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Stefane Dione Raulerson

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENT VETERANS
WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF GEORGIA TO ASSIST IN THE
DECISION-MAKING PROCESS TO BETTER SERVING THEM

By Stefane Dione Raulerson

This dissertation has been read and approved as fulfilling the partial requirement for the
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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Education
in Curriculum and Leadership
(HIGHER EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION)

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Columbus, GA

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ABSTRACT

Within the USG, no systematic approach exists regarding the identification of its student veterans. In support of the significant number of veterans living in Georgia and more of them utilizing VA educational benefits, the purpose of the research was to explore the various means in which USG institutions identify student veterans and use this information to make data-driven decisions as well as establish retention and graduation rates. The research included surveying and interviewing, following theoretical sampling. Interviews were conducted to obtain more comprehensive and detailed information on the survey results where participants indicated the identification of student veterans, use of data related to the identification of student veterans, and offering transitional resources for the purpose of increase academic success. Grounded theory approach was used to generate a theory following the collection of survey data and using theoretical sampling to determine institutions for involved in the interview process. Quantitative data were analyzed for descriptive statistics with the qualitative data subjected to a multi-level approach of open, axial, and selective coding. Key findings included an inventory of the transitional resources offered within the USG, the extent of retention and graduation tracking within the USG, and the awareness of the various means within the USG for recording student veteran identification. The grounded theory proposed for student veteran identification in a consistent manner among USG institutions include the use of select Banner screens for specific purposes and verifying or confirming the identification for accuracy. Complete and thorough veteran status identification will provide a basis for generating reports for data-driven decisions.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Over the history of the United States, various educational benefits have been provided to support veterans in their educational endeavors (Spaulding, 2000). With increasing numbers of students utilizing educational benefits payable under the Post 9/11 GI Bill (Circle, 2017; Viveros, 2017), institutions are learning to serve student veterans in a way that helps them succeed academically (Field, Hebel, & Smallwood, 2008).

Because some traits, such as teamwork, self-discipline, and having different perspectives (Olsen, Badger, & McCuddy, 2014), taught during military service created barriers in the transition of veterans to academic life Kurzynski (2014), Knapp (2013), Whitney, Tschudi, and Gieber (2013), Griffin (2015), Naphan and Elliott (2015), and Steele (2015) among others agree transitional support for student veterans in higher education is beneficial to their academic pursuits.

An institution may elect to offer transitional services (Kirchner, 2015), but the VA only requires a designated certifying official (Daly & Fox Garrity, 2013). The mandated position have responsibilities varying from the “minimally federal required functions of basic record keeping” (Daly & Fox Garrity, 2013, p. 8) to other functions specifically related to student veterans or to the general student population (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs School Certifying Official Handbook, 2018). The VA provides required responsibilities on the GI Bill website as (a) provide VA with recipient enrollment status using provided forms (b) update State Approving Agency of new or changes in existing

academic programs, and changes in institutional academic policies, (c) remain current on VA regulations and benefits, and (d) maintain student records on academic progress and degree requirements in a secure location (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs School Certifying Official Handbook, 2018).

A study conducted by Hitt et al. (2015) evaluated the veteran educational services in Indiana and found resources varied by size and type of school (Hitt et al., 2015). In addition, suggestions and tools provided by Student Veterans of America and were used on many campuses as a launching point for veterans new to the academic environment (Kirchner, 2015). Regardless of the mechanism used to provide guidance, Whitley et al. (2013) found “school and department leaders needed to have an open, collaborative approach focused on the common goal of supporting student veterans across the institution” (Whitley et al., 2013, p. 169). Miles (2014) concurred with the idea, saying deans, vice-presidents, and college executives needed to be a part of communicating the college’s commitment to “improving services to veterans” (Miles, 2014, p. 178), and Pacheco (2017) found faculty and staff thought better communication about veteran services lead to more referrals. Miles (2014) also stated research mostly included only four-year institutions; however, a large percentage of veterans chose community colleges to meet their educational desires because nearly 70% of veterans indicated finding a job was their biggest concern (Prudential Financial, 2012). An associate degree obtained from a community college could allow them to obtain credentials and move to the workforce quickly (Miles, 2014).

Georgia’s veteran population was over 700,000, and a slightly larger percentage of veterans were enrolled in school than the national average (U.S. Census Bureau,

2018). However, institutions vary in how and why they choose to aid in the transition of these students to academic life (Naphan & Elliott, 2015), but most institutions within the USG identified the student veteran population as a target group for their Complete College Georgia efforts (Complete College Georgia, 2016). While a general lack of information on retention and graduation rates for student veterans among USG institutions exists, transitional resources are offered for other reasons and not necessarily for academic success. Identifying student veterans aid in USG institutions having the means to tracking retention and graduation rates and making informed decisions regarding transitional services and the effectiveness of the transitional resources. This information, in turn, ensures student veterans enrolled within the USG are served in the best way.

Background of the Problem

Research had been conducted on the barriers to the successful transition to higher education of student veterans and how institutions of all sizes aided in removing those barriers with resources. However, data on student veterans within the USG were limited and, therefore, the basis for knowing retention and graduation rates on and for offering effective transitional resources to this student population was also limited. This study provided a theory on the best practice of identifying student veterans and used the data to compute retention and graduation rates of student veterans and make informed decisions regarding transitional resources.

Statement of the Problem

Cole and Kim (2013) studied undergraduate student veterans at four-year institutions and found them to be different from other traditional students in what they

needed to be successful. Barriers, such as less leisure time and larger demands of family and work, negatively affected their transition to civilian life and success in their academic endeavors (Cole & Kim, 2013). According to Naphan and Elliott (2015), who studied 11 student veterans, the veterans often felt different, misunderstood, and disconnected on a college campus, and Wygmans (2016) provided the age gap, differences in life experiences, and varying levels of maturity as possible reasons for this feeling of disconnection. However, college campuses began with policies and practices to assist in the transition of veterans to the academic world (Naphan & Elliott, 2015) and doing so deemed important in the transition process (Braxton, 2011). According to Junger (2016) and Reed (2016), fitting in and feeling accepted was vital to a student veteran's academic success. "Today's veterans often come home to find that, although they're willing to die for their country, they're not sure how to live for it" (Junger, 2016, p. 124). Norman et al. (2015) studied 31 veterans who stated campus support provided them with a positive experience. At Western Michigan University, Moon and Schma (2011) found providing support mechanisms to student veterans, such as the supportive structures suggested by Hamrick and Rumann (2012), was beneficial to this student veteran population at the institution. DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell (2008) found assisting veterans in their academic success contributes to the success of the educational benefit they have earned. The "mission" of the academic journey was not a small task considering factors, such as age gap, life experiences, living situations, and culture changes, but, given support and guidance, student veterans could be successful (Willingham, 2016).

No systematic approach existed for the USG institutions regarding the identification of its student veterans. With the state of Georgia having a significant

number of veterans as part of its population (Davis, 2013) and more veterans were utilizing benefits from the Post 9/11 GI Bill (Circle, 2017; Viveros, 2017), this study provided a theory of the best practice of identifying student veterans and using related data to make decisions regarding transitional services offered and establish retention and graduation rates at diverse institutions of higher education in Georgia.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify a best practice of identifying student veterans. The goal was to establish consistency in identifying student veterans, allowing USG institutions to determine retention and graduation rates and to make informed decisions regarding transitional resources for the student veterans who elected to fulfill their academic dreams within the USG.

The use of Post 9/11 GI Bill educational benefits was expected to increase (Circle, 2017; Viveros, 2017), and Georgia was one of the top 10 states in which veterans called home (Davis, 2013). Gaps in the literature regarding student veterans within the USG existed due to a lack of means of consistently identifying student veterans and their retention and graduation rates in identifying the services collectively offered to student veterans who attended institutions within the USG. The researcher, who was employed by the USG and worked with military connected students, was interested in knowing how the System could better serve student veterans by institutions identifying student veterans and using related data to provide retention and graduate rates and to make decisions regarding transitional resources.

Research Questions

The survey in this grounded theory research was administered to the supervisor of the student veteran department or, if this department did not exist, to the school certifying official of institutions within the USG. The survey collected data on the availability and purpose(s) of various transitional resources, the current processes at institutions in identifying student veterans, and used this information to make data-driven decisions as well as establish retention and graduation rates. The quantitative phase investigated the following research questions:

1. How do USG institutions record identification of student veterans?
2. What data regarding student veterans are tracked by USG institutions?
3. How do USG institutions use this information to make decisions about the transitional resources offered and their effectiveness?

The use of grounded theory methodology aided in the development of the following secondary research questions:

- RQ1a. How do student veterans disclose veteran status and how do USG institutions record it?
- RQ3a. How are decisions made regarding the offering of transitional resources?
- RQ3b. What means are used to determine effectiveness of the transitional resources offered?

The first secondary research question was written as the researcher understood there were multiple ways in which disclosure was being made. As a result, the research needed to reflect the methods of not just how the identification is being recorded but how it was being disclosed beyond the formal processes such as on the admission application. The

second and third secondary research questions were written as the researcher realized the limited use of data in tracking student veterans and the effectiveness of transitional resources was typically not linked to data, such as retention and graduation.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is shown in Figure 1. The figure demonstrates how building upon the availability of transitional resources with recording the identification of student veterans allowed for data-driven decisions to be made, including the establishment of retention and graduation rates. Being able to make data-driven decisions allowed better service to be provided to student veterans within the USG.



Figure 1. Conceptual Framework. Effect of Identification of Student Veterans in Serving Them within the USG.

The study provided a theory on the best practice of identifying student veterans and using the data to compute retention and graduation rates of student veterans and for making informed decisions regarding transitional resources.

Nature of the Study

The researcher used a grounded theory approach, which provided a means to generate theory that was grounded in the data of a phenomenon as viewed by the participants (Fassinger, 2005). Using grounded theory, the researcher factually examined the steps or pieces of a process, rather than made assumptions about them (Glaser, 1978). Proposed theory for events or actions was grounded in the data found during the research process (McLeod, 2001). Grounded theory was exemplary for generating new theories and improving professional practices related to adults in higher education (Conrad, 1982; Darkenwald, 1980). While options were available with grounded theory, the research approached with a specific issue to explore (Babchuk, 1997).

The researcher desired to know what transitional services were being offered at each institution and why they were offered, how student veterans were identified, and what data were tracked regarding student veterans as reported by the supervisor of the student veteran department or, if this department did not exist, school certifying official. The purpose of the study was to obtain a comprehensive look at the procedures of the institutions within USG and provide a theory on the best practice for identifying student veterans and using related data to make decisions regarding the services offered to them. The grounded theory approach met the needs of the researcher and allowed for examination of the various means of identifying student veterans from simple to complex within the USG.

The first phase of the study was a confidential survey to collect data from the supervisor of the student veteran department or, if this department did not exist, school certifying official from each institution of the USG and was composed of questions designed by the researcher. The survey included demographic questions, identification of transitional services and why they were offered, and the processes regarding the identification of student veterans and what data were tracked or used. The survey was administered electronically using a survey tool (i.e., Qualtrics) and the data were analyzed for descriptive statistics using the tools within Qualtrics. The qualitative phase included 11 interviews with open-ended questions developed from the data collected in the survey for the supervisor of the student veteran department or, if this department did not exist, school certifying official at institutions within the USG offering a distinctive means of a transitional resource. Interviews began with institutions that had simple identification and data usage processes. Coding of the data collected was completed before moving to a new level of identification and data usage complexity. Document collection was also conducted to validate the data from the interviews, which were conducted via phone, or in person.

All USG institutions were included in documentation presented to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once IRB permission was secured, an email was sent to the supervisor of the student veteran department or, if this department did not exist, school certifying official providing the purpose of the study. The position was identified by each institution's website. An email was sent to include a personal survey link provided by Qualtrics with the consent being the first question of the survey and requiring an affirmative answer in order to progress. The survey was constructed based on services the

literature had indicated as being helpful in the transition of veterans and was used to collect data on each institution reported as being services offered to student veterans. Collected survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistical design based upon the type of institution and the services offered to student veterans.

The purpose of the interview was to obtain more comprehensive and detailed information on the survey results where participants indicated the identification of student veterans, use of data related to the identification of student veterans, and offering transitional resources for the purpose of increase academic success. Eleven interviews were conducted based on survey responses. Theoretical sampling was used to allow a progression of data collection from institutions that used very simple to more complex processes of identifying student veterans and use of associated data. Interviews were scheduled by phone and confirmed via email, which included a reminder of the purpose of the study. The interviews were conducted via phone, or in person. Open-ended semi-structured questions were designed based upon the data regarding distinctive means of offering transitional resources obtained in the quantitative phase. Interview questions was adapted as progression was made to explore themes and categories identified through the coding process. Interviews were recorded and transcribed by a third party and coded by the researcher using a multi-level approach to include open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Results from both phases of research were shown in narrative form with figures and tables to support understanding visually.

The population for this study consisted of the employees at the 26 institutions within the USG. A listing of the institutions was provided on the USG website, along with links to the website for each institution. The supervisor of the student veteran

department or, if this department did not exist, school certifying was likely the most knowledgeable on this institutional level regarding what transitional resources were offered and why in addition to the processes for identification of student veterans and the data tracked using the identification. A theoretical sampling of 11 institutions was taken from the responding institutions to identify participants for the interview phase. Beginning with institutions reporting simple identification and use of data and then progressing to institutions that reported more complex identification and use of data, interviews were conducted with the supervisor of the student veteran department or, if this department did not exist, school certifying official. An interview time was agreed upon via phone and confirmed via email. Interviews, which were conducted via phone, or in person, were recorded and transcribed at a later date by a third party and were analyzed using a multi-level of coding from the information shared with the researcher.

The survey used to collect data from the supervisor of the student veteran department or, if this department did not exist, school certifying official will provide numerical data for the various transitional services offered at the USG institutions by type on institution and the percentage of student veterans of the total student population and the level of identification of student veterans and the use of this data in serving them. Electronic surveys were a preferred instrument for the study because they are inexpensive to conduct, can be easily used to reach large numbers of participants, can be more easily analyzed with its digital format already in place, and can contain related information and directions as part of the survey itself (Wyatt, 2000). Tools within Qualtrics were used to analyze the numerical survey results into descriptive statistics.

Survey results guided open-ended questions for interviews, which were to be used to collect qualitative data from the supervisor of student veteran department or, if this department did not exist, the school certifying official. Document collection was used to validate the interview responses. Interview questions were adapted as research was conducted with institutions using more complex identification and data usage processes. Transcribing was completed by a third party, and multi-level coding was completed by the researcher using themes identified in the interview process. Figures and tables were used to further explain the narrative on the survey and interview results.

Definition of Terms

- *Academic success*: York, Gibson, and Rankin (2015) found “academic success” and “student success” to be used interchangeably in literature. Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, and Hayek (2006) provided the definition as “academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational outcomes, and post-college performance” (Kuh et al., 2006, p. 7). For this study, academic success will be defined as graduation.
- *Administrators*: Professional or management staff personnel at higher education institutions (Hawlk, 2017).
- *American Council on Education*: A membership organization that mobilizes the higher education community to shape effective public policy and foster innovative, high-quality practice (American Council on Education, 2019)

- *College, university, and institution*: A formal setting of degree granting post-secondary learning (Conley, 2012; Hawk, 2017). These terms are used interchangeably.
- *Community college*: Mullin and Phillippe (2009) defined the community college as “an access point for educational opportunity” (Mullin & Phillippe, 2009, p. 5).
- *Front line staff*: Employees who most often have initial contact with customers, which in this case, students (Rada, 1998).
- *Joint Services Transcript (JST)*: An official record of the training and other information related to a servicemembers specific service ("Joint Services Transcript", 2019).
- *Military experience*: For the purpose of this study, military experience was similar to how Mays (2017) defined “military service” (Mays, 2017, p. 14), being completed service in any military branch described by the U.S. Department of Defense.
- *Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)*: The U.S. military action against Afghanistan response to the September 11th attacks beginning in October 2001 (We Honor Veterans, 2019).
- *Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF)*: The U.S. military action against Iraq beginning in March 2003 when evidence was inconclusive that Iraq did not have weapons of mass destruction (We Honor Veterans, 2019).

