unbeneficial, 3 = Beneficial, and 4 = Very Beneficial with the campus

mental health support, tutoring support, educational counseling, financial aid, and career services. Table 4.3 delineates these results.

Table 4.3

Administrators' Belief of Student Veteran Program Benefit

Support Service	Very Unbeneficial		Unbeneficial		Beneficial		Very Beneficial		Total
	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	<i>N</i>
Mental health support	10%	1	0%	0	60%	6	30%	1	10
Tutoring support	8%	1	8%	1	38%	5	46%	4	13
Educational counseling	8%	1	0%	0	41%	5	50%	4	12
Financial aid	7%	1	0%	0	40%	6	53%	5	15
Career services	8%	1	8%	1	33%	4	50%	4	12

Again, most administrators found mental health support and educational counseling to be beneficial. However, administrators believed tutoring support and career services were least beneficial for student veterans.

Related to research question 1d – *Regarding university support services for veterans, how well coordinated are these services*, administrators were asked to rate their familiarity with resource programs among student veterans on a scale of 1 = Unfamiliar, 2 = Somewhat Familiar, and 3 = Familiar with the campus' VA financial assistance, Yellow Ribbon, VUB, MSS, and Textbooks for Troops. Table 4.4 delineates these results.

Table 4.4

Administrators' Familiarity with Resource Programs Offered for Student Veterans

Resource Program	Unfamiliar		Somewhat Familiar		Familiar		Total
	%	N	%	N	%	N	N
VA financial assistance	16%	3	37%	7	47%	9	19
Yellow Ribbon	53%	10	21%	4	26%	5	19
Veterans Upward Bound	16%	3	37%	7	47%	9	19
Military student services	26%	5	21%	4	53%	10	19
Textbooks for Troops	37%	7	16%	3	47%	9	19

Administrators were mostly familiar with MSS and VA financial assistance and least familiar with Yellow Ribbon and Textbooks for Troops.

Related to research question 1b – *Regarding university support services for veterans, how satisfied are veterans with these services*, administrators also were asked again to rate their belief of satisfaction regarding resource services among student veterans, on a scale of 1 = Very unsatisfied, 2 = Unsatisfied, 3 = Satisfied, and 4 = Very satisfied with the campus' VA financial assistance, Yellow Ribbon, VUB, MSS, and Textbooks for Troops. Table 4.5 delineates these results.

Table 4.5

Administrators' Belief of Student Veteran Satisfaction with Resource Program Services

Resource Program	Very Unsatisfied		Unsatisfied		Satisfied		Very Satisfied		Total
	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	<i>N</i>
VA financial assistance	6%	1	19%	3	38%	6	38%	6	10
Yellow Ribbon	0%	0	0%	0	71%	5	29%	2	12
Veterans Upward Bound	7%	1	0%	0	50%	7	43%	6	13
Military student services	10%	1	0%	0	40%	4	50%	5	16
Textbooks for Troops	9%	1	0%	0	36%	4	55%	6	13

Administrators were very satisfied with Yellow Ribbon and VUB. Yet, information in Table 4.4 demonstrated administrators were unfamiliar with Yellow Ribbon.

Related to research question 1b – *Regarding university support services for veterans, how beneficial did veterans find these services*, administrators were asked to rate their belief of each service's benefit to student veterans on a scale of 1 = Very Satisfied, 2 = Unsatisfied, 3 = Satisfied, and 4 = Very Satisfied with the campus VA financial assistance, Yellow Ribbon, VUB, MSS, and Textbooks for Troops. Table 4.6 delineates these results.

Table 4.6

Administrators' Belief of Benefits of Resource Program Services for Student Veterans

Resource Program	Very Unbeneficial		Unbeneficial		Beneficial		Very Beneficial		Total
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	N
VA Financial Assistance	13%	2	7%	1	27%	4	53%	8	15
Yellow Ribbon	11%	1	0%	0	33%	3	56%	5	9
Veterans Upward Bound	7%	1	0%	0	27%	4	67%	10	15
Military Student Services	17%	2	0%	0	17%	2	67%	8	12
Textbooks for Troops	15%	2	0%	0	0%	0	85%	11	13

Accordingly, administrators believed the most beneficial programs for student veterans on campus were Textbooks for Troops, VUB, and MSS. The least beneficial program for student veterans was VA financial aid.