- *Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)*: The “earning college credits for college-level knowledge you have acquired through expertise developed outside the classroom” (Thomas Edison State University, 2019, para. 1).
- *Resources*: Defined similarly as Hawk (2017) defined “veteran student services” (p. 17), being support services offered by higher educational institutions to “meet the needs of students who served in the United States military.”
- *Retention*: The measurement of the proportion of students who remain enrolled at the same institution from one year to the next (Hagedorn, 2005).
- *School certifying official*: The institutional employee who is designated to submit enrollment certifications and related information to VA for educational benefits to be paid to the student (Weston, 2015).
- *Transition*: The shift from military service to civilian status (Alkire, 2017).
- *University System of Georgia (USG)*: An organization of 26 institutions of higher education, the Georgia Public Library Service, and the Georgia Archives. The system is governed by the Board of Regents (USG, 2019).
- *U.S Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)*: A unit of the U.S. government that oversees programs serving veterans and their families. The programs include pensions, educational benefits, and health care (Usa.gov, 2019).
- *Veterans and student veterans*: This definition was adapted from Davidson (2015) and includes

any person (a) whose last discharge from active service was under honorable conditions, and who (b) served in the army, navy, marine corps, coast guard, or air force of the United States for not less than 180 days active service; provided, however, that any person who so served and was awarded a service-connected disability....shall be deemed to be a veteran notwithstanding his failure to complete 180 days of active service.” (Davidson, 2015, p. 26)

Assumptions

One assumption of this study was institutions within the USG have a desire to serve student veterans in a beneficial way as they progress through their academic career. It is necessary to make this assumption to believe institutions are providing all the services to student veterans they are capable of providing within the resources available to them and have assessed those as being meaningful to their student veteran population. Another assumption was some, if not most, institutions are offering transitional resources with a lack of data to guide the decisions of the institution. Because institutions lacked the informational resources to adequately record the identification of student veterans, having a basis upon which to make decisions and track academic success was assumed to likely not exist.

Scope and Delimitations

The population defined for the study was limited to public institutions within the USG even though private institutions exist in the state and are an option for student veterans within the state of Georgia. Theories regarding the effectiveness or success of transitional resources were not investigated in this study. The delimitations of this study included:

- Participants of the quantitative and qualitative research were selected on a non-random basis.
- The study related to public institutions in the USG and results were not generalized to other university systems.

Limitations

The limitations of this study include:

- With the survey, it was assumed all transitional resources were provided as options. While resources and student populations varied, all institutions received the same survey questions.
- As a supervisor of the student veteran department or, if this department did not exist, school certifying official, it was assumed this person had sufficient interest in serving veterans to provide complete and accurate data and not answer the questions in a way to avoid what may be seen as additional work.
- The researcher worked with the student veteran population, so an awareness of the transition process and resources available within the USG was present.

Significance of the Study

Research has shown veterans struggle as they transition from the military culture when they separate from active duty and return to the civilian world. Research has also shown institutions provide a wide array of resources to assist in this transition. As veterans continue to utilize educational benefits under Post 9/11 GI Bill, the support to student veterans will continue to be important, especially if taxpayers desire to know the return on their investment with the academic success of this population whose education was funded by federal dollars. Ensuring support is based on the needs of each particular

institution was the responsibility of higher education employees from front line staff to administrative leaders, according to Whitley et al. (2013). However, the supervisor of the student veteran department or, if this department did not exist, school certifying official often initiated or oversaw transitional resources offered to student veterans. With a large population of veterans residing in the Georgia, it was imperative to have data on student veterans, the effectiveness of transitional resources, and a means to compute retention and graduation rates of student veterans enrolled within the USG. The study was important because the transition of veterans from military to academic life could be difficult and having resources available to them can impact their academic success. Their success was important to other stakeholders, such as the institution and taxpayers, if educational benefits are being used. Determining the effectiveness of transitional resources and the impact on retention and graduation rates begins with identifying student veterans.

The researcher planned to provide of theory of best practice in identifying student veterans and using the data to make decisions regarding transitional resources and establish retention and graduation rates. The researcher hoped to provide encouragement and incentive through this study for institutions within USG to identify student veterans and track information consistently within and among institutions for data-driven decisions as a means to better serve student veterans.

Summary

Many veterans elect to obtain a college degree after the military due to the educational benefits associated with their military service. With that decision, student veterans bring experiences and skills to campuses, which create obstacles to their

transition to an environment that is very different than the environment that they had while active duty.

Student veterans have transitional resources available to them at many higher education institutions. This study explored the various levels of identifying student veterans and the use of the data to make decisions regarding transitional resources within the USG institutions and provided a grounded theory of best practice.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Theoretical Perspective

Research indicates traits learned while in the military, such as leadership and self-discipline, are beneficial to veterans in the academic world (Olsen et al., 2014). but the military life also caused hardships for veterans as well because there was a shift to a less structured, more flexible environment in the academic world (Kurzynski, 2014). Research of Naphan and Elliott (2015) documented the effects of military life on transitioning to an academic life. Griffin (2015) found themes in the support provided to student veterans in the academic world and, within the themes, transitional resources were identified. These transitional resources guide the research in determining the resources most institutions within the USG would offer as veterans took advantage of the educational benefits offered to them as a result of their military service (Hitt et al., 2015). A “wide disparity” of how institutions serve students veterans was found by Evans, Pellegrino, and Hoggan (2015). However, with those having used and who are using educational benefits close to one million students, distinctive means of offering transitional resources were likely to exist.

History of Veteran Educational Benefits

The concept of veterans receiving support from the government due to their service without some service-connected sickness or disability began with the Dependent Pension Act of 1890, which provided a pension for service members who could not

perform manual labor (Johnson, 2011.). The Sherwood Act of 1912 expanded the ability for all veterans to receive a pension at the age of 62 (Korb, 2009). The War Risk Insurance Act of 1914 was amended in 1917 to offer life insurance and, for the first time ever, provided vocational training for veterans who had permanent serviced-connected disabilities, allowing them to receive training for new jobs (Button, 2017).

During the Great Depression, veterans from World War I suffered harder than most U.S. citizens, often struggling to survive (Burgan, 2010). The U.S. government responded with the World War Adjustment Compensation Act, which paid funds to World War I veterans based on their length of service up to \$1,500 (Thomas, 2009). However, if a veteran was entitled to more than \$50, a certificate was issued and payable 20 years later with a face-value of \$1,500 in most cases (Thomas, 2009). As economic conditions worsened, veterans joined forces and demanded payment of the bonuses immediately, and, in 1932, approximately 30,000 veterans and their family members convened in Washington, D.C. (Thomas, 2009). After a riot occurred, President Hoover authorized federal troops to bring order and forcibly remove the veterans who refused to leave (Thomas, 2009). Immediate results did not occur, but in 1936 Congress authorized payment and by mid-1937 approximately 3.5 million applications for payment were submitted, with most requesting immediate payment (Ortiz, 2004). The march to Washington, D.C. brought to light the shortcomings of the United States on how veterans were assisted in their transition from military to civilian life (Thomas, 2009) The result of the shortcomings was the G.I. Bills of Rights, a benefits package for World War II veterans (Thomas, 2009).

Prior to the start of and during World War II, Congress acted to support veterans and other citizens who worked for the war efforts (Boulton, 2005). Reemployment was guaranteed to the U.S. citizens who enlisted in the military. Many women became eligible for jobs previously held only by men, who were then away defending and serving the country under the Selective Service and Training Act of 1940 (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.), and disabled veterans of World War I and World War II were provided with vocational training with Disabled Veterans' Rehabilitation Act of 1943 (Hemmingsen, 2001). In addition, support for the veterans and their families and the needs they would have grew in the minds and hearts of the U.S. citizens, and the response was the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (Circle, 2017). The components of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 were educational support, a guaranteed loan for a house, farm, or business without the need of a down payment, and unemployment compensation (Thomas, 2009). The education benefit provided tuition payment for 48 months, an allowance for books and supplies, and a monthly allowance (Thomas, 2009), allowing the veterans of this era to be "the most rewarded soldier the United States had ever sent into battle" (Boulton, 2005, p. 41).

College administrators had reservations about veterans enrolling at their institutions because they expected a negative effect on student performance (Meyer, 2009). Administrators thought veterans would not be prepared to be successful, and, being older and many times with families, they would not blend well on campus (Meyer, 2009). Veterans flocked to colleges and universities, and they were found to be determined and high achieving students (Hunt, 2006) and were twice as likely to complete a bachelor's degree as their civilian counterparts (Meyer, 2009). Ten years

following the end of World War II, over 12 million of the almost 16 million veterans had benefited from the GI Bill (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009), providing over half a million engineers and scientists, 700,000 business personnel, and 360,000 schoolteachers (Boulton, 2005). Prior to World War II, a college education was achieved usually by people from a higher socioeconomic class, but this military benefit changed the future of education (Hunt, 2006). Enrollment in colleges increased tremendously as veterans and their children sought education beyond high school (Hunt, 2006). Community colleges expanded, research universities and state colleges were developed, and funding of financial aid was established for private and public institutions (Hunt, 2006). The result was the opportunity for all ages, socioeconomic groups, and ethnicities to obtain a college degree, causing a surge in enrollment “from 1.5 million in 1940 to almost two million in 1950 to more than seventeen million” (Hunt, 2006, para. 3) in the early 2000s (Hunt, 2006). “The GI Bill created a massive socio-economic shift upward for the American working class” (Thomas, 2009, p. 17), contributed to more tax revenues and economic growth (Thomas, 2009), and facilitated the United States becoming a world leader in education and building the middle class (Hunt, 2006). However, the nearly one million African Americans and the 400,000 women who served did not always benefit from this educational opportunity (Munsey, 2010). African Americans lacked access in many cases with some states having segregated colleges and universities or limited slots for admissions available to them. For historically black institutions from 1940 to 1950, there was an 80% increase in enrollment to over 76,000 students (Munsey, 2010). It was not until the early 1970s that enrollment numbers for women began to grow (Munsey, 2010).

The U.S. citizens continued to support veterans and their transition to civilian life following the Korean War and the Vietnam War (Thomas, 2009). With the Korean Conflict in 1950, benefits were again available to veterans for education, unemployment, and home ownership (Vable et al., 2016). However, the Korean GI Bill offered less educational support than what was available with the earlier GI Bill, and it was utilized by about 43% of the eligible veterans (Thomas, 2009). Part of the reduction in benefit was due to an investigation that found institutions were increasing the rate of tuition and fees to maximize the profits received for the veterans streaming to the campuses (Boulton, 2005). Veterans only received support for 36 months and did not have payment of tuition (Thomas, 2009), but a minimum \$110 monthly subsistence allowance was paid to cover college tuition (Boulton, 2005). The U.S. economy was growing, so the concern over soldiers reintegrating was less, even though unemployment provisions continued, and benefits were perceived to be overly generous (Boulton, 2005). The Korean GI Bill set the expectation that the nation owed its veterans for their sacrifice during war times (Boulton, 2005). There was debate over what this debt would and would not include, and the Bradley Commissions worked for more than a year to determine what was needed by veterans (Boulton, 2005). Their work was “one of the most important documents on veterans’ benefits to emerge in the mid twentieth century” (Boulton, 2005, p. 50) and impacted public policy for the next decade (Boulton, 2005).

The Veteran’s Readjustment Act of 1966, also called the Vietnam GI Bill, allowed for educational benefits of one month for every month served for veterans of this war who had more than 180 consecutive days of active duty service (Thomas, 2009). The benefit was later expanded to be a month and a half of educational benefits for every

month served, up to 36 months (Thomas, 2009). However, the benefit paid to student veterans was much less than the benefits paid to World War II veterans as Vietnam veterans collectively petitioned for similar benefits (Boulton, 2005). They lacked tuition assistance but received a monthly stipend of \$220 to \$261, depending on one's marital status (Teachman, 2005). Many veterans had a disruption in their academic careers, creating a gap between the education achieved by veterans and nonveterans, but, given time, veterans closed the gap on educational achievement with nonveterans to less than one year of schooling within 10 years since discharge (Teachman, 2005). The availability of financial assistance for college without military serviced caused the Vietnam GI Bill to not have the impact as did the World War II benefits (Meyer, 2009), but educational benefits for this group of veterans was the reason for much debate between themselves and Congress (Boulton, 2005). From the late 1960s to the end of the 1970s, educational benefits were the standards by which Vietnam veterans gauged their treatment from the country they served (Boulton, 2005). For the Vietnam veterans who attended college, for many campuses, administrators were managing the tensions over the unpopular war to realize special programs may have benefited these student veterans (DiRamio et al., 2008).

Following Vietnam, educational benefits were provided as an incentive to enlist and less as a benefit after service (Angrist, 1993). The Post Vietnam Era Veteran's Educational Assistance Program of 1977, also called VEAP, allowed enlistees to "contribute up to \$2,700 to an educational fund and the federal government would match the service member's contribution with two dollars for each one contributed" (Thomas, 2009, p. 38). This educational program did not meet expectations for increasing

enlistment number did not increase, and, with the servicemembers who did enlist, overall educational levels within the military dropped (Angrist, 1993). The Veterans' Educational Assistance Act of 1984, more commonly known as the Montgomery GI Bill, became law as an attempt to revive military recruiting efforts (Spaulding, 2000). The educational benefit provided 36 months of financial assistance to military members who served for 3 years and who contributed \$100 per month for the first year of enlistment. The educational benefit was also made available to reservists who signed a six-year service contract (Thomas, 2009). Benefits were not adjusted from 1985 until 1992, during a time in which tuition and fees increased by an average rate of seven percent (Simon, 2010). After making a corrective adjustment in 1992, an annual adjustment was scheduled for October of every year (Simon, 2010). Educational support for military members serving in the Persian Gulf War, which began in mid-1990s, included an increase in the monthly support for servicemembers enrolled in higher education, as part of the Persian Gulf Conflict Supplemental Authorization and Personnel Benefits Act (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.). The act also provided veteran counseling and assistance for veterans experiencing difficulties readjusting to life in the civilian world (Purtle, 2014).

The Montgomery GI Bill was rooted in fear of mass unemployment due to the volumes of service members returning from war (Field et al., 2008). Congress predicted it to have a similar impact to the earlier GI Bill, helping to “spark economic growth and expansion for a whole generation of Americans” (Field et al., 2008, p. 1). However, it did not, perhaps due to a smaller military force (Field et al., 2008). For the veterans who elected to attend college, most of them selected for-profit institutions or community

colleges where their needs were better served (Field et al., 2008). An explanation for the choice of institution type was likely because the benefit paid about three-quarters of the average tuition and fees for a four-year public institution and only a third of the average four-year private institution but paid the average tuition and fees for community colleges (Field et al., 2008). After the first Gulf War, most veterans were using only 17 of the 36 months of benefits, and only six percent used all, indicating many veterans were likely only receiving associate degrees before ending their academic endeavors (Field et al., 2008). However, veterans of this era were more likely than nonveteran students to attend private institutions, likely to the convenience of balancing academics with other aspects of their lives and the ability to build on specific skills learned in the military (Field et al., 2008). Veterans who were eligible for this benefit could transition to benefits under another benefit, Post 9/11 GI Bill, and receive additional benefits if all months under the Montgomery GI Bill had been exhausted or the balance of the remaining time under Montgomery GI Bill if they had not (Hames, 2010).

After the events of September 11, 2001, the Post 9/11 GI Bill was enacted to support the educational efforts of servicemembers who served on active duty or reservists who were called to active duty for a minimum of 90 days, or who had a service-related disability after 30 continuous days of service (Thomas, 2009). Benefits were paid by percentages based on length of service and included payment of tuition and fees, a book allowance up to \$1000 per academic year, and housing allowance based on the current rate for an E-5 with dependents. This educational benefit could also be transferred to one's dependents for use in obtaining their education (Thomas, 2009), but the VA reports only eight percent of veterans did so (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs,

2015). The Post 9/11 GI Bill was the biggest impact for education for student veterans since the original GI Bill (Cook & Kim, 2009). Simon (2010) reported the Post 9/11 GI Bill almost doubled the value of the Montgomery GI Bill and expected participation rates to rise to nearly 70%. According to McBain, Kim, Cook, and Snead (2012), as of 2012, more than half a million veterans and their dependents exercised the right to this benefit. Students using educational benefits from Post 9/11 GI Bill leveled off between the fiscal years of 2014 and 2015 with nearly 800,000 attending college and almost 200,000 of those students using educational benefits were new recipients (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016). This population accounted for 84% of the utilization of educational benefits (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016), and many veterans stated the benefit was a major influence on their seeking a college education (Steele, Salcedo, & Coley, 2010). The benefits were enough to allow them to attend school full-time without having to work, and, with tuition and fees paid directly to the institution, there were few out of pocket expenses for them (Steele et al., 2010).

The Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017, also called the Forever GI Bill, brought significant changes to the Post 9/11 GI Bill (Gore, 2017). In general, the Forever GI Bill allowed more veterans to participate and additional time in which one could take advantage (Gore, 2017). Purple Heart recipients were able to receive benefits at a rate of 100%; there was an increase in the minimum percentage of benefits paid from 40 to 50% ; and the delimiting date was removed for veterans discharged after January 1, 2013 (Gore, 2017). Funding for the changes was made from a change in the housing allowance calculation, which was similar to the funding of the

Montgomery GI Bill for student veterans who begin receiving benefits after January 1, 2018 (Gore, 2017).

National Data on Benefits and Student Veterans

Servicemembers and veterans wishing to obtain a college degree received educational benefits, based on their eligibility from Post 9/11 GI Bill, the Montgomery GI Bill for active duty and reservist, VEAP for post-Vietnam era veterans, or Reserve Educational Assistance Program (REAP) for reservists who were called to active duty following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 (Howell, 2015). Over one million veterans used their educational benefits since 2008 (Cate & Albright, 2014), and many of them who used educational benefits elected to attend a public institution (Field et al., 2008). By 2011, “nearly \$10 billion in education benefits” (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014, p. 37) were accessed under Post 9/11 GI Bill (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014). Means to increase the likelihood of success was questioned (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014), but support services to increase retention and graduation were believed to be a critical need (Kirchner, 2015). Nevertheless, overall graduation rates between 2002 and 2010 were compared between veteran and nonveteran students, 52% and 54% respectively, even though veterans took slightly longer to complete their education (Sander, 2014). Graduation rates for Air Force veterans was the highest among branches at 67% , and, for Marine veterans, the rate was the lowest at 45% (Sander, 2014).

Collecting and analyzing data regarding the academic success of student veterans has been difficult (Cate, Lyon, Schmeling, & Bogue, 2017), and, in 2013, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) partnered with InsideTrack to better understand the how institutions tracked student veterans (Sponsler, Wesaw, &

Jarrat, 2013). Their research found institutions worked to understand student veterans to better serve them but mostly decisions were being made without complete data or a means to measure outcomes accurately (Sponsler et al., 2013). While resources were available to aid in the transition and academic success of student veterans, most institutions did not have a means to measure the effectiveness of the resources (Sponsler et al., 2013). Cate et al. (2017) learned collecting service-related information was not consistent in the application process among or across higher education sections and various agencies collected information on traditional students or on specific military populations only. The U.S. Department of Defense provided tuition assistance to veterans or reservists while they were on active duty but did not track them educationally after full separation from the military (Cate et al., 2017). The U.S. Department of Education collected data from several databases within the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES), but veterans were not specifically tracked as part of the data collection (Cate et al., 2017). A secondary database of NCES is the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), which focuses on traditional students (Cate et al., 2017). The National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS) is another secondary database of NCES that is limited to identify veterans because its information is populated from the completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA; Cate et al., 2017). While the FAFSA does ask questions about military status, the questions allow for misclassification of some military-affiliated students, and the question was not an inclusive means of collecting veteran data because students were not required to apply for this type of financial assistance (Cate et al., 2017). The VA is primarily interested in ensuring benefits are accurately paid and does not require an institution to report

academic success of benefit recipients but encouraged certifying officials to disclose this information to the VA voluntarily (Cate et al., 2017). However, if the veteran graduates after benefits expired, the success is not reported (Cate et al., 2017). Conditions of the Executive Order 13607 directed for a more comprehensive means of identifying veterans enrolled in higher education institutions and their academic progress (Cate et al., 2017). However, Darcy, Swagger, and Ferreira (2018) learned student veterans did not always wish to disclose military service in the academic setting unless it was necessary.

Student Veterans of America partnered with the VA and the National Student Clearinghouse in 2013 to address the shortcomings of other databases and means to gauge the success of student veterans, calling the collaboration the Million Records Project (Cate, 2014). The academic accomplishments of veterans using the Montgomery GI Bill and the Post 9/11 GI Bill between 2002 and 2010 were evaluated. Data from the National Student Clearinghouse showing degree completion from 97% of higher education institutions were matched with data from the VA (Cate, 2014). Results of the study showed 51.7% of student veterans earned a certificate or degree (Cate, 2014). The Million Records Project helped fill the gap and clarify data regarding the academic success of student veterans (Cate, 2014).

Itzkowitz (2018) provided data that over a million veterans or their dependents received a portion of the approximately \$11 billion dollars in GI Bill benefits in 2016 and yet limited information existed on the outcomes of student veterans, despite the investment of the tax dollars for educational benefits. Using a combination of IPEDS information, the Veterans Affairs GI Bill Comparison Tool, and Performance by Accreditor databases, military college attendees and their associated graduation rates

were determined but only included institutions with at least 100 military beneficiary recipients and only considered the students who graduated within 8 years of first being enrolled (Itzkowitz, 2018). Actual outcome measures were hard to obtain because information on this demographic was limited and not widely available as the VA had only recently begun collecting graduation and retention rates and the Department of Education (DOE) did not require reporting of this population specifically (Itzkowitz, 2018). Of the nearly 900,000 beneficiaries who attended the 984 institutions included in this report, 64% attended bachelor's degree granting institutions, 27% attended community colleges, and the remaining 9% attended certificate-granting institutions (Itzkowitz, 2018). In addition, 70% of these institutions were publicly funded (Itzkowitz, 2018). This report showed less than 40% of the institutions graduated at minimum half of their students within eight years and information from the VA suggested veteran graduation outcomes often lagged behind so actual rates for veteran may have been even lower (Itzkowitz, 2018).

Georgia's Commitment to Veterans

Complete College Georgia

Complete College Georgia is an initiative in which the USG and the Technical College System of Georgia work collaboratively to educate Georgia citizens to remain competitive as a state and as a nation for skilled labor employment (Complete College Georgia, 2016). It is projected by 2025 60% of the jobs in the state will require a college degree, and currently only an approximate 48% of the population meet this criterion (Complete College Georgia, 2016). Institutions within the USG proposed plans of how each would work to increase graduation rates in attempt to meet the fast-approaching

demand for an educated workforce (Complete College Georgia, 2016). In 2012, 29 of the 31 institutions in the USG included military students in their Complete College Georgia plans (Complete College Georgia, 2016). It is unknown if the completion initiative has driven the offering of transitional resources to student veterans. Also noted in the campus plans for Complete College Georgia was the need for identifying student veterans on campus (Complete College Georgia, 2016), which seemed to support the limited availability of student veteran graduation rates among the USG institutions.

A component of Complete College Georgia was specifically targeted at adult and military students and included policies developed by the Adult Learning Consortium, a group of nine participating institutions (Complete College Georgia, 2016). In addition to increasing participation in the Consortium, additional campaigns to recruit adults who had some college credit but no degree. Resources and awareness of best practices for college completion of adult learners, which include most student veterans, included the expansion of the USG's Soldiers 2 Scholars (S2S) program to aid in the transition of veterans to the civilian world through college completion (C Complete College Georgia, 2016). Using grant funding from the Department of Education, the S2S program offered faculty and staff training to help them better understand the unique needs of student veterans and encouraged connections with the VA for additional training for veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (USG, 2011). According to Tonya Lam, the USG's associate vice chancellor for Student Affairs, the program aimed to utilize "proven methods and best practices that attract and retain military students in the University System" (USG, 2011, para. 2). Gorman (2014) stated the attention toward the S2S program lessened as institutions began their own initiatives to serves student veterans and

with the release of the Principles of Excellence. However, USG institutions used S2S to “benchmark their initiatives to other similar institutions to ensure that they remain competitive and innovative” (Gorman, 2014, p. 151) but also worked collaboratively to assist other institutions in implementing initiatives for student veterans (Gorman, 2014).

Veterans in Georgia

Georgia’s population of veterans was one of the top ten states in the country behind states such as California, Texas, Florida, Virginia, and Arizona (Davis, 2013) and the VA reported Georgia as being sixth in educational beneficiaries, over 30,000 of them (Education Program Beneficiaries, 2014). In 2017, Georgia’s veteran population was estimated at 700,000, and a slightly larger percentage of veterans were enrolled in school than the national average (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). According to the Georgia Department of Veterans Services (2017), over 18,500 veterans were enrolled in some type of higher education program during the 2017 fiscal year (Georgia Department of Veterans Service, 2018). This count of student veterans was down from 22,592 in the fiscal year 2016 (Georgia Department of Veterans Service, 2017) and from 24,188 in the fiscal year 2015 (Georgia Department of Veterans Service, 2016). The VA predicted an increase in the veteran population within the state of Georgia between 2017 and 2027 and to remain consistent through 2037 (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016).

Resources and Data for Georgia’s Student Veterans

Sponsler et al. (2013) provided some guidelines in providing resources to student veterans. They recommended protecting often scarce resources by leveraging the knowledge of institutions that have data and measurements for evaluating the effectiveness of the veteran programs (Sponsler et al., 2013). Support for student veterans

should be a campus-wide effort, involving campus employees from orientation leaders to faculty members and others to allow enough flexibility to impact all student veterans (Sponsler et al., 2013). Transitional resources should be developed in a proactive, not reactive, means and give student veterans resources to identify for themselves possible barriers and the tools to overcome them and to “hold themselves accountable for their own success” (Sponsler et al., 2013, p. 8).

Boyd (2017) conducted research on the academic success of student veterans at a large university with the USG using institutional data, stating “providing more reliable research on college success for student veterans can combat clichés and stereotypes in other settings as well” (Boyd, 2017, p. 4). Boyd (2017) stated using the data provided by the institution was the “first reliable assessments of retention and completion in a public university”. Boyd (2017) cited limitations of IPEDS, U.S. Department of Education, NPSAS, and other mechanisms, which report various data on student veteran success, and noted the Million Records Project did not allow for comparison of nonstudent veterans during the same period of time. Accounting for age, enrollment patterns, and demographic characteristics, including race, high school GPA, and mean income level, student veterans at this public university were approximately five percentage points more likely to graduate within four, five, and six years of their nonstudent veteran (Boyd, 2017).

Traits and Transitioning

Semer and Harmening (2015) discussed Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson’s theory on the four types of transitions and how individuals “react and adapt” (p.4) to life’s events differently and at different stages of life and considered how DiRamio et al.

applied the theory to student veterans in 2008 (Semer & Harmening, 2015). The transition theory was comprised of four components: (a) moving in, (b) moving through, (c) moving out, and (d) moving in, while Schlossberg's original theory noted four types of transitions: (a) anticipated, (b) unanticipated, (c) chronic "hassles" (Semer & Harmening, 2015, p. 34), and (d) nonevent (Semer & Harmening, 2015). The initial "moving in" (Semer & Harmening, 2015, p. 34) stage was joining the military, receiving training, and being mobilized; the "moving through" (Semer & Harmening, 2015, p. 34) stage was the time a soldier was deployed; the "moving out" (Semer & Harmening, 2015, p. 34) stage was separating from the military and returning to civilian life; and the final "moving in" (Semer & Harmening, 2015, p. 34) stage was becoming familiar with the school environment (Semer & Harmening, 2015). Schlossberg's original theory applied to student veterans demonstrated enrolling in school as an anticipated event for student veterans, an event for which preparation can be done, and experiencing the challenges related to college enrollment as an unanticipated event, an event which was irregular or involved a level of crises (Semer & Harmening, 2015).

The "moving in" stage was related to the research of Naphan and Elliott (2015) who discussed "the total institution" (Naphan & Elliott, 2015, p. 37), a term coined by Erving Goffman, which was often related to the military in that "the total institution" (Naphan & Elliott, 2015, p. 37) lived and worked together, separated from the rest of society. Further, there was a single authority, punishment for non-compliance, and a loss of self-determination and autonomy while activities within the institution were completed as a unit. The goals of the institution were ensured with no input regarding one's own fate because self-conceptions were replaced with those more suitable for group, and

individuals were passive and controlled (Naphan & Elliott, 2015). Many times, the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of the individuals who serve were not generally accepted in the world outside “the total institution” (Naphan & Elliott, 2015, p. 37). These roles were often embedded deep into the student veteran, essential to his or her service to our country, and were hard to change or let go (Naphan & Elliott, 2015). These concepts were supported by the research of Hamrick and Rumann (2012) in *Called to Serve: A Handbook on Student Veterans and Higher Education*, which showed a military culture that was deeply seeded into the individuals who served their country, where norms were identified, controlled, and enforced. Furthermore, the coerciveness of the military authority instilled obedience and discipline (Hamrick & Rumann, 2012).

Certain traits learned in military training were beneficial in the academic world (Olsen et al., 2014). The traits were “(a) self-discipline (b) leadership and teamwork abilities, and (c) possessing new perspectives and different/ valuable experience” (Olsen et al., 2014, p. 103), and Pacheco (2017) expanded this list to include time management, problem solving, public speaking, and determination. Regarding self-discipline, assets learned during military life were positive work ethic and time management and were applied to college life by submitting assignments in a timely fashion, allowing for sufficient time to prepare for exams, arriving to class on time, and working well with peers in group projects (Olsen et al., 2014). Traits related to leadership and teamwork abilities included communicating with subordinates and superiors in an effective manner, giving information in a precise manner and having responsibility over groups of people (Olsen et al., 2014). The unique experiences provided by the military allowed veterans to have different perspectives and insights in the classroom, which lead to a motivation for

excelling in many cases (Olsen et al., 2014). “Heightened maturity and goal commitment resulting from military service” provided student veterans with a tool not found in their traditional student counterpart (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010, p. 451), and the military helped this population of student perform better overall than their younger counterparts (Vacchi, 2012).

Hand in hand with the positive traits learned from the military experience came challenges in transitioning to civilian life and the academic world (Kurzynski, 2014). Nearly half of the veterans questioned said it was difficult to transition to civilian life, citing stress within family relationships, service-related illnesses, and feeling isolated because few understood the difficulties of the transitions (Kurzynski, 2014). Attempting to enter and navigate the world of academics with the “complicated, strictly regulated system to access VA education benefits” (Kurzynski, 2014, p. 183) was an additional stress factor (Kurzynski, 2014). Sullivan (2017) interviewed a student veteran who said “it’s like I left earth and went to a completely different planet” (Sullivan, 2017, p. 77). Vacchi (2012) discussed why student veterans experienced difficulties in transitioning from the military to academia, including a highly organized environment to a highly flexible one and the cultures of the two environments are indisputably different. Student veterans were accustomed to a more routine and customized approach to teaching that varies from the approach used on college campuses, which was often autonomous (Barry, Whiteman, & MacDermid Wadsworth, 2014). In addition, faculty varied in the approach to instruction, class requirements, grading, and instruction instead of the consistency of military evaluation (Barry et al., 2014). The unproductive and counter-productive habits on one’s youth were replaced with training and development in areas of leadership,

teamwork, and discipline under demanding circumstances, which instills in them that failure was not an option and it was unfavorable to be the weakest link (Vacchi, 2012). “Jeff”, a participant in a study on veterans, seemed “disconcerted initially about civilian independence compared to regimented military life” (Kurzynski, 2014, p. 153) and said even little decisions, such as what to wear each day, were simple while in the military as academic life presented various decisions a student veteran was not in the habit of making (Ness, Rocke, Harrist, & Vroman, 2014). Chronic hardships affected a student veteran’s self-esteem and, as a result, prevented changes being made for academic success (Semer & Harmening, 2015). The contrast of cultures between military and academics included the constant imposition of structure to structure being self-imposed, clear communication to subtle communication, and teamwork to individual success (Ritterbush, 2017).