Open-Ended Item Responses

Administrators were given the opportunity to answer open-ended survey items. Of the 29 participants, five responded to the following question: *If you believe student veteran services are not very well coordinated, please describe how coordination could be improved. What other student engagement opportunities would you like WKU to offer to student veterans?* Below are the responses for each participant

Participant 1:

- To be honest between raising my family, working part time and keeping up with homework I do not have a lot of free time to dedicate to engagements.
- Special graduation cords/recognition

Participant 2:

- During Topper orientation and pre-admissions (like campus tours) have a dedicated collection of information in a folder to give to the veteran.

Acknowledge that veterans are trying to get into WKU for their education and recognize that. I did not know Vets upward bound would help me with my application and pay my application fee until too late. It is not easy to find, and the campus tour is heavily catered to high school kids. I wish there had been someone that said, “You indicated you’re a veteran this information will help you.”

- Living Learning Community

Participant 3:

- My problem is not with coordination but lack of support—money and staff
- I am sure there are more good programs that would be useful to have—but I think first we should give more than lip service to the ones we have which are supported 90% by words and 10% by funding. The staff and budget cuts (in this small area) saved very little in the big picture of WKU but hurt this program a lot. That is a mistake.

Participant 4:

- Special graduation cords/recognition

Participant 5:

- Provide more information to veterans

Of the 29 participants, eight responded to the prompt: *Please explain which general student support service(s) and/or student veteran support services you believe are particularly beneficial to student veterans and why.*

Participant 1:

- I think having dedicated study spaces in TPH is awesome. I feel like they're not as welcoming in the office—I constantly feel out of place like I do not belong on campus.

Participant 2:

- Veteran's Upward bound is what I am most familiar with. The feedback I've gotten from my Cadets and cadre has all been extremely positive. The staff is very engaged and motivated to help their veteran students

Participant 3:

- VUB was the most helpful to me. A *counselor* introduces me to all the other groups. Without VUB, I would not have known about any of the other ones.

Participant 4:

- Mental Health Counseling helps veterans deal with daily stressors.

Participant 5:

- The VA process part and the central one-stop-shop for Veteran office.

Participant 6:

- VUB professional staff

Participant 7:

- Upward bound by far. I haven't really had to use them for [Name of public university] as I already earned a degree with them through SKYCTC, but they

still made sure I knew what I was doing when signing up for [Name of public university].

Participant 8:

- Books for troops

Of the 29 participants, six responded to the prompt: *Please explain which general student support service(s) and/or student veteran support services you believe are particularly unbeneficial to student veterans and why.*

Participant 1:

- SGA, and “diversity” services that cater solely to the young demographic. It’s as though the presence of older students is barely tolerated...like somehow an older student is “less” than because they were not able to accomplish this in their teen years. It’s a very alienating and ageist environment.

Participant 2:

- I have not personally used any of these services as I am not a student here but cadre at the ROTC program. So, no comment for this question.

Participant 3:

- Everyone has different needs. I cannot speak about which ones may not be beneficial to another individual.

Participant 4:

- VA FA because of Trump

Participant 5:

- The meal plan dollars. I eat at my house with my family not at the commissary or DSU (Downing University Center) with the regular college students.

Participant 6:

- Tutoring

Summary

All administrators were contacted from veteran and student veteran related organizations within the university via university email. Twenty-nine participated in the survey and results were delineated in this chapter. Only nine student veterans responded to survey, with four responding to the open-ended questions. Regardless of quantity, the feedback was informative to a degree and indicates a need for further study. The researcher will discuss findings in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to survey student veterans and administrators of student veteran services at one university about their knowledge and perceptions regarding these services. After several attempts to solicit responses from student veterans, insufficient data were collected to draw solid conclusions on scaled items; therefore, responses to open-ended questions were reported. However, some information from both scaled and open-ended items informed the following discussion. Of the 29 administrators invited to complete the survey, 23 sufficiently did so and their data were used in the analysis. Responses to both scaled and open-ended items were reported.

This chapter discusses all findings through the lens of “themes” or other key ideas that emerged from the data, as well as the researcher’s perspectives on their relevance for the future of student veteran services.