The effects of the military life on the transition to college were documented in a qualitative study conducted by Naphan and Elliott (2015), who surveyed 11 student veterans who served since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The participants noted the military had broken them down and rebuilt them, de-individualized them, and made everyone equal with the same haircut, uniform, and basic possessions (Naphan & Elliott, 2015). Their tasks were accomplished with a team orientation and unit goals in mind. There were controls on one’s actions, to include expectations and punishments, and clear instructions were given on how to accomplish a task or mission (Naphan & Elliott, 2015). While in the military, there was often less freedom to choose one’s actions, but there was a greater level of responsibility in completing what was expected or instructed (Naphan & Elliott, 2015). Combat veterans had a sense of continuous danger, which was

often hard to relinquish even if there was no threat (Naphan & Elliott, 2015). They followed their training and often took part in “unacceptable” (Naphan & Elliott, 2015, p. 43) actions in the civilian world, for which they were often unfairly judged (Naphan & Elliott, 2015). Combat veterans may have had post-traumatic stress disorder, which made them hyper-vigilant, even when there was not a threat or the threat was less dangerous than it was seen as being (Naphan & Elliott, 2015). Post-traumatic stress disorder made it more difficult for combat veterans to connect with other students and to find fellow students who understand their experiences, making student veterans feel different and disconnected (Naphan & Elliott, 2015). One student veteran stated a traditional-aged student, learning of his military service, said “oh, my grandpa was in the Marines” (Garcia, 2017, p. 132), and the student veteran ended the conversation, feeling it was useless to attempt a connection (Garcia, 2017). Another veteran said the college experience excluded non-traditional students and based activities and experiences on traditional-aged students (Kappell, 2017). While college can be a time for traditional students to experiment with self-identity, having the opportunity to experiment in such a way was not provided to non-traditional students, especially student veterans with a wide array of life experiences (Jenner, 2017). Distancing oneself from traditional-aged peers was a frequent reaction, and one student veteran noted the immaturity and lack of focus for traditional students affected motivation, focus, and purpose (Garcia, 2017). The social connectedness of student veterans who served together, often “like wolf packs” (Naphan & Elliott, 2015, p.43) was lost in the academic world, and student veterans experienced feelings of being alone even with a nonmilitary support group (Naphan & Elliott, 2015). Open forums for student conversation was a way for military and nonmilitary students to

engage in conversation in a safe environment (Swords to plowshares releases findings on supports for student veterans, 2018, May 03).

Ritterbush (2017) concurred with the research of Naphan and Elliott (2015) in a qualitative study of 12 student veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Ritterbush (2017) stated, even with an investment of more than \$30 billion to aid veterans in a college degree, institutions often lacked an understanding of their unique needs and “a lack of established methods to collect the data needed to evaluate the return on investment” (Ritterbush, 2017, p. 34) existed. Student veterans were unsure of their path as civilians, because their lives in the military were planned and were unprepared for their entrance into the academic world (Ritterbush, 2017). A new civilian life was rewarding once challenges were overcome but the process of transitioning varied (Ritterbush, 2017). Student veterans reported core beliefs learned in the military, such as “following orders, respecting rank, and respecting formality” (Ritterbush, 2017, p. 75), did not mesh well with the culture on college campuses (Ritterbush, 2017). Not believing in defeat aided student veterans in the achievement of academic success, and they found support from family, community, and other veterans (Ritterbush, 2017). Student veterans reported often needing to readjust their expectations after they returned to school and admitted to not realizing how difficult the transition would be (Ritterbush, 2017).

The experiences and skills learned in the military created a “holistic view” (Hassan, Jackson, Lindsey, McCabe, & Sanders, 2010, p. 31) needed on college campuses (Hassan et al., 2010). Student veterans personified what institutions of higher education represent – new opportunity, hope for achievement, and stamina to reach one’s full capacity (Hassan et al., 2010). Student veterans often have lived all over the world,

had experienced different cultures, and had obtained training beyond what is typical for traditionally aged students (Hassan et al., 2010). Student veterans with combat experience were more likely to have stress-related illnesses (Renn & Reason, 2012) with approximately one-third of OIF and OEF veterans reporting a mental or cognitive challenge (Hitt et al., 2015), making them overrepresented among college students with disabilities (Renn & Reason, 2012).

For student veterans who had disabilities or injuries, which affected the transition to life on a college campus, there was hesitation to seek help was identified in two symposia as a partnership of the National Veterans Center, the HSC Foundation, and George Washington University's Graduate School of Education and Human Development's Department of Counseling and Human Development (Whitley et al., 2013). Part of the culture within the military was "strength and self-reliance" (Whitley et al., 2013, p. 10), which made it difficult for student veterans to ask for assistance (Whitley et al., 2013). Several obstacles exist in the minds of the student veterans, such as viewing the need for help as failure, not realizing help is needed, and the associated stigma prevented them from requesting much needed help (Whitley et al., 2013). For some student veterans, it was easier to withdraw from class than to ask for help or seek services (Mackiewicz, 2018). Student veterans may not have known resources existed on campus to assist them, and they may not have thought their struggles were "severe enough" (Whitley et al., 2013, p. 10) to benefit from assistance (Whitley et al., 2013). Reaching out for help may be viewed as a personal failure or weakness or may have included sharing details of mental illness or other injuries, often not obvious by sight, which make them feel uncomfortable (Whitley et al., 2013). If a student veteran reached

out for help from on campus resources, staff may not be trained to handle many of the issues faced by this specific student population. Counseling services and similar assistance may be short-lived if the student veteran does not feel a connection with them (Whitley et al., 2013).

Life for student veterans transitioning to the academic world from the vastly different military work was often difficult (Cole & Kim, 2013). Moore (2017) agreed it was difficult but added education was often key in transitioning from the military to civilian world. Cole and Kim (2013) studied undergraduate student veterans at four-year institutions and found ways in which they differed from their traditionally-aged counterparts. The differences sometimes were a barrier to academic success in addition to the transition from the military culture (Cole & Kim, 2013). Student veterans in this study were more likely to be male and first-generation students (Cole & Kim, 2013). They possessed fewer resources and were more likely to need academic support; family and work were more likely to cause challenges to their achieving academic success (Cole & Kim, 2013). They had less time to invest in leisure time, which was often a stress reliever, but spent more time commuting to school and working an off campus (Cole & Kim, 2013). Student veterans were somewhat more likely to describe relationships with faculty and administration as friendly and supportive but less likely to say the same about relationships with fellow students (Cole & Kim, 2013).

Hitt et al. (2015) researched student veterans who recently separated from the military and the preparedness of institutions of higher education in the state of Indiana. They found student veterans tended to be 24 years old or older, felt unprepared and unsure of themselves, and believed their military experience made them very different

from their traditional counterparts (Hitt et al., 2015). Sullivan's (2017) research supported this notion with a respondent who said military students and non-military traditional students were from "two different worlds" (Sullivan, 2017, p. 102) and differing life experiences made it difficult to connect. Supporting the findings of Cole and Kim (2013), student veterans played multiple roles, including student and parent or spouse, which often contributed to overload and additional stress and, in turn, affected retention and degree achievement (Hitt et al., 2015). Many student veterans have a "complicated blend of academic, social, family, and cultural challenges" (Hitt et al., 2015, p. 538). Kurzynski (2014) found nearly half of the veterans studied said it was difficult to transition to civilian life because of stress within family relationships, service-related illnesses, and feeling isolated because few understood the difficulties of the transitions. In addition, attempting to enter and navigate the world of academics was an additional stress factor (Kurzynski, 2014) and feeling "anything less than perfect meant that they were less than successful" (Wygmans, 2016, p. 172).

Using the information and guidance provided by the institution, the student veteran could adapt to the culture of academia and transition to a nonevent (Semer & Harmening, 2015). How an institution provided this guidance to the student veteran can be determined by considering the four student typologies added by the research of Braxton (2011): (a) ambivalent, (b) skeptic, (c) emerging, and (d) fulfilled civilian self. Renn and Reason (2012) found the "role incongruities" to be a barrier as the transition is made from military to academic life while Naphan and Elliott (2015) found, following military separation, stressors emerged with changes in values, norms, and expectations as the "old" of the military was replaced with the "new" of civilian life. The ambivalent

student makes no claim to the military identity but has not adopted a new identity and does not see the need to adapt to the new environment of higher education and academic life (Braxton, 2011). This type of student veteran may feel misunderstood and uncommitted (Braxton, 2011). If a college professional is unable to help this type student “move toward identity exploration” (Braxton, 2011, p. 62), then the student is likely to leave the institution before obtaining a degree (Braxton, 2011). Skeptics cling to the identity provided by their military service with no reason to explore any others because it has served them well while enlisted (Braxton, 2011). The time spent to achieve a degree was seen as “a straightaway process where job training and vocational preparation are paramount” (Braxton, 2011, p. 63), where the military identity is necessary, but, if changes are not made, the student veteran can become frustrated when the old identity fails to serve them as anticipated (Braxton, 2011). The “emerging” student realized the old military culture was not the best in this new environment of academic life, but there has not been a commitment to make a change (Braxton, 2011). Struggles were likely when a new friendship may replace the camaraderie of the military or when a new experience replaces the often-authoritarian military experience, and “culture shock” (Braxton, 2011, p. 64) may result (Braxton, 2011). Assistance from college officials is vital to help this type student establish a “meaning and purpose” (Braxton, 2011, p. 64) after the military (Braxton, 2011). The military student who has established relationships with fellow students and other new contacts and has renewed connections with family and friends from prior to the military has made great strides in becoming a fulfilled civilian self (Braxton, 2011). While aspects of the military remain part of life, they are well-balanced with dimensions of the civilian world (Braxton, 2011). These students

have worked through the process of transitioning and most often achieve their academic goals (Braxton, 2011).

The opportunity to play a role in the transition to academia, the achievement of a college degree, and the success in the civilian world for a student veteran is available for colleges and universities life after military service (Hitt et al., 2015). After performing duties, often dangerous and difficult on behalf of their country, educated student veterans can generate “substantial new intellectual capital that will be invested in communities across the nation” (Hitt et al., 2015, p. 548). As First Lady Michelle Obama stated regarding the military, “We must do everything in our power to honor them by supporting them, not just by words but also by deeds” (Hitt et al., 2015, p. 548). Institutions of higher learning are certainly not exempt from this charge and, in fact, can have a great impact by providing the support needed in the academic environment (Hitt et al., 2015). Mackiewicz (2018) stated institutions can address the needs of student veterans by providing services, which increase the likelihood of retention and graduation, a desire of many servicemembers who enlist to secure employment and improve their societal status (Wygmans, 2016).

Higher Education Institutional Resources

Executive Order 13607 established the Principles of Excellence, guidelines by which higher education institutions followed to serve student veterans in an appropriate way (Obama, 2012). For institutions to receive funding from educational benefits programs, the institution was required to provide certain information to the student veteran while not aggressively pursuing the veteran regarding admission and enrollment (Bordley-Hughes, 2018). The student veteran was provided with information regarding

the total cost of attendance, various financial aid options, including an estimation of student loan debt, graduation rates, and other information needed to compare institutions of interest (Bordley-Hughes, 2018). In addition, the institution's role is to educate the student veteran regarding the options of funding an education and to avoid aggressive or deceitful recruiting techniques (Bordley-Hughes, 2018). The programs offered to student veterans are best when accredited and accommodations are made when a student is required to delay studies while fulfilling military duties with any withdrawals during a term being processed in accordance with the rules associated with Title IV refunds (Bordley-Hughes, 2018). It is a best practice for each institution to have a point of contact for student veterans to connect with in discussing educational and career options (Bordley-Hughes, 2018). The purpose of the legislation was to protect the student veteran and the investment of taxpayers for educational benefits (Bordley-Hughes, 2018). A complaint system was added in 2014 to assist student veterans who experienced situations in violation of the legislation (U. S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2014).

The Eight Keys of Veterans' Success was an aspirational list supported by the U.S. Department of Education instead of mandated actions from national legislation (Kirk, 2014). The goals were centered around trust, connectedness, support, consistency, and documentation for student veterans (Baker, 2013). The goals include (Baker, 2013, para. 3-10):

1. Create a culture of trust and connectedness across the campus community to promote well-being and success for veterans.
2. Ensure consistent and sustained support from campus leadership.

3. Implement an early alert system to ensure all veterans receive academic, career, and financial advice before challenges become overwhelming.
4. Coordinate and centralize campus efforts for all veterans, together with the creation of a designated space (even if limited in size).
5. Collaborate with local communities and organizations, including government agencies, to align and coordinate various services for veterans.
6. Utilize a uniform set of data tools to collect and track information on veterans, including demographics, retention and degree completion.
7. Provide comprehensive professional development for faculty and staff on issues and challenges unique to veterans.
8. Develop systems that ensure sustainability of effective practices for veterans.

Sustaining these programs and points of support was vital for the long-term success of student veterans at the institutions of their choosing (Baker, 2013; Mackiewicz, 2018). This type of success was seen as a step required for a successful life and a means to acquire intelligence, skills, and money (Wygmans, 2016).

Ever since the veterans of World War II entered academia, there was a focus on their transition from military life (Ritchie, 1945). While Ritchie understood the importance for each university to accommodate the needs of the student veterans and each would be unique, he also found the institution had a responsibility for assisting the veteran in adjusting to academia and related career pursuits. The veterans studied by DiRamio et al. (2008) did not feel campuses were prepared for potential student veterans coming to campus with physical or mental disabilities or hardships, noting an insufficient number of handicap parking spaces and staffing for those with Post Traumatic Stress

Disorder (PTSD) or anger issues (DiRamio et al., 2008). In addition, even though enrollment in higher education can be linked to the patterns of military deployment and the return of veterans (Tull, Kuk, & Dalpes, 2014), Barry et al. (2014) stated the Post 9/11 GI Bill had allowed a greater number of veterans to enter the world of higher education than ever before but indicated this population of students had “unique challenges” (Barry et al., 2014, p. 571). The researchers further concluded institutions of higher education were not prepared to construct strategies to assist student veterans in a successful transition (Barry et al., 2014). Walburn (2017) agreed and stated colleges and universities continued to struggle to improve progression and retention in understanding the needs of student veterans, which are not only diverse among themselves but also different than traditional students. The findings of “The Path Forward” stated transitioning from the military is a lifelong process (Swords to plowshares releases findings on supports for student veterans, 2018, May 03).

With the creation of the Post 9/11 GI Bill as a means for the country to better serve its veterans and to appreciate the associated sacrifice, higher education institutions were also considering how they may be able to best serve veterans seeking an education (Field et al., 2008), something they were unable to do in the Vietnam era (DiRamio et al., 2008). The ACE conducted a conference in 2008 to identify best practices and to learn about the needs of serving the student veteran population (Field et al., 2008). Even before legislation was enacted, some schools were planning special orientation sessions and priority enrollment periods and had designed targeted counseling programs (Field et al., 2008) because they knew there was much to learn within the administration at institutions to ease transition and improve the chances of academic success with the directed services

and programs available to student veterans (McBain et al., 2012). DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) reported about how institutions moved to serve the influx of student veterans to college campuses with the passage of the legislation.

Each institution had the option of deciding how it would assist in the transition to academic life. Other researchers summarized the transitional issues of student veterans on college campuses as maturity, camaraderie, and college experience and stated transition was aided by providing resources addressing these issues (Green, Dawson-Fend, Hayden, Crews, & Painter, 2016). Specific needs could be addressed, and the impact of barriers could be greatly reduced (Renn & Reason, 2012) because even with the skills learned in the military, student veterans often struggled academically (Semer & Harmening, 2015). Mackiewicz (2018) said the challenges student veterans experience while transitioning to the academic world – social, financial, emotional, academic, or psychological – can impact their ability to progress to graduation. While some challenges of transitioning may not be directly linked to the academic world, institutions are in the position to “intervene and respond” (Swords to plowshares releases findings on supports for student veterans, 2018, May 03, para. 4). Naphan and Elliott (2015) suggested institutions begin with policies and practices, which would aid in transition from military to civilian life, given the levels of control, authority, and cohesion vary between the military and higher education and there can be challenges in expectations, environment, and self-identity. The military life provided more structure and more responsibility than life as a student, and the military provided clear guidelines and punishment while in academic life, instructions can be vague and open-ended and students have to navigate the system by oneself (Naphan & Elliott, 2015). Once in the classroom, while some student veterans

were less academically engaged (Hitt et al., 2015), many student veterans took class work more seriously as to not disappoint the taxpayers who were funding their education. They were also often more engaged in the classroom than traditional students (Naphan & Elliott, 2015) but often less engaged in activities outside the classroom (Hamrick & Rumann, 2012) and have difficulty understanding the disrespect and lack of commitment by the traditionally aged counterparts (Naphan & Elliott, 2015).

The actions to assist in the academic success of student veterans were widespread, and, in the support structures for student veterans, three themes emerged on how institutions of higher education could help student veterans' transition into academic life and, therefore, achieve greater success (Griffin, 2015). The themes included (a) personnel and services, (b) institutional structures, and (c) social and cultural support (Griffin, 2015). In relation to personnel and services, someone with an understanding of a veteran's concerns and issues was able to offer assistance and connect them with services (Griffin, 2015). Sponsler et al. (2013) found institutions were responding to the unique needs of the veteran population with approximately three-fourths of the responding institutions has a specific staff person or department to serve student veterans.

In a study, a veteran named Amy expressed a challenge faced by many veterans (Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015). Aiming to complete school in four semesters, Amy enrolled with at least 18 credit hours each term and was completely overwhelmed (Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015). However, her struggle to complete her classes successfully was mostly because no one ever advised to take fewer credit hours (Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015). It has been suggested that validation for the veteran resulted in greater

academic success (Elfman, 2015) and institutional policies and procedures, which benefited and supported veteran services and benefits were needed (Griffin, 2015).

Regarding social and cultural support, it was vital for veteran specific groups to exist and provide an opportunity for quality relationships with other veterans to be created (Griffin, 2015). Mentoring, virtual and face-to-face, was a possible social and cultural support with a positive impact (Cass & Hammond, 2015; Swords to Plowshares releases findings on supports for student veterans, 2018, May 03). Online mentoring provided this service to student veterans who were unable to spend extended time on campus while still providing motivation and guidance (Mackiewicz, 2018). Eric, a veteran and graduate of Harvard University, said many of his accomplishments would not have been possible without his mentor, Dan (Rodriquez, 2015, para. 15). Middle Tennessee State University began a peer to peer mentoring program when they realized student veterans may perform poorly and not be retained (Porter, 2015). Peer support can help student veterans through stressors and potentially distressing memories related to one's military service (Swords to plowshares releases findings on supports for student veterans, 2018, May 03). Personal struggles, such as financial hardships or an undiagnosed mental health issue instead of academic difficulty, may impact retention with some student veterans (Porter, 2015). Also, American Corporate Partners (ACP) had brought mentoring to many student veterans with a yearlong connection with business leaders from across the nation (Roney, 2016). ACP provided transitioning veterans with someone to hold them accountable, to provide guidance, connection, and ideas, and to be a cheerleader (Roney, 2016).

Efforts within higher education needed to support increased “veteran enrollment, persistence, and completion rates” (Steele, 2015, p. 63) included measures to make a college degree more affordable with waivers for tuition and fees and to assist in student success with tutoring and support services (Steele, 2015). When benefits under Post 9/11 GI Bill originated, veterans preferred for-profit institutions and nonprofit community colleges because these campuses catered to their needs and had greater convenience (Field et al., 2008), but, in 2016, Hill (2016) found few transitional services were offered to student veterans at for-profit institutions. However, Hill (2016) learned student veterans appeared satisfied with the support offered at community college even though a “wide disparity” (Evans et al., 2015, p. 53) existed between how community colleges provided it (Evans et al., 2015). Ways in which student veterans were supported included state initiatives, on campus support, and means to apply credits earned through military training (Evans et al., 2015). The means for a college or university to aid veterans was perfected and basic information regarding retention, graduation, and employment contained gaps (Knapp, 2013). Sponsler et al. (2013) noted about one-third of institutions in their research disaggregated retention and completions rates for student veterans, independently of rates for the general student population, making assessment of transitional resources difficult to determine, and two-thirds of responding institutions with no specific data on retention and completion of student veterans. Additionally, only 25% were aware of the causes for stop outs or dropouts for military students (Sponsler et al., 2013). Nevertheless, Meyer (2009) noted the changes needed to serve veterans on college campuses have significant costs, which could yield even more significant dividends. Colleges and universities have “an obligation and an opportunity in the years

ahead to achieve even greater success by doing what our veterans have done on our behalf for years: listen, improvise, persevere, and lead” (Knapp, 2013, p. 33).

Research has shown student veterans benefited from “veteran-centric” support mechanisms and the importance of such programs, on and off campus (Norman et al. 2015). A study of 31 veterans attending community colleges and four-year universities published in the *Journal of Rehabilitation Research and Development* reported participants felt they lacked the skills to be successful in an academic setting but positive experiences were noted when a campus provided support (Norman et al., 2015). Some school VA centers provided assistance with even seemingly simple tasks, such as taking notes and preparing for tests (Norman et al., 2015). A generic approach did not appear to exist, but veterans found comfort in seeing a culture of military support on campus, such as flying the U.S. flag (Norman et al., 2015). Having a variety of support programs was noted as being able to increase the rates of academic success for student veterans as well as remaining sensitive to their needs as they progressed through their educational careers and adjusting accordingly (Norman et al., 2015). To demonstrate the work being done to aid in the transition of student veterans, Schiavone and Gentry (2014) found almost two-thirds of the schools surveyed offered directed services and another nine percent were adding such services as part of their strategic plan. Naphan and Elliott (2015) found institutions can provide student services, such as assistance in securing educational benefits, removing the stigma for seeking help, providing academic advising, and employing processes that are military friendly. Sponsler et al. (2013) stated efforts to assist student veterans were “most effective when guided by timely and accurate data” while Moore (2017) stated research to identify how services benefit student veterans and

how to develop resources that are impactful for the student veteran population are needed. Osagie (2016) found student veterans often had cumulative grade point averages near the grade point averages of traditional students when there was high engagement, particularly with advisors, faculty members outside the classroom, and other students.

The ACE standardized much of the review of military training for academic credit (Snead & Anderson, 2010) and some military occupations (Varsalona, 2016), which allowed institutions to more easily award credit based on military training and occupation (Snead & Anderson, 2010). Military students received academic credit when military training closely mirrored that provided in the college classroom (Snead & Anderson, 2010). Using teams of faculty members to evaluate the military training and following a stringent review process, ACE recommended academic credit for military courses and some military experiences or occupations on the JST so institutions can award academic credit consistently (Varsalona, 2016). Other means of providing credit to veterans to hasten their academic objectives included credit through exam, often through College Level Examination Program (CLEP), or portfolio submission, which allowed documentation of learning through experiences in a professional environment versus the classroom (Snead & Anderson, 2010). McBain et al. (2012) found three-fourths of surveyed schools indicated they awarded military credit, which supported 2010 CAEL findings (Brigham & Klein-Collins, 2010). Reviewing military transcripts and awarding credit where it is appropriate, as with other methods of PLA, assist student veterans in progressing more quickly and earning a degree more often than when these credits were not (Klein-Collins, 2010). Over 70% of the student veterans surveyed answered military credit was important (Accamando, 2017).

Student veterans needed assistance in maneuvering through paperwork and processes (Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011). When entering an academic environment, the bureaucracy of paperwork and various integrating processes could be a deterrent for student veterans (Mackiewicz, 2018). The assistance needed could be achieved through multiple positions at the college or university but often the role is played by the school certifying official (Rumann et al., 2011). Many times, when this role is fulfilled by the certifying official, this position is viewed by student veterans as a “support during their transition.... and not simply as the person certifying their enrollment” (Rumann et al., 2011, p. 56). A school may identify themselves as being military friendly but having someone to assist in working through the bureaucracy of the academic world provides this claim with some substance (Rumann et al., 2011; Swords to plowshares releases findings on supports for student veterans, 2018, May 03). Piland (2018) reported dedicated staff to serve student veterans played a vital role in the success of student veterans. Accamando (2017) found all survey participants either agreed or strongly agreed a dedicated staff as being valuable. The certifying official at an institution is a position mandated for each campus by the Department of Veterans Affairs (Daly & Fox Garrity, 2013). Nevertheless, the duties of this position can vary from the basic federal requirements to an advocate for student veterans (Daly & Fox Garrity, 2013). Jones (2013) found a veteran who stated it was difficult to gather admissions documents, adding the institution did not have a person to assist him. He and others expressed how additional assistance for veterans is often needed in transitioning to the academic life (Jones, 2013). Having a central point of contact charges one who can work to meet the needs of the student veterans and help them make the best of their educational benefits

(Reynolds, 2013). First impressions matter to student veterans and sensing support from their initial experience on the campus leads to a more satisfying experience (Swords to plowshares releases findings on supports for student veterans, 2018, May 03). However, some veterans did not find the support or guidance they needed from the certifying official who were unresponsive, but, even at institutions with certifying officials who diligently work to help student veterans, resources and training was often limited (Swords to plowshares releases findings on supports for student veterans, 2018, May 03).

On campus support may come in the form of student organizations or offices to support the needs of transitioning veterans (Kirchner, 2015). Student Veterans of America (SVA), founded in 2008, support and provide a means for student veterans to connect with one another, an opportunity research suggests is desirable (Kirchner, 2015). The main goal of such groups focus on easing transition to civilian life (Summerlot, Green & Parker, 2009) with less isolation (Rumann et al., 2011) and on connecting with other veterans, which increases the likelihood of persistence, achievement, and self-esteem (Astin, 2011). Therefore, many campuses used military student organizations as a launching point for veterans new to the academic environment (Kirchner, 2015). Brewer (2016) learned, while connecting with other veterans was important for camaraderie, it was not always a substitute for one's military unit.

A specific lounge for social support was another best practice for student veterans (Elfman, 2015), with nearly 20% of schools have such a space (Queen & Lewis, 2014). According to USG Director of Military Affairs Director Dr. David Snow (D. Snow, personal communication, September 23, 2017), 90% of USG institutions have a designated space for student veterans. Student veterans benefit from having the

opportunity and space to connect with other military students and receive comfort in the support of others like themselves, allowing them to cope more easily with the misunderstanding and stereotypes of civilians and to moderate the emotional struggle of transitioning (Naphan & Elliott, 2015). Piland (2018) found a designated space played a fundamental role in academic success, providing them with much needed camaraderie and motivation to persist. A lounge allows student veterans to have the same social interaction that traditional students have in usual congregating spaces (Mackiewicz, 2018).

According to Osborne (2014), a supportive classroom environment is a component, which aids in academic success while veterans bring great depth to the classroom with their life experiences and “advanced professional backgrounds” (Osborne, 2014, p. 249). When faculty monitored distractions, such as outbursts and loud noises, a more acceptable environment was created for student veterans (Sinski, 2012). Breaking down assignments for student veterans in a way that is similar to military training would be helpful (Pacheco, 2017). Faculty members who do not have military experience often contributed to the many labels given to today’s veterans, assuming brain injury, violent tendencies, and PTSD plague all veterans and undermine their ability to transition easily into the academic world (Osborne, 2014). Almost three-fourths of the student veterans surveyed by Accamando (2017) thought training for faculty and staff was influential or very influential. Without supportive and understanding faculty members, student veterans were more hesitant than other students to interact one-on-one with faculty members (Osborne, 2014). Faculty and staff training demonstrated to student veterans they are valued on campus and the institution desired to make their transition

easier (Layne, 2016). Training regarding the military student is important, not only for faculty but also for staff and other students to aid in disproving some stereotypes for student veterans (Barry et al., 2014). Instead of focusing on mental or emotional disabilities, which can divide, training would facilitate acceptance, connection, and understanding (Barry et al., 2014) and role-playing within virtual settings helped faculty, staff, and non-military students interact with student veterans in an appropriate manner (Cate & Albright, 2014). Training could allow faculty to be aware of symptoms experienced by some student veterans when they fail to self-disclose a disability (Sullivan, 2017). However, when disabilities needed accommodations, faculty and disability offices should have established channels of communication to ensure student veteran assistance and compliance with federal legislation (Swords to plowshares releases findings on supports for student veterans, 2018, May 03).

With resources, the academic achievements of student veterans can be equal to, if not better than, traditional students, but other obligations often create barriers to being able to use the resources available. Hitt et al. (2015) found many institutions were unprepared for serving this population, with Semer and Harmening (2015) in agreement, and there was a need to assimilate information and practices. The expectations and culture in the college environment, different than to what the student veteran is accustomed, are viewed as inconsistent with the policies of colleges and universities seen as “unclear and capricious” (Hitt et al., 2015, p. 538). Barriers were often created by disparities and feeling unsupported, so services were targeted to the needs of this population as support increased the likelihood of success (Hitt et al., 2015). According to Mackiewicz (2018), student veterans prospered at institutions that were “devoted to

providing the best level of support systems comprehensively designed to assist this unique population” (Mackiewicz, 2018, p. 38) to include support academically, socially, and psychologically (Mackiewicz, 2018).

Moon and Schma (2011) discussed how Western Michigan University approached serving its student veterans in better ways. After a 43% increase in enrollment for this population, the university took several steps in anticipating and meeting the needs of these students (Moon & Schma, 2011). A campus-wide “System of Care” was implemented where support was identified and provided for veterans with obstacles that could affect academic success (Moon & Schma, 2011). In addition, the university created a student organization to support help them connect with other students like themselves. An orientation was planned to ensure they were connected to key people on campus to assist them and were aware of information specific to them (Higgerson, 2017), such as assistance from local VA Offices for transitional issues, financial assistance the first semester of college, and mentoring from faculty and staff (Moon & Schma, 2011). Western Michigan University continued to support student veterans despite the obstacles of starting such programs because it created university pride to welcome and provide services to support student veterans (Moon & Schma, 2011).

McBain et al. (2012) reassessed campus programs in 2012 after an initial survey in 2009. The purpose of the survey was to determine how prepared institutions of higher learning were to serve students receiving educational benefits under the Post 9/11 GI Bill in comparison to the earlier survey, following revisions in the legislation in 2010 (McBain et al., 2012). From the 24% response rate of the 2,916 institutions that received the survey, there were increases found for institutions, which provided services and

programs specifically for veterans and other military service members with this population of student being targeted in the recruitment plan with increased enrollment of student veterans since the initial survey (McBain et al., 2012). Two-year and four-year public institutions remained more likely to have military specific programs than their private counterparts, although there was “great diversity” (McBain et al., 2012, p. 8) in how the specific programs were implemented (McBain et al., 2012). Services and programs specific for this group of students were more likely at institutions with a greater population of military students, but institutions with smaller populations had a focus on counseling for military students, military specific committees, and recruitment of veterans (McBain et al., 2012). At institutions where a dedicated department was provided for military and student veterans, the institutions were more likely to play a role in these efforts as well as providing training opportunities for the faculty and staff for the transitional needs of this population (McBain et al., 2012). Institutions of all types saw challenges in “finances, retention/degree completion, and social acculturation to campus” (McBain et al., 2012, p. 10) for military students (McBain et al., 2012).

Findings in the 2012 survey found the main emphasis was recruiting and outreach to military personnel as potential students and the development of specific military programs on campus (McBain et al., 2012). Following was the institution having a webpage specific for military students to provide pertinent information to this population (McBain et al., 2012). Providing training for faculty and staff on military related issues was surprisingly reported by less than half of the institutions, but 69% reported having staff who was specifically trained to assist in the transitioning to academic life, an increase of 17% from the 2009 survey (McBain et al., 2012). Flexible availability of

classes was important for military students for ease of obtaining one's academic goals (McBain et al., 2012). Evening and online options are the most popular and, a new question to the 2012 survey pertaining to hybrid classes where there was a blend of face-to-face and online class interaction was added; weekend classes lost some popularity but remains an important option (McBain et al., 2012). Further, a supportive withdrawal policy can assist students who are deployed or mobilized in leaving and returning to the institutions and was provided by 82% of the responding institutions (McBain et al., 2012). However, the ease of the re-enrollment process had less support at 28% , regardless of the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA), section 484(c), which mandates service members be readmitted without a change in one's academic status (McBain et al., 2012). Other areas growing support in the 2012 survey include an orientation specific for veterans or military students, a designated military space to relax, and assistance with transitioning to campus life, and military specific tutoring programs (McBain et al., 2012). The availability of counseling services directly related to PTSD, depression, stress, and anxiety remained a high priority for responding institutions as well as military sexual trauma, which was a new question on the 2012 survey (McBain et al., 2012). However, if a student veteran did reach out for help from on campus resources, staff may not be trained to handle many of the issues faced by this specific student population and counseling services and similar assistance may be short-lived if the student veteran does not feel a connection with them (Whitley et al., 2013).