Discussion of Findings

Lack of Support

Some administrators reported lack of support in terms of financial resources and staff, others mentioned feeling unwelcomed or out of place on campus, and still others described multiple responsibilities that limited their ability to serve students and be available on campus. Current staff reductions at the university were cited as a “mistake.” Also, some staff appeared not in tune with how the veterans at the university feel because, as they attested, they have little time to communicate with veterans effectively. This lack of support and time may explain why some student veterans are unaware of services or find them difficult to access.

Some administrators seem to be very concerned with the future standing of programs currently offered and may have the impression there is insufficient support for the student veterans on campus. Yet, all honorably discharged student veterans have entitlement to GI Bill funding, which is a fixed payment to the university for the individual's tuition. A future question of concern may deal with the amount of funding allocated for the student veteran population at the university.

Based upon review of the feedback, it may be beneficial for administrators of the student veteran support programs to consider re-evaluating some programs and developing a more cost-effective and streamlined process to connect students to available resources. One possible solution would be to create a "one-stop source" location for this population to learn about student veteran programs. By leading this evaluation process toward identifying best services for student veterans, veteran retention rates for the university could increase dramatically over time due to recognition of quality services, as well as to improvement of some services that are underperforming. This type of review could be used for many other student programs/groups on campus.

Coaching/Mentoring

It has been acknowledged the administrators and student veterans have agreed a coach/mentor would be beneficial for the overall success and transition into a university lifestyle. This information demonstrates an opportunity for growth and development of an improved outreach system that could also accommodate the needs of student veterans, such as a "one-stop" location for information, as well as building comradery and helping with the transitioning process. However, such mentoring seems unrealistic in the current

circumstances, as administrators and others reported lack of support in terms of funding, personnel, and time.

Usefulness of Textbooks for Troops

According to the data from the student veterans survey, the Textbooks for Troops program has not been of benefit. Yet, according to the administrators who participated in the survey, 85% indicated the program is very beneficial. There is an obvious discrepancy concerning the student veterans' viewpoint and that of the administrators. From the researchers' perspective and experience, these textbooks are rarely used and often are outdated. Thus, it may be best to sell them the next semester at a discounted rate and receive funding to assist student veterans in purchasing the required texts.

Knowledge about Yellow Ribbon and Other VA Financial Aid Programs

Both student veterans and administrators reported little knowledge about the Yellow Ribbon Program. Perhaps this program is not well promoted at this university. This may be due to possible limitations of the university grants for assistance, or the program may vary among states. Further investigation is recommended because the Yellow Ribbon Program could be of benefit to some student veterans and their families.

The data suggest veterans view the most beneficial program to be the VA Financial Assistance/GI Bill benefits they receive for university expenses. However, only a little over half of the administrators who participated in the study rated the program as beneficial. After consideration of the information provided from the administrators, it seems to suggest that they were at times satisfied with services, yet they acknowledged they were unfamiliar with them.

Importance of Communication

The findings also demonstrate that a brochure has not been implemented to the fullest and it may be a simple solution for all student veterans in order to receive the information and services provided on campus. The VA financial aid office on campus also could provide information via email for student veterans, if a brochure is not feasible, concerning all funding and outreach resource opportunities. However, the VA office has been successful in providing information regarding who to contact, via hotline numbers, although, these are sources outside the university.

A participating administrator suggested special graduation cords and recognition for student veterans. Currently, special cords are available for student veterans, and they receive recognition during commencement. According to the university's MSS website: "Military and Veteran students graduating, as well as Faculty/Staff participating in graduation ceremonies are all eligible to wear the red, white, and blue honor cords." Thus, this may demonstrate the lack of communication between student veteran programs.

Disability Accommodations

Some student veteran participants in this study indicated they are recognized by a physician as a disabled veteran; therefore, proper accommodations for the veterans are necessary. The student veteran participants have been diagnosed with PTSD, and one was diagnosed with TBI, which supports a need for accommodations and/or services on campus.

Concerning class attendance, some student veterans have occasional issues with attending classes due to their disabilities. However, no specific reasons were given other

than their disability had an impact on their attendance. This is an area recommended for further investigation as well.

Student veterans reported their school performance was also affected due to disabilities. This indicates a need to consider accommodations such as extended due dates for assignments and excused absences due to doctors' appointments, etc. Unfortunately, the data also demonstrate student veterans are not well-informed regarding accommodations for their disabilities. According to the number of participants in this study, which was limited, data show mental health services on campus were not utilized and parking/transportation accessibility and knowledge of locations were not well known. The university could improve on this with additional data to support the need.

Nevertheless, information may verify the student veterans are unaware of the mental health services on campus, may not use the services, may not need them, or a need exists for mental health personnel to be more involved in student support services, especially with transitioning students who are veterans. The university civilian environment is much different than that of a very organized and planned military lifestyle. The student veterans may become more successful during their postsecondary educational experience if they are aware of these support services on campus.

The findings also show student veterans believe professors and staff are very helpful during their educational transition, suggesting they support these students transitioning into a different lifestyle and may well be providing the accommodations needed. Correspondingly, these accommodations are more likely (but not always) provided if students obtain the required accommodations letter from the student services center for review and approval by professor or staff.

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, no current mentor or coach programs are available on campus, which would be especially beneficial to veterans with disabilities. In particular, if mental health counselors became more active in programs affiliated with the student veterans on campus, an awareness of the circumstances of this population could help to improve the programs offered for all student veterans seeking mental health counseling.

Limitations

The source of data collection from one university was a limitation; thus, the results cannot speak for all student veterans transitioning, and data were limited by location and participation. Contact with participants was limited to electronic protocols such as email and social media. The surveys were not mailed out by any ground service, there were no face-to face interviews, and no phone calls were made. As response rate among student veterans was low, perhaps these other distribution methods should be considered. However, two separate attempts were made to gather data for a period of at least two weeks each; nevertheless, fewer than 10 student veterans participated in the study. It is important to note that the number of veterans on campus is unknown at this time, which may be because the veterans are a protected group and not all divulge their status.

Recommendations

Recommendations as a result of this study are as follows:

- Brochures should be given to the student veteran upon arrival and/or admission to university describing all services available to them on campus and local community options.

- University resource improvements could be accomplished by networking with outside veteran-associated organizations. Presently, this occurs, but many student veterans are unaware of it and it may be limited to only administrators. This reinforces the need for a “one-stop” brochure that provides information to student veterans as they enroll with the university.
- Perhaps for future research and possible improvements for services, surveys could be provided to students when they have completed their first semester; the survey could be provided as an option in which to participate when submitting their form for GI Bill approval through the VAO on campus.
- The veterans’ list of contact information (phone, address, email) may need to be updated, if such a full-scale list actually exists at the university.
- Information should be provided to all veterans enrolled in the university to make them aware their military courses may be submitted for possible credit hours through the Registrar’s Office.

Implications for Further Study

Implications for further research include the following:

- Funding sources for veteran programs on campuses
- Veteran programs available on a national level and their ranking on campuses
- Veterans’ advocacy. Examples: Are these programs offered on campuses and/or are they needed? Are administrators playing important roles, such as ombudsman, overseers, and/or policy developers?
- Student veteran retention and dropout rates
- Effectiveness and/or redundancy of programs on campuses

- Degree programs veterans seek and why

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to gather data from student veterans and administrators of student veteran support services regarding the adequacy of university support to ensure veterans' successful transition into university life. Data from student veterans were limited, but most administrators responded to an invitation to complete a survey. This chapter discussed themes that arose from administrators' responses to open-ended questions. These themes highlight that, although support services for student veterans may be "adequate," there is much room for improvement in the quality, and, in particular, the coordination of these services in order to better serve veterans returning to civilian life and entering the university.

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Student Veteran Support Services Administrators Survey

INTRO

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through [Name of public university] by completing this survey about general and specific support services provided for student veterans.

Click here for information about IRB approval for this study as well as information regarding your ability to discontinue this survey at any time with no penalty:

(https://wku.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0CmQ9MKAu3QEEsJ)

This survey should take no more than 15-20 minutes to complete.

By continuing this survey, you are giving implied consent for the researcher to include your responses in reporting survey results. In all reporting, your responses will be reported in aggregate or in a manner that ensures your anonymity.

Thanks for participating in this study.

SUP SUPPORT SERVICES INFORMATION

Q03 For each general student support service WKU provides listed below, please indicate how familiar you are with each service.

	Unfamiliar (1)	Somewhat Familiar (2)	Familiar (3)
Mental Health Support (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tutoring support (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Educational Counseling (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Financial Aid (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Career Services (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q05 For each general student support service WKU provides listed below, please indicate how satisfied you believe student veterans are with each service. (Choose "Don't Know" for services you are not familiar with.)