Fifty-five percent of responding schools in 2012 had a trained staff member to assist veterans with physical disabilities, up from 33% 2009, and only 36% of the responding schools indicated having a designated person to assist veterans with brain

injuries, up from 23% in 2009 (McBain et al., 2012). The researchers provided a possible explanation as schools have comprehensive plans for all students but noted the need for these targeted services for military students (McBain et al., 2012). Colleges may have student veterans who need counseling beyond the scope of the services offered at the institution and almost 90% coordinate services with off-campus services and 71% now make referrals directly to the Veterans Administration, up 16% from the 2009 survey (McBain et al., 2012). Veterans connecting with others through student organizations grew among responding schools from 32% in 2009 to 68% in 2012 (McBain et al., 2012). Collete and Davila-Carranza (2014) learned the support from other veterans was found to be important in the transitioning process, reducing the stress of transitioning. In addition to student organizations, likewise, there was substantial growth in the availability of mentoring programs, up from 18% in 2009 to 42% in 2012 (McBain et al., 2012). Other more targeted groups of support, such as support groups for female veterans or dependents of deceased veterans, were growing slightly in popularity on college campuses (McBain et al., 2012).

Even with sufficient staff and training, institutions may lack a general understanding or knowledge of the services they offer campus wide. Hitt et al. (2015) surveyed 91 institutions of higher education in the state of Indiana and 77 of them responded. After finding literature that suggested there were unmet needs and no standardized support, the researchers planned to gather information on the availability of specific supports for student veterans in Indiana (Hitt et al., 2015). The goal was to see the experience of prospective student veterans with the nature and quality of their interaction with institutions and to learn what resources were available at each institution

(Hitt et al., 2015). To collect data, the main number of the campus was called to front line staff, and the caller posed as a potential student who was a veteran. The survey included 11 questions pertaining to admissions, financial aid, academic affairs, and student services, and the possible responses were *yes*, *no*, *maybe*, *don't know*, and *case by case* decision (Hitt et al., 2015). In some cases, to collect all the answers, up to 12 calls or transfers were required. The responses of the front line staff were documented and compiled for each institution, and the same questions were sent to college administrators for their responses (Hitt et al., 2015). When the results were compared, there was disparity among the responses of front line staff and administrators with staff consistently reporting the availability of services less often than administrators, and the researchers questioned if the staff was uninformed or if the administration was optimistic (Hitt et al., 2015).

Public and private nonprofit institutions were found to reduce barriers to admissions most often, and more services were reported by staff at institutions with graduate programs and by administrators at large or public institutions, but only one-third of the institutions offered all the supports inquired about in the survey (Hitt et al., 2015). Institutions with multiple campuses were found to have considerable discontinuity of services and policies while larger, public institutions or institutions with graduate programs most often had a designated contact person for veterans or offered specific disability services (Hitt et al., 2015). The researchers determined the finding supported the idea that generally most institutions, not just in Indiana but across the country, are not prepared to assist student veterans in the way they need. The researchers encouraged colleges and universities to do more than apply military service for physical education

and to offer support which may be “off the grid” (Hitt et al., 2015, p. 545) for the typical traditional student (Hitt et al., 2015). Recommendations from this study included transition assistance for veterans, awareness training for faculty and staff, services for hidden and visible disabilities or injuries, opportunity for making connections with other veterans, and expedited admissions processing (Hitt et al., 2015). Having a single point of contact was determined to be the most pertinent strategy for serving this population of students. One stop or first stop offices combined important support for transitioning veterans and consistent information regarding policies, procedures, and services (Hitt et al., 2015). Tull, Kuk, and Dalpes (2014) concurred with Hamrick and Rumann (2012) that transitioning students would go to a trusted staff or faculty member for guidance in navigating the various components of higher education, and they would establish a connection on campus prior to enrollment and would need more detailed information about campus navigation than other students. Osagie (2016) added an office of this type helped veterans more easily access resources. Representatives from across campus collaborating on behalf of student veterans helps create more awareness of the assets and challenges of student veterans and helps coordinate services for academic success, degree completion, and gainful employment (Hitt et al., 2015; Higgerson, 2017). An orientation for student veterans is an opportunity to provide specific information to them, to aid in social connections with others like themselves, and to learn how to eliminate some of the barriers associated with entering college (Higgerson, 2017; Swords to Plowshares releases findings on supports for student veterans, 2018, May 03). System-wide continuity is ideal as it reduces the “fragmentation of services” (Hitt et al., 2015, p. 545), and collectively determines which policies, procedures, and support systems have

greatest impact, what efforts are most costly, and what support strategies are most cost effective (Hitt et al., 2015).

The research of Hamrick and Rumann (2012) supported many of the recommendations from the Indiana study by Hitt et al. (2015). They outlined conditions for success as including specific points of contact, education efforts for faculty and staff pertaining to specific veteran issues, streamlining disability services for student veterans, and collaborative efforts with community organizations as a means of providing an extension of services beyond the services available on campus (Hamrick & Rumann, 2012). Additional resources to aid in the success of student veterans were the production of a handbook to give insight to the campus community about the common transitional issues. The researchers found peer-to-peer mentoring whether student to student or faculty/staff to student (Hamrick & Rumann, 2012). Institutions of higher learning can assist student veterans who are returning to or entering academic life (Renn & Reason, 2012). Money (2016) proposed a transition course to teach student veterans about educational benefits, career counseling and options, and application of military credit.

Concept Analysis Chart

Key studies researched during the literature review are shown in the concept analysis chart, identified as Table 1. The review aided in identifying gaps in the literature and developing the research questions regarding the transitional resources available to student veterans at USG of Georgia institutions.

Table 1

Concept Analysis Chart

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/ Analysis	Outcomes
Garcia (2017)	Explore the transitional experiences of student veterans who leveraged their Post 9/11 G.I. Bill.	20 student veterans	Qualitative: Interview, purposeful samplings	Themes included developing self, solidifying personal identity, managing the transition, and racing against time.
Norman et al. (2015)	Explore student veterans' perceived facilitators and barriers to achieving academic goals.	31 student veterans	Mixed methods— Quantitative: Questionnaire Qualitative: Focus groups and interviews	Reintegration problems were positively correlated with symptoms of PTSD, anxiety/depression, and lower quality of life, which were all positively correlated to one another. Six umbrella codes, including positive/negative person, institution positive/negative, and policy positive/negative, were found.
McBain, Kim, Cook, and Snead (2012)	Update 2009 survey assessing programs and services for veterans in the first year of the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill.	690 schools	Qualitative: Survey	To serve the growing student veteran population, institutions need to consider scholarships, refund policies for deployments, veterans-specific academic support, counseling, military credit, additional outreach, programmatic changes and delays in the payment of benefits and overpayments by the VA.

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/ Analysis	Outcomes
Pellegrino and Hogan (2015)	Learn about two female veterans' transition to a community college.	Two female veterans	Qualitative: Semi-structured interview	Despite delays with VA benefits, both participants were full-time students, wanted a college degree to set an example for their children, and gave credit to the military for their organizational and time management skills. They had mixed feelings about their faculty interactions. Their transition to college may be similar to a nonveteran's transition in a chosen career change.
Barry, Whiteman, and Wadsworth (2014)	Determine whether posttraumatic stress (PTS) symptoms are associated with problem drinking, as well as academic correlates among military-affiliated and civilian students.	78 combat-exposed student service members/veterans, 53 noncombat-exposed student service members/veterans, 38 ROTC students, and 79 civilian students	Quantitative: Survey	Military students exposed to combat-related trauma reported significantly higher symptoms of PTS than other military and civilian groups. The number of institutions providing veterans-specific programs and services increased.
Cole and Kim (2013)	Explore how students at a similar stage of life manage college and university life and education.	2,505 student veterans/service members and 88,000 nonveteran/civilian students who were enrolled full-time at 132 institutions	Quantitative: Survey	Student veterans and service members are likely to state that they have a supportive relationship with faculty and staff, but relationships with other students are less likely to be stated as supportive. They also are more likely than nonveteran and civilian students to report lower gains as students.
Brigham and Klein-Collins (2010)	Learn about the availability and use of prior learning	88 community colleges	Quantitative	Most colleges have a PLA program that is not used by many students, so many

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/ Analysis	Outcomes
	assessment (PLA).			institutions do not plan to expand it.
Cate and Albright (2014)	Assess the effectiveness of faculty/staff training.	758 faculty, staff, and administrators from 20 four-year colleges or universities and four community colleges	Quasi-experimental post-hoc	Training was shown to be effective with significant and sustained increases in gatekeeper behaviors and military cultural competency among participants.
Collette and Davila-Carranza (2014)	Improve understanding of the challenges student veterans face when transferring from community colleges to California State University, Sacramento.	80 students agreed to participate from a sample of 81 students. 70 students fully completed the survey.	Quantitative: Survey using structured questions with a mix of qualitative and quantitative closed-ended questions	Obstacles for students often included credit transfer, faculty and peer interaction, problems during orientation, family responsibilities, financial hardship, and poor coping skills. Top services reported were priority registration, a full-time representative on campus, and a higher level of VA administrative processes and veteran representatives at the institution.
Jones (2013)	Describe and understand the identity development of student veterans as they transition from the military to higher education.	Three student veterans attending college full-time	Phenomenological: in-depth interview focusing on experiences and worldviews	Adapting to civilian life and the ability to self-regulate is difficult, and while higher education has been seen as an acculturation process, its role in transitioning to civilian life may not be that in all situations. Increased and improved services were noted.
Klein-Collins (2010)	Explore whether adult students with PLA credit graduate faster than the adult students without it.	62,475 students from 48 post-secondary institutions	Mixed: Survey and interview	Students with PLA credits had higher graduation rates than students without, were more persistent in earning hours toward a degree, and had strong patterns of enrollment.

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/ Analysis	Outcomes
Naphan and Elliott (2015)	Understand the transition and what factors affected how they negotiated the move home.	11 student veterans transitioning from the military to a mid-sized public university	Qualitative: Interviews	In the civilian world, the student veteran has to learn to navigate college life with more general communication and a lack of social cohesiveness.
Olsen, Badger, and McCuddy (2014)	Explore the perceptions of student veterans' struggles, factors impacting participation in institutional resources, and suggestions for supporting their academic success.	10 active military and reserve component student veterans	Mixed methods: Exploratory study with purposive sample	Perceived strengths include self-discipline and leadership, and perceived challenges include social interactions and culture and role adjustments. Ideal support would be socially focused, but not wanting to be identified as a veteran, a lack of free time, and living off campus were factors in participation.
Semer and Harmening (2015)	Identify factors that influence veterans' academic success in their first year of college.	A sample to represent the over 4,000 first-year veterans attending college in Ohio	Quantitative: Nonexperimental design	The institution's size (e.g., if it is too large for veterans to feel supported) and type (e.g., if the label of "military friendly" is only used to attract students) may affect veterans' success. Receiving feedback from faculty, getting exercise, and being involved may increase their likelihood of success.
Varsalona (2016)	Improve understanding of how comprehensive universities can expand the programs and support they offer to attract wider audiences and serve them throughout their education.	Three 4-year comprehensive universities with a mission to serve traditional and nontraditional students	Qualitative: Case study	Key factors of support include flexibility, convenience, access, accelerated completion, affordability, a career-focus, individualized attention, an integrated adult student focus, and retention and outcomes. Participating institutions were dedicated to serving adults.

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/ Analysis	Outcomes
Griffin (2015)	Gain insight into the experiences of veterans in higher education.	72 administrators, faculty, and student affairs professionals and 28 student veterans	Qualitative: Semi-structured interviews and focus groups	The importance of offices, services, policies, and professionals who understand veterans' unique needs and the importance of having veterans as part of the student body was important.
Hitt et al., (2015)	Evaluate the educational services offered to student veterans in Indiana.	77 institutions in the state of Indiana	Mixed methods: Interview and survey	Disparity existed between front line staff and administration regarding the offering of support and services to student veterans.
Ness, Rocke, Harrist, and Vroman (2014)	Measure self-reported academic achievement and neurobehavioral symptoms of services members.	48 service members with TBI and/or PTSD	Mixed methods: Survey and interviews	Resiliency, discipline, and motivation aided in academic success, but more training was needed regarding TBI and PTSD.
Osborne (2014)	Gain insight into veterans' transitional experiences.	14 veterans who were members of the institution's student veteran organization	Qualitative: Focus groups and interviews	The military culture had contributed to the participants' matriculation. Feeling isolated, they struggled with asking for help but did find support in fellow veterans.
Schiavone and Gentry (2014)	Discover and understand the challenges student veterans face when transitioning from the military to higher education.	Six student veterans at a Midwestern public research university	Qualitative	Maturity and global awareness learned in military service would serve them as students, but other perceived assets became liabilities, deterring a successful transition to academic life.
Boyd (2017)	Understand how veterans fare in college and the reasons for those outcomes.	Database of students entering Georgia State University between 2003 and 2015	Quantitative	Primary models show student veterans are at least as successful as nonveterans, perhaps due to educational benefits, but the finding could not be ruled out

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/ Analysis	Outcomes
Swords to Plowshares releases findings on supports for student veterans (2018, May 03)	Improve understanding of student veterans' direct challenges and needs	75 veterans and nine campus staff	Qualitative: Focus groups and interviews	completely from military related factors. Transition is a challenging, lifelong process, but institutions are in a unique position to assist with transition.
Sullivan (2017)	Explore community college student veterans' experiences as they transition.	11 veterans who were part- or full-time students at a community college in North Texas	Qualitative: Interview	Students experienced difficulties transitioning to college and using their educational benefits. Veterans were aware of opportunities to participate on campus but chose not to and were mostly unaware of resources and disability accommodations.
Piland (2018)	Examine the perception of student veterans who utilize student services to navigate barriers to academic success at the community college level.	13 student veterans for interviews, four veterans for focus group	Qualitative: Interviews and focus groups	Themes of the use of support services included the importance of a veteran resource center and a dedicated staff, while barriers to academic success were feeling too old for community college and a lack of motivation to enroll.
Mackiewicz (2018)	Explore student veterans' needs for and use of services.	Six veterans who served in Iraq or Afghanistan who attended three different community colleges in Massachusetts	Qualitative: Interview	Transition to academic life was difficult, further complicated by PTSD. Applying for educational benefits and other aid was complex. Available support services determine veteran friendliness from a student veterans' perspective.

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/ Analysis	Outcomes
Wygmans (2016)	Provide insight into and understanding of the educational experiences and social support of student veterans who were successful in their academic pursuits.	18 student veterans	Qualitative: Interviews	Education guided part of the path to enlistment. College enrollment provided a sense of purpose and student veterans planned to maximize social supports for academic success. However, the transition was a challenge, and while aware of the supports, few took advantage of them.
Sponsler, Wesaw, and Jarrat (2013)	Gauge efforts in tracking educational progress and outcomes for active duty service members and veterans.	239 institutions responded out of 1,162 institutions invited to participate	Quantitative: Survey	Institutions are making a concerted effort to better understand and serve military students, but most institutions are doing so without the benefit of good data and strong measurement mechanisms.
Ritterbush (2017)	Offer university personnel insight into and knowledge of the lives of combat veterans returning to school.	12 student veterans who served in combat zones in Iraq and Afghanistan	Qualitative: Case study	Veterans do not feel they are prepared for their readjustment to civilian or academic life. Struggles included establishing their identity as a student, assimilating to the college culture, having different views of academic success, and accessing support, if not available from fellow veterans.
Money (2016)	Explore the essential components necessary for a veterans' success course.	Three experts in the field of veterans' student affairs	Qualitative: Interviews	Findings suggested a transition course was needed for student veterans. Campus support, learning communities, transitional courses, and veteran-specific programming were important and helpful.