	Very Unsatisfied (1)	Unsatisfied (2)	Satisfied (3)	Very Satisfied (4)	Don't Know (5)
Mental Health Support (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tutoring Support (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Educational Counseling (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Financial Aid (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Career Services (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q06 For each general student support service WKU provides listed below, please indicate how beneficial you believe student veterans find each service to be. (Choose "Don't Know" for services you are not familiar with.)

	Very Unbeneficial (1)	Unbeneficial (2)	Beneficial (3)	Very Beneficial (4)	Don't Know (5)
Mental Health Support (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tutoring Support (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Educational Counseling (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Financial Aid (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Career Services (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q07 For each student veteran support service listed below, please indicate how familiar you are with each service.

	Unfamiliar (1)	Somewhat Familiar (2)	Familiar (3)
VA Financial Assistance (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Yellow Ribbon (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Veterans Upward Bound (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Military Student Services (not including Textbooks for Troops, see below) (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Textbooks for Troops (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q09 For each student veteran support service listed below, please indicate how satisfied you believe student veterans are with each service. (Choose "Don't Know" for services you are not familiar with.)

	Very Unsatisfied (1)	Unsatisfied (2)	Satisfied (3)	Very Satisfied (4)	Don't Know (5)
VA Financial Assistance (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Yellow Ribbon (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Veterans Upward Bound (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Military Student Services (not including Textbooks for Troops, see below) (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Textbooks for Troops (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q10 For each student veteran support service listed below, please indicate how beneficial you believe student veterans find each service to be. (Choose "Don't Know" for services you are not familiar with.)

	Very Unbeneficial (1)	Unbeneficial (2)	Beneficial (3)	Very Beneficial (4)	Don't Know (5)
VA Financial Assistance (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Yellow Ribbon (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Veterans Upward Bound (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Military Student Services (not including Textbooks for Troops, see below) (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Textbooks for Troops (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q10a In your opinion, how well coordinated are the student veteran services provided for veterans?

- Not Well (1)
- Moderately Well (2)
- Well (3)
- Very Well (4)

Q10b If you believe student veteran services are not very well coordinated, please describe how coordination could be improved.

DIS DISABILITY INFORMATION

Q15 Regarding student veterans with disabilities, do you believe they...

	No (1)	Yes (2)	Unsure (3)
Receive information from WKU regarding all services available? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Receive information from WKU about accommodations, such as parking and transportation assistance? (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have trouble receiving accommodations from WKU? (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Receive mental health counseling services on campus? (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q16 Regarding student veterans with disabilities, in general, how helpful (accommodating) do you believe the following individuals are for such veterans? (Choose "Don't Know" if you unsure of how disabled veterans perceive these individuals.)

	Very Unhelpful (1)	Unhelpful (2)	Helpful (3)	Very Helpful (4)	Don't Know (5)
WKU Professors (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
WKU Staff (in general) (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Veteran Services Staff at WKU (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mental Health Counselors (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
WKU Student Veteran Coach/Mentor (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

STENG STUDENT ENGAGEMENT INFORMATION

Q17 How involved are you with the Student Veterans Alliance on campus?

- Not Involved (1)
 - Somewhat Involved (2)
 - Actively Involved (3)
 - Not Familiar With (4)
-

Q19 What other student engagement opportunities would you like WKU to offer to student veterans?

OPQ OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS

Q20 Please explain which general student support service(s) and/or student veteran support services you believe are particularly beneficial to student veterans and why.

Q21 Please explain which general student support service(s) and/or student veteran support services you believe are particularly unbeneficial to student veterans and why.

Q21a The researcher seeks to interview some administrators about their experiences serving student veterans. If you are willing to be contacted about your role in providing services for student veterans, please provide your e-mail address and/or other contact information. Thank you for considering this request.

END Thank you for completing this survey! Please click the arrow on the right to record your responses.

Share Your Voice - Student Veteran Experiences in Post-Secondary Education

INTRO

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through [Name of public university] by completing this survey about general and specific support services provided for student veterans.

Click here for information about IRB approval for this study as well as information regarding your ability to discontinue this survey at any time with no penalty: (https://wku.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6S8mTAZ9XYmgIA1)

If you are not a veteran, please discontinue this survey by selecting "No" to the question below. If you are a veteran, please select "Yes" to the question below and continue to complete the questions that follow. This survey should take no more than 15-20 minutes to complete.

By continuing this survey, you are giving implied consent for the researcher to include your responses in reporting survey results. In all reporting, your responses will be reported in aggregate or in a manner that ensures your anonymity.

Thanks for participating in this study.

QV Are you a veteran?

No (1)

Yes (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Are you a veteran? = No

ENR ENROLLMENT INFORMATION

Q01 Including the current semester if you are enrolled, how many semesters have you attended WKU?

- 1 (1)
 - 2 (2)
 - 3 (3)
 - 4 (4)
 - 5 (5)
 - 6 (6)
 - 7 (7)
 - 8 (8)
 - >8 (9)
-

Q02 Are you currently enrolled in courses?

- No (1)
 - Yes (2)
-

SUP SUPPORT SERVICES INFORMATION

Q03 For each general student support service WKU provides listed below, please indicate how familiar you are with each service.

	Unfamiliar (1)	Somewhat Familiar (2)	Familiar (3)
Mental Health Support (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tutoring support (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Educational Counseling (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Financial Aid (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Career Services (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q04 For each general student support service WKU provides listed below, please indicate any that you have used. (Check all that apply.)

- Mental Health Support (1)
 - Tutoring Support (2)
 - Educational Counseling (3)
 - Financial Aid (4)
 - Career Services (5)
 - Other (Please Describe) (6)
-

Q05 For each general student support service WKU provides listed below, please indicate how satisfied you are with each service. (Choose "Not Applicable" for services you have not used.)

	Very Unsatisfied (1)	Unsatisfied (2)	Satisfied (3)	Very Satisfied (4)	Not Applicable (5)
Mental Health Support (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tutoring Support (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Educational Counseling (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Financial Aid (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Career Services (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q06 For each general student support service WKU provides listed below, please indicate how beneficial you found each service to be. (Choose "Not Applicable" for services you have not used.)

	Very Unbeneficial (1)	Unbeneficial (2)	Beneficial (3)	Very Beneficial (4)	Not Applicable (5)
Mental Health Support (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tutoring Support (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Educational Counseling (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Financial Aid (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Career Services (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q07 For each student veteran support service listed below, please indicate how familiar you are with each service.

	Unfamiliar (1)	Somewhat Familiar (2)	Familiar (3)
VA Financial Assistance (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Yellow Ribbon (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Veterans Upward Bound (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Military Student Services (not including Textbooks for Troops, see below) (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Textbooks for Troops (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q08 For each student veteran support service listed below, please indicate any that you have used. (Check all that apply.)

- VA Financial Assistance (1)
- Yellow Ribbon (2)
- Veterans Upward Bound (3)
- Military Student Services (not including Textbooks for Troops, see below) (4)
- Textbooks for Troops (5)

Q09 For each student veteran support service listed below, please indicate how satisfied you are with each service. (Choose "Not Applicable" for services you have not used.)

	Very Unsatisfied (1)	Unsatisfied (2)	Satisfied (3)	Very Satisfied (4)	Not Applicable (5)
VA Financial Assistance (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Yellow Ribbon (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Veterans Upward Bound (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Military Student Services (not including Textbooks for Troops, see below) (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Textbooks for Troops (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q10 For each student veteran support service listed below, please indicate how beneficial you found each service to be. (Choose "Not Applicable" for services you have not used.)

	Very Unbeneficial (1)	Unbeneficial (2)	Beneficial (3)	Very Beneficial (4)	Not Applicable (5)
VA Financial Assistance (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Yellow Ribbon (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Veterans Upward Bound (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Military Student Services (not including Textbooks for Troops, see below) (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Textbooks for Troops (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q11 Regarding your GI Bill, Post 9/11, or another military student funding program, did you receive any of the following from the VA Student Financial Aid Office?

	No (1)	Yes (2)	Don't Remember (3)
Brochure or other printed information about these funding sources (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
E-mail information about these funding sources (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information about who to contact for VA/GI benefits (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

DIS DISABILITY INFORMATION

Q12 Are you a disabled veteran?

No (1)

Yes (2)

Q13 Have you been diagnosed by a physician with any of the following?

	No (1)	Yes (2)
PTSD (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
TBI (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q14 Does your disability affect...