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/ Analysis	Outcomes
Accamando (2017)	Examine the perception of military and student veteran regarding specific support services offered to them and the kinds of support services they may be offered in the future.	46 military/student veteran attending Duquesne University	Mixed methods: Survey and interview	Intense support from a military resource center lessens over time, even though veterans deserve a well-defined means of support. Characteristics, such as age, marital status, and length of service, should be considered in how military students are reached and served.
Osagie (2016)	Investigate whether veterans' level of engagement correlates with their success as measured by cumulative grade point average.	Two cohorts of senior college students from a four-year urban public institution. One cohort from 2011 with 1,662 students and one from 2013 with 1688 students	Quantitative: Survey	The correlations for veterans between cumulative GPA, learning collaboratives, and support environments were larger than other groups, indicating veterans accept the challenge of transition and perform well. Faculty interaction outside the classroom and meeting with an academic advisor impacted veterans' GPA.
Layne (2016)	Describe student veterans' perceptions of the transition services and support systems at their university that may explain the challenges they face.	Six student veterans attending a West Virginia university and six who had graduated within the last three years from the same institution	Qualitative: Interview	Student veterans felt they had little or no support when transitioning from military duty to the processing center for benefits. Student veterans felt unsupported during their enrollment and were not satisfied overall with support

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/ Analysis	Outcomes
Brewer (2016)	Examine pedagogical resources used by student veterans and determine those most and least useful for academic success.	10 student veterans— three female and seven male—who had completed 1 year of study at Tacoma Community College	Qualitative: Interview	services offered during their transition. Involvement with the veterans' office impacted the ease of matriculation. Mixed feelings were present regarding classroom policies and assignments being a help or hindrance.
Green et al. (2016)	Aid higher education in creating an environment that is prepared to help service members make a smooth transition to the university.	11 full-time student veterans who attended a large four-year public institution in the southwestern United States	Qualitative: Interview	Student veterans saw themselves as being more mature than traditional students, feeling unconnected to the general student population and frustrated with the different structure and routine of higher education.
Hill (2016)	Explore factors that influenced veterans' decisions to attend a private for-profit institution of higher education and factors that influenced their decisions to transfer to a public two-year institution or community college.	10 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who initially enrolled at a private for-profit institution and later transferred to a community college	Qualitative: Case study	While reasons for choosing a for-profit institution and a community college were different, little difference was found to exist between decision factors to attend a for-profit institution and decision factors to transfer to a community college.
Higgerson (2017)	Investigate how student veteran transition to being a student, as well as the aspects of orientation and support services that are most beneficial.	Six student veterans enrolled for at least their second semester at one of two institutions	Qualitative: Semi-structured interview	A veterans' support office can connect student veterans, provide information not given at orientation, work as an advocate and remove barriers, and serve as a voice for student veterans and a place for social reintegration and

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/ Analysis	Outcomes
				support while also showing value to students and introducing them to resources and support.

Summary

Educational benefits have been a part of military service since the late 1800s but, with the passage of the Post 9/11, more veterans attended college. The transition from the military to the academic world could be difficult to make, and, overall, there were differing outcomes when processing data regarding the academic success of student veterans. The methods of data collection varied widely and were not always inclusive or accurate. Resources offered to student veterans by institutions of higher education aided in the transition, but few institutions tracked retention and graduation rates to determine the effectiveness of the resources.

The USG differed little from this national trait of lacking data on its student veterans and the effectiveness of the resources offered to this population. With Georgia's high veteran population and the expectation of an increase within the next 10 years, it was important for the USG institutions to have an inventory of the resources offered to student veterans, to know distinctive ways in which student veterans could be better served, to determine how resources could be allocated to ensure good stewardship, and to identify a method for determining graduation and retention rates at each institution within the system.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Educational benefits were offered to veterans since the Readjustment Act of 1944 (Thomas, 2009) and, with the introduction of the Post 9/11 GI Bill, many veterans took advantage of the assistance to receive a college education (McBain et al., 2012). Research indicated transitional resources aided in the academic success of student veterans where the cultures of the military and academics differed, making academic success more difficult (Vacchi, 2012). However, many institutions did not or were unable to provide data regarding the success of student veterans, specifically retention and graduation rates (Boyd, 2017) and even more so the effectiveness of the transitional resources offered. A gap in the literature existed regarding how USG institutions recorded the identification of student veterans and how they used data in making meaningful decisions regarding the effectiveness of transitional resources. In this chapter, the methodology for the research is provided including the rationale for the design.

The researcher explored the common transitional resources available to student veterans attending institutions in the USG institutions and why institutions elected to provide them. The literature review described how transitional resources impacted the academic success of student veterans, but a gap existed in the identification of student veterans. Without adequate identification, decisions regarding transitional resources were haphazard, as effectiveness was immeasurable.

The researcher discovered the identification process by creating a survey that included the consent to participate and emailed to the supervisor of the student veteran department or, if this department did not exist, to the school certifying official of the 26 institutions within the USG. The participants were asked to provide data on the institutions regarding the transitional resources and the reason they were offered, and whether the institution recorded the identification of student veterans and used the information to make decisions regarding transitional resources or track the academic success of student veterans. The survey differentiated between data collection on student veterans with and without VA educational benefits. This differentiation was not to give a sense of priority to one group over another, but it was assumed student veterans who received benefits were more easily identified and, therefore, had data more easily collected. Additionally, student veterans receiving VA educational benefits were likely to have separated from the military more recently and, therefore, would more likely benefit from any offered transitional resources.

The purpose of the grounded theory case study was to explore the practices of USG institutions for identifying and tracking student veterans and using this information to make informed decisions. The research began with the assumption that some, if not most, institutions were offering transitional resources with a lack of data to guide the decisions of the institution. There was an assumption each institution had a desire to serve student veterans in an effective way but lacked the informational resources to record the identification of student veterans adequately, providing them with the basis upon which to make decisions and track academic success.

Using the survey information, qualitative data were captured from select institutions during the interview process to investigate the primary research questions initially. Through grounded research methodology, secondary research questions were developed. Agee (2009) stated secondary questions are formed to address specific topic within the overarching questions. The following lists both research questions that initially began this study and then developed:

1. How do USG institutions record identification of student veterans?
 - a. How do student veterans disclose veteran status and how do USG institutions record it?
2. What data regarding student veterans are tracked by USG institutions?
3. How do USG institutions use this information to make decisions about the transitional resources offered and their effectiveness?
 - a. How are decisions made regarding the offering of transitional resources?
 - b. What means are used to determine effectiveness of the transitional resources offered?

Research Design

Fassinger (2005) stated grounded theory approach provided a means to generate theory that was grounded in the data of a phenomenon as viewed by the participants. Based on an inductive approach (Glaser, 1978), the researcher aimed to formulate a theory of how USG institutions record identification of student veterans as a means of making better choices regarding the availability of transitional resources and thus have an impact on the academic success of student veterans. Glaser (1978) stated grounded theory enabled the researcher “to discover what is going on rather than assuming what is going

on, as required in preconceived type research”. Institutions may have had assumptions about the difficulty or resources needed to record the identification of student veterans and being able to use the identification in their decision making. McLeod (2001) stated grounded theory included finding different means of examination and discovering new ways to examining the work, closely following the data to ensure a guided approach to the development of theory. The theories generated often explained a process or action surrounding an experience or a sequence of events pertaining to a particular topic (McLeod, 2001). Clarke (2005) stated data did not fit into perfect models, as the researcher’s perspectives affected the process and reports of the research.

In this research, the process of determining the means to record the identification of student veterans varied among institutions. Given the identification of student veterans, use of the data for making effective decisions regarding transitional resources was examined. The research allowed true discovery of the available processes and how they were used, understanding a single method for the recording the identification of student veterans may not have existed so the model for gathering data could be general in nature. Darkenwalk (1980) and Conrad (1982) agreed grounded theory was ideal in improving professional practices and in generating new theories in the adult and higher education, which was an important factor in the research.

Differences lie in whether the researcher could begin with a general interest or with a specific issue to explore (Babchuk, 1997). Babchuk (1997) gave a listing of these options, of which three are similar.

1. Begin with a research area and let analysis dictate the research problem;
2. Begin with a research problem or question and look to test, conceptually refine, modify, or extend this problem;
3. Begin with a research problem or question and abandon it in favor of another if data analysis leads you in this direction;
4. Begin with an extant grounded theory and further test, refine, and expand upon it (Babchuk, 1997, p. 76).

The researcher in this study identified questions to be studied, which began with three research questions and then developed into six. The questions explored the identification of student veterans and using the data to make decisions regarding transitional resources available at institutions within the USG. The approach followed Babchuk's (1997) option of beginning with a research problem or question and looking to test, conceptually refine, modify, or extend it.

The researcher assumed institutions offered the transitional resources they could provide with the resources available. Also, the researcher assumed the participants were interested in the academic success of student veterans by virtue of the position they held. The survey was limited by the availability of transitional resources offered within the USG and did not include transitional resources available in the private educational sector. Proposed transitional resources were not studied or identified, and the research did not study any barriers to offering additional transitional resources.

Population

A quantitative description of the population from which this research could be conducted was unknown. Institutions within the USG could have multiple school

certifying officials and could not have a department specifically established for serving student veterans. The maximum population was 26 , the number of institutions within USG as every institution was federally required to have a school certifying official, even if that person had other nonveteran related job responsibilities.

Participants

Actual participants for the research were the supervisors of the student veteran department or, if this department did not exist, were the school certifying officials at the 26 institutions within the USG who provided consent to participate. The participants were identified from the individual institutional websites using the search option and searching for “military”, or “veteran”, or “school certifying official”. Participants were asked to provide the name and contact information for other institutional employees who may be able to provide additional information. Five institutions provided names of others who could add to the data, providing the possibility of the “unit of analysis” (Glaser, Strauss, & Strutzel, 1967, p. 64) to be greater than one respondent person institution. Glaser, Strauss, and Strutzel (1967) believed researchers should consider all the data to determine the unit of analysis and allow the data, not the researcher, to guide the direction of the research. The researcher sent emails to the six other possible participants from the five institutions that provided this additional information, but none of the additional six participants responded. Employees who held positions working with the population of student veterans were assumed to have a desire to serve them to the fullest extent possible, even veterans not at their institutions. It was assumed the employees would respond in a timely manner to the survey and to be eager to participate in the interview phase should the institution have processes of identifying student veterans, using the

information to make data-driven decisions, and establishing retention and graduation rates for student veterans.

Sample

Using grounded theory, the researcher selected participants based on “their congruence with the theoretical constructs” (Hays & Singh, 2011, p. 49). The first stage of the research established institutions that identify student veterans. The participants of the second stage were theoretically selected based on their identification of student veterans, and, when further selection was needed, using the data of tracking retention and graduation of student veterans. The theoretical sampling was based upon collecting data from institutions that used no or very simple processes of identifying student veterans and use of associated data to institutions that used very complex processes. If multiple institutions from the same sector identified their student veterans, the researcher reviewed the criteria of which of those institutions were or were not tracking retention and/or graduation of student veterans. The researcher interview 11 institutions with various levels of identifying student veterans and using associated information to make data-driven decisions and establishing retention and graduation rates.

Instrumentation

The researcher gathered information from the participants using a survey and interviews with document collection. Using the search option and searching for “military”, or “veteran”, or “school certifying official”, the researcher collected email addresses for the supervisor of the student veteran department or, if this department did not exist, to school certifying official for institutions listed on the website for the USG. The researcher sent an email providing a personalized link for survey completion,

provided by Qualtrics, with the consent being the first question of the survey and requiring an affirmative answer in order to progress. Survey responses were confidential but not anonymous. Collected via electronic response, data included the existence of transitional resources and the reason they were offered, if the institution identified student veterans, and how the institution used the information to make decisions regarding transitional resources or track the academic success of student veterans. Additionally, demographic information for the institution was collected. While the goal of the researcher was not directly related to the offering of the various types of transitional resources, the information was provided based upon the demographic information to fill the gap in the literature. Descriptive statistics using the tools within Qualtrics were used to analyze the quantitative data.

The second phase of the research consisted of interviews with 11 institutions with document collection for validity. Institutions that reported tracking student veterans and use of associated data were contacted by phone to schedule an interview at a mutually acceptable time. Using theoretical sampling, the researcher scheduled interviews with institutions having very simple to more complex processes of identifying student veterans and use of associated data.

Pilot Study

Kitchenham and Pfleeger (2002) discussed the four steps to constructing a survey, which include searching relevant literature, instrument construction, instrument evaluation, and instrument documentation. By exploring the data thoroughly, confidence existed that the researcher was not duplicating the work of others, but the ideas of others were used in the constructor of the survey instrument. The purpose of the research guided

question construction, but evaluation was needed to ensure questions were purposeful and concrete (Kitchenham & Pfleeger, 2002). Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2014) stated pilot study can aid in the effectiveness of the survey and can ensure the survey will serve the purpose it is intended. A pilot study aid in knowing “what problems or areas of confusion will arise” (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014). Due to the researcher’s connection with the student veteran population, a pilot study was conducted for the survey to ensure questions were clearly worded, increasing the likelihood of accurate and meaningful data collection.

For the pilot study, the researcher contacted three former certifying officials, who remain employed in higher education, to complete the survey and provide their feedback. Participant #1 noted there was an expectation of a “submit now” option. She read through the questions without providing answers and submitted a blank response. Working through the survey a second time, answers were recorded and submitted without complication. Participant #2 completed the survey and provided feedback to explain her answer regarding veteran-specific disability personnel. Participant #2 stated via phone the wording was confusing, so the researcher changed the wording as noted below. Participant #3 stated the answers for the question “What data regarding student veterans who do not receive VA educational benefits are currently tracked at your institution?” should include “do not” in all answer options. Table 2 displays the survey questions before and after the pilot study.

Table 2

Survey Changes After Pilot Survey

Description of Transitional Resource Prior to Pilot Study	Description of Transitional Resource After Pilot Study
Veteran-Specific Adviser	Advising Personnel who Assist Veterans Only
Veteran-Specific Disabilities Personnel	Disabilities Personnel who Assist Veterans Only
Veteran-Specific Counseling Personnel	Counseling Personnel who Assist Veterans Only
Veteran-Specific Orientation	Orientation for Student Veterans Only

Data Collection

Surveys and interview were the basis for this research. Surveys were used to determine what transitional resources were available, why the resources were offered, to what degree the identification of student veterans was tracked, and how associated information was used. Tools within Qualtrics were used to provide descriptive analysis. Interviews and document collection from 11 institutions supported trustworthiness among data, allowing the researcher to explore with greater depth and gain deeper insight and understanding (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). All survey and interview data as well as collected documents for validity were stored in the researcher's personal password-protected computer or in locked files.

USG employees who were identified as the supervisor of the student veteran department or, if this department did not exist, as the school certifying official were informed via email of the research purpose and process, notified of the potential risks for participation in the survey, and provided a personal link for survey participation. The consent form was the first question of the survey and participants could not proceed unless they agreed to participate. Notification of involvement by Columbus State

University IRB was shared to ensure protection of human subjects in research as required by federal regulations. The research posed no risk to participants, and the researcher aimed to avoid any risk to them. . Participants did not incur any expense and were informed of their ability to end their involvement at any time without penalty. Data collected were confidential, but not anonymous, to allow for the survey responses to be analyzed through interviews to create a theory of best practice. Seven days after sending the email containing the survey link, a follow up email was sent to non-respondents as a reminder to act within the next three days.

After obtaining demographic and general data about the levels in which institutions were identifying student veterans and using associated data, the researcher collected data through interviewing with document collecting used for validity. The researcher began interviewing institutions that had simple processes and transitioning to more complex ones for identifying student veterans and using the associated data based on the survey responses. After scheduling by phone and confirming by email a mutually acceptable interview time, the researcher began interviewing institutions that collected, recorded, and used data minimally regarding its student veterans. Using the interview protocol shown in Appendix E, interview questions inquired about the barriers to have further documentation, how data were being used, and what were seen as the changes, if any, needed to be made to serve student veterans at the institution in the best way. Glaser (1994) stated with grounded theory, there was continual modification in the data collection with the emergence of theory and collection and analysis of data occur simultaneously.

Interviews took place over the phone or in or near the military resource center on campus. The interview process followed the concept of theoretical sampling, as outlined by Taylor and Brogdan (1998), of selecting new respondents to interview who could provide new or additional insight or refine data already collected. With constant comparison from prior interviews, the researcher formulated more meaningful interview questions for latter ones as suggested by Rennie (1998). An example of the formulation of more meaningful interview questions was , prior to beginning the interview process, the research had not considered on campus collaboration as an aid or the lack thereof as a barrier in identifying student veterans and tracking information related to them. Once the concept was shared in an interview, future interviews incorporated it. Interviews were recorded using an audio recorder and were transcribed by a third party as a Word document. The researcher labeled the interview after it was transcribed to identify the institution.

Response Rate

Baruch (1999) researched the response rates of 175 different academic studies and found the average response rate to be 48.4% with a standard deviation of 13.3%. It was suggested this response rate be used as the norm for future studies (Baruch, 1999). Baruch (1999) stated potential respondents become less likely to respond to questionnaires due to a stressful work environment, time to complete the questionnaire is at a minimum, and feeling there is no true value in responding. The investment of time was considered in keeping the survey phase of the research to less than 10 minutes and the interview phase to no more than 60 minutes. To meet the goal of having the desired 11 institutions to interview, the ideal response rate would be a minimum of 30 to 45%

participation. In attempt to increase the participation rates, Dr. David Snow, the director of military affairs for the University of Georgia Board of Regents, sent an email of support, encouraging participation for the benefit of how the USG serves military students.

Data Analysis

The researcher utilized a survey and interviews to explore the topic of interest. Moving from institutions that had simple processes to more complex ones for identifying student veterans and using the associated data based on the survey responses, the researcher collected data through interviewing and document collecting at 11 institutions. With a constant comparison, interview questions were adapted to allow for more in-depth and meaningful data collection.

To determine the order in which institutions would be interviewed, assumptions were made regarding the complexity of identifying and tracking student veterans. It was assumed tracking attendance was the simplest component to track and was made more difficult only in tracking student veterans who were and who were not receiving VA educational benefits. Tracking graduation was more difficult than attendance alone and retention was the most difficult component to track. Complexity was added to tracking graduation and retention when an institution conducted it for student veterans who were and were not receiving VA educational benefits. If an institution tracked military branch and major, the researcher noted it but assumed it did not add to the complexity.

In reviewing the complexity of identification and tracking completed by the responding institutions, the researcher began with an institution indicating it was identifying student veterans with and without VA educational benefits but were not

tracking either of these populations. The second level of institutions considered for interviews were identifying student veterans who received educational benefits but tracked only attendance; one institution was on this level of complexity. The next level, where one institution existed, considered the identification of student veterans with and without VA educational benefits but were only tracking the semester attendance of these populations. The next level of complexity was identified as an institution tracking semester attendance and graduation for student veterans with VA educational benefits and consisted of one institution that was also tracking military branch and major. One institution was identified as identifying student veterans with VA educational benefits and tracking for semester attendance, graduation, and retention, which was the next level of complexity. Tracking components beyond attendance for student veterans with and without VA educational benefits comprised the next level of complexity. The next level included one institution that was tracking semester attendance, graduation, and retention for student veterans receiving educational benefits and tracking semester attendance for student veterans not receiving VA educational benefits. One institution tracking all components of student veterans receiving VA educational benefits and semester attendance and retention on student veterans who did not comprised the next level. The highest level of complexity was comprised of four institutions that were tracking all three components for both student veteran populations.

Charmaz and Mitchell (2001) named five characteristics of grounded theory to include a) simultaneous data collection and analysis, b) pursuit of emergent themes through early data analysis, c) discovery of basic social processes within the data, d) inductive construction of categories to explain and synthesize these processes, and e) the

combining of categories into a theoretical framework that identifies causes, conditions, and consequences of the processes. As interviews were conducted, the researcher asked probing questions as new topics or ideas were introduced by the various institutions. The researcher used the responses to these probing questions to modify interview questions asked of other institutions, creating simultaneous data collection and analysis. An example of adjustments made in the interview questions included asking about collaboration with other departments who may or may not share student veteran information or other departments who may support transitional resource offerings in some way. Another example of this simultaneous data collection and analysis was institutions questioning the accuracy of student veteran identification and future interviewees being asked if they verify a veteran's status.

A second component of grounded theory is pursuit of emergent themes through early data analysis. An emerging theme early in the data analysis was the various means a student veteran could self-identify and how this information was recorded, formally and informally. The interview question was generally "how does your institution identify its student veterans" allowing interviewees to speak on the various methods for inclusion of many possible themes. Additionally, emergent themes identified early in the data analysis included non-academic means of measuring effectiveness of transitional resources, a finding not expected by the researcher.

Data analysis was conducted using three levels of coding, which included open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 2008) and addressed two components of grounded theory – the discovery of basic social processes within the data and inductive construction of categories to explain and synthesize these processes. Open

coding was the initial step and included categorization of the data; axial coding expanded on the initial categorization and made connections between the various categories; selective coding included identifying core categories supported by relationships shown in and supported by the data with no new categories emerging (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013), process coding is ideal for grounded theory as it provides for “observable and conceptual action in the data” (Miles et al., 2013, p. 75) and represents actions and consequences. The researcher continued data collection to saturation in order to be able to provide a theoretical understanding of how institutions are collecting and using the data regarding student veterans and used the core categories identified through coding in the development of the theory (Strauss & Corbin, 2008).

Grounded theory provides researchers the means to look for “patterns of action and interaction between and among various types of social units”, which, in this case, were institutions within USG (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Analysis of individual institutions was conducted to understand the reasoning of how changes were made in the process of recording the identification of student veterans to produce more effective data. Strauss and Corbin (1994) stated changes in processes, being the recording of the identification of student veterans, in this case, was a notion of what may occur in some situations under some conditions. Some institutions discussed changes in the process over time, which included moving from a simple spreadsheet to a complex portal with substantial data available for analysis. To contrast, one institution stated no changes have been made since the USG provided the original process.

The final component of grounded theory is the combining of categories into a theoretical framework that identifies causes, conditions, and consequences of the processes (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001). The purpose of the study was to provide a theory on the best practice of identifying student veterans and using the data to compute retention and graduation rates of student veterans and make informed decisions regarding transitional resources. This proposed best practice is discussed in Chapter IV.

To ensure with validity of the data, the researcher employed member checking, memoing, and documentation collection to validate interview data. Hays and Singh (2011) stated member checking allows the interview participant to verify the accuracy of the transcribed interview, correcting any errors and providing further explanation where it is needed. Interview participants were provided with an electronic copy of the transcription and asked to provide corrections or additional input within seven days. If there was no response within that time, the interview would be assumed as accurate and complete. One institution provided edits. Memoing, which “leads naturally to the abstraction or ideation” (Glaser & Holton, 2004, p. 12), was used by the researcher to document thoughts and ideas during the coding process. Doing so provided a means for the researcher to note hypothesis about connections (Glaser & Holton, 2004). Memoing was utilized during the coding process to aid in clarifying the researcher’s thoughts and formulating an understanding of the developing theory.

According to Hays and Singh (2011), institutional organizations are entities able to provide archival data, which may or may not be interpreted or analyzed. The researcher expected to receive documents, such as assessment information, reports showing the informational code where data are obtained, and reports submitted to the

Board of Regents. Some documentation was provided to the researcher, if the interview was in person. Otherwise, documentations were shared via email. A follow up request for document collection was made with the availability of the transcript for review.

Additional emails and phone calls were made to nonresponding institutions to collect documentation supporting the data from the interview. Four institutions did not provide supporting documentation for triangulation and credibility to the study, despite the repeated requests. Data provided for triangulation included spreadsheets, which were populated by report running. One such spreadsheet showed the military attribute, the VA benefit. Similarly, an institution provided the report code to show how various veteran related reports were generated. An institution utilizing a spreadsheet for tracking provided a copy with fictional student data with color codes and various information recorded. Other supporting data included institutional manuals providing instruction on how veteran/military related information should be recorded or updated. Similarly, some institutions provided screen shots showing information recorded within the student database. One institution provided a flyer, which is included in the general student orientation packet with information about the military resource center.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1994), the researcher using grounded theory has an obligation to the participants to “correspond closely to the data if it is to be applied in daily situations” (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 281) and to develop a theory, which will have some practical applications and serve the good of other groups. The theory generated is stated in a manner, which allows for further testing after combining “systematic data collection, coding, and analysis with a theoretical sampling” (Conrad, 1993, p. 280). The researcher intended for the theory to be applied to student veterans

attending other types of schools within the state of Georgia and in other states.

Additionally, entities, such as VA and the USG Board of Regents, may also benefit.

Reporting the Data

The data from the survey questions regarding the common transitional services offered was shown in tabular form, likely showing offerings based on the type of institution, such as a research university or state college. Interview data and document collection were presented in text form to ensure all details of the institutional process were adequately described and represented. Graphics from reports may be used to further explain or support discovery from the data.

Summary

The purpose of the research was to determine how USG institutions identify and record the identification of student veterans and to use data in making meaning decisions regarding the effectiveness of transitional resources. Chapter III provided an understanding of the methods for the research and why grounded theory was selected. An electronic survey collected quantitative data on institutional demographics, and if/how institutions identified and recorded the identification of student veterans, and used data in making meaning decisions regarding the effectiveness of transitional resources. Interviews provided additional information and understanding of the practices and processes of student veteran identification, from simple to more complex, and how the data were used in making decisions regarding transitional resources. Data obtained and knowledge gained from this work provide the USG institutions processes to follow. The proposed processes aid in institutions making more informed choices regarding transitional resources can be made and, therefore, positively impacting the academic

success of student veterans. The instrumentation and strategy for each research question is shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Research Confirmation Table

Research Question	Instrumentation/ Analysis	How will the institution's strategy answer the research question?
How do USG institutions record student veterans' identification?	Survey/ Interview	Institutions that respond on the survey as recording the identification of student veterans will be interviewed about the means they use to do so.
How do student veterans disclose veteran status and how do USG institutions record it?	Interview	Interviewed institutions will be asked to describe the various methods a veteran may disclose the military status and if, and, if so, how it is recorded.
What data regarding student veterans do USG institutions track?	Survey/ Interview	Institutions may respond to three areas in which they track data regarding student veterans, and they may describe other areas. Institutions responding as tracking graduation rates, retention rates, and/or "other data" will be interviewed to determine their process for tracking the data.
How do USG institutions use this information to make decisions about the transitional resources they offer and their effectiveness?	Survey/ Interview	Institutions that provide a firm analysis process for continuing or discontinuing transitional resources will be interviewed regarding their process for collecting the data they use to make these decisions.

How are decisions made regarding the offering of transitional resources?	Survey/ Interview	Institutions that may or may not have responded on the survey as recording the identification of student veterans will be interviewed about how decisions are made for offering transitional resources.
What means are used to determine effectiveness of the transitional resources offered?	Survey/ Interview	Interviewed institutions will be asked to describe the means in which the effectiveness of offered transitional resources is determined.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

Surveys and interviews were the research tools used in this research study to identify a best practice of identifying student veterans. The response rate of the survey, administered to collect data regarding identification, was over 65%. Eleven institutions were selected by theoretical sampling for the interview phase of the research. Theoretical sampling supported data collection from institutions having very simple to more complex processes of identifying student veterans and use of associated data. All USG institutions who responded had some type of identification of student veterans and offered transitional resources. The means of recording student veteran identification varied as did the reason transitional resources were offered. Obstacles and collaborations were common themes among two research questions. Tracking graduation was an easier process than tracking retention, and some institutions looked at other success measures.

Participants

The survey was emailed to the participants who were identified as the supervisor of the student veteran department or, if this department did not exist, as the school certifying official at all institutions within the USG. Of the 26 institutions invited to take the survey, 17 agreed and completed the survey for a 65.38% response rate. The 17 respondents were from all sectors of the USG, including two (of four) research universities, three (of four) comprehensive universities, five (of nine) state universities,

and seven (of nine) state colleges. Of the 17 respondents, 13 institutions agreed to participate in the interview process, with one state university and three state colleges declining. The researcher was successful in scheduling and interviewing 11 of those institutions, which included two research institutions, three each in the comprehensive, state university, and state college sectors. Table 4 provides a summary of the various sectors and the representation of each sector in the survey and interview processes.

Table 4

Representation of the Sectors in the Survey and Interview Processes

	Number of institutions within the USG, by sector	Number of institutions that participated in the survey process, by sector	Number of institutions that agreed to participate in the interview process, by sector	Number of institutions interviewed, by sector
Research Institutions	4	2	2	2
Comprehensive Institutions	4	3	3	3
State Universities	9	5	4	3
State Colleges	9	7	4	3
Total Institutions	26	17	13	11

The survey with a personal link for each institution was emailed in late May to the employees identified as the supervisor of the student veteran department or, if this department did not exist, as the school certifying official. The initial request for participation yielded minimal response. Dr. David Snow, the Director of Military Affairs for the University of Georgia Board of Regents, sent an email of support, encouraging participation for the benefit of how the USG serves military students. Subsequent emails

with new personal links to the survey were sent in mid-June to institutions who had not responded, and a final set of emails with personal survey links was sent in early July. Emails were also sent to additional contacts provided by responding institutions with a personalized survey link. After learning the email sent through Qualtrics may have been routed to spam, the researcher sent the final set of emails with the personal link from the researcher's academic email account. Interviews were conducted from mid-July through late August. Transcriptions were emailed to interviewees within one to two weeks of the interview for member checking. Additional documents were obtained at the time of the interview, when possible, or via email following the interview.

Findings

The survey responses provided data on the institutions regarding the transitional resources and the reason they were offered, and whether the institution recorded the identification of student veterans and used the information to make decisions regarding transitional resources or track the academic success of student veterans. Selecting institutions from the survey responses, qualitative data were captured to answer the following primary research questions and secondary research questions developed through the use of grounded theory:

1. How do USG institutions record identification of student veterans?
 - a. How do student veterans disclose veteran status and how do USG institutions record it?
2. What data regarding student veterans are tracked by USG institutions?
3. How do USG institutions use this information to make decisions about the transitional resources offered and their effectiveness?

- a. How are decisions made regarding the offering of transitional resources?
- b. What means are used to determine effectiveness of the transitional resources offered?

Quantitative Findings

Quantitative data were separated into two parts – tracking of student veterans and offering of transitional resources. Each section was presented in narrative form with figures and tables to support understanding with the qualitative data in solely narrative form visually. Quantitative data related to transitional resource offerings were shown by sector within each type of transitional resource offered. The qualitative data were divided into sections to correspond with the three research questions. The types of data are discussed and labeled separately.

Tracking of student veterans. Among the responding institutions, all 17 (100%) were identifying and tracking student veterans who receive VA educational benefits, and 10 (58.8%) were identifying student veterans who do not receive VA educational benefits. Figure 2 shows, by sector, the number of institutions who identified each group.

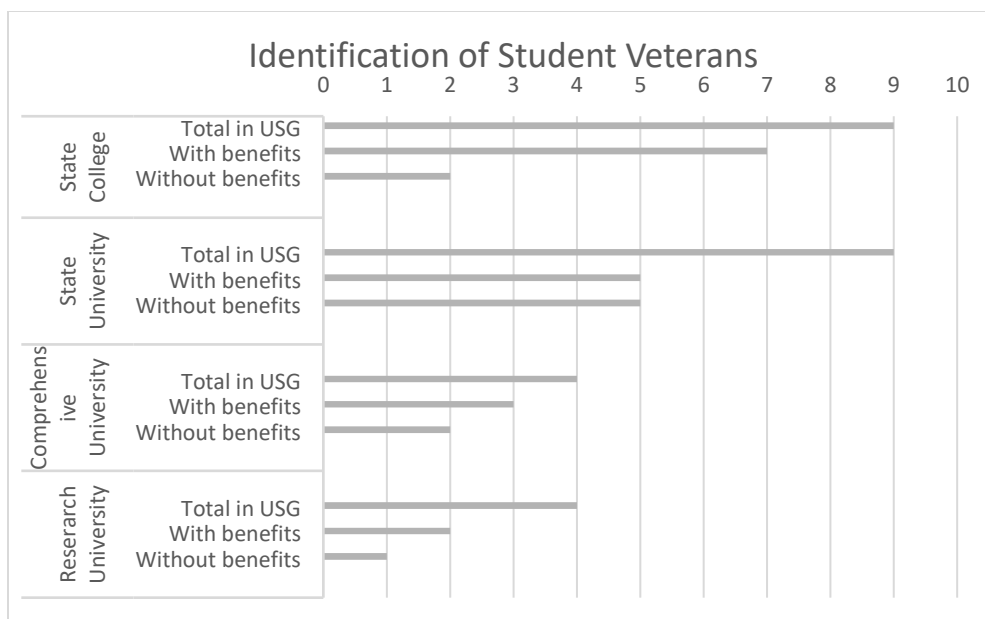


Figure 2. The number of institutions which identify student veterans who receive and do not receive VA educational benefits.

Identifying student veterans who receive or who do not receive VA educational benefits did not ensure tracking of the two populations. However, 16 of the 17 or 94.1% respondents who were identifying student veterans who receive VA educational benefits tracked at least one element of semester attendance, graduation, and/or retention for this population, as shown in Table 5. The semester attendance of student veterans who receive VA educational benefits was tracked at 16 responding institutions with 12 (70.6%) of the institutions tracking graduation rates and eight (47.1%) tracking retention rates of student veterans. Three (17.7%) responded they were collecting other information, such