	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Occasionally (3)	Frequently (4)
Your ability to get to and from classes? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your school performance? (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your attendance in classes? (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q15 Regarding your disability, did you...

	No (1)	Yes (2)
Receive information from WKU regarding all services available? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Receive information from WKU about accommodations, such as parking and transportation assistance? (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have trouble receiving accommodations from WKU? (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Receive mental health counseling services on campus? (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q16 Regarding your disability, in general, how helpful (accommodating) were the following individuals? (Choose "Not Applicable" if you have not encountered or are not familiar with these individuals.)

	Very Unhelpful (1)	Unhelpful (2)	Helpful (3)	Very Helpful (4)	Not Applicable (5)
WKU Professors (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
WKU Staff (in general) (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Veteran Services Staff at WKU (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mental Health Counselors (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
WKU Student Veteran Coach/Mentor (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

STENG STUDENT ENGAGEMENT INFORMATION

Q17 How involved are you with the Student Veterans Alliance on campus?

- Not Involved (1)
- Somewhat Involved (2)
- Actively Involved (3)
- Not Familiar With (4)

Q18 What other student engagement opportunities at WKU are you involved in?

Q19 What other student engagement opportunities would you like WKU to offer to student veterans?

OPQ OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS

Q20 Please explain which general student support service(s) and/or student veteran support services have been particularly beneficial and why.

Q21 Please explain which general student support service(s) and/or student veteran support services have been particularly unbeneficial and why.

Q22 Have you sought outside assistance, other than WKU, to help with your transition into the university? If yes, what services?

Q23 If those outside services were offered on campus, would it have made your transition into the university easier?

END Thank you for completing this survey! Please click the arrow on the right to record your responses.

APPENDIX C: IRB Approval Letter

WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board
Continuing Review Report



If this is your third year for your Continuing Review Request, please complete a new application.
Otherwise; DO NOT include the complete application in describing modifications and requests for additional time to collect data.

Name of Project: Veteran Transition from Combat to Campus: A Mixed Methods Study
Name of Researcher: Joanna Jones, MHA
Department: EDD / EDLD

How many total subjects have participated in the study since its inception? # 6

How many subjects have participated in the project since the last review? # 6

Is your data collection with human subjects complete? Yes No

1. Has there been any change in the level of risks to human subjects? (If "Yes", please explain changes on a separate page). Yes No
2. Have informed consent procedures changed so as to put subjects above minimal risk? (If "Yes", please describe on a separate page). Yes No
3. Have any subjects withdrawn from the research due to adverse events or any unanticipated risks/problems? (If "Yes", please describe on a separate page). Yes No
4. Have there been any changes to the source(s) of subjects and the Selection criteria? (If "Yes", please describe on a separate page). Yes No
5. Have there been any changes to your research design that were not specified in your application, including the frequency, duration and location of each procedure. (If "Yes", please describe on a separate page). Yes No
6. Has there been any change to the way in which confidentiality of the Data is maintained? (If "Yes", please describe on a separate page). Yes No
7. Is there desire to extend the time line of the project? Yes No
On what date do you anticipate data collection with human subjects to be completed? _____

WKU IRB# 19-121
Approved: 11/08/2018
End Date: 5/31/2019
EXPEDITED
Original: 10/24/2018

WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board
Continuing Review Report



5. Have there been any changes to your research design that were not specified in your application, including the frequency, duration and location of each procedure. (If "Yes", please describe on a separate page).

As the Principle Investigator I want to send a "student-all-email" and the script will be as follows:

Hi,

I hope all students are doing well at WKU.

First, I would like to introduce myself:

My name is Joanna and I am an EDD Candidate at WKU, I am also a military veteran (USMC – OIF/OEF).

Secondly, I am currently collecting information about the services offered to the veteran population at WKU.

If you are a student veteran at WKU, please take 10-15 minutes – tops- and use this opportunity to share your voice on how you feel about the current services at WKU for student veterans.

Follow the link below and it is phone friendly.

https://wku.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6S8mTAZ9XYmgIAI

Thank you for your time, service and go TOPS!
Your input is much appreciated and will be acknowledged.

- Joanna Jones, MHA
EDD Candidate at WKU

WKU IRB# 19-121
Approved: 11/08/2018
End Date: 5/31/2019
EXPEDITED
Original: 10/24/2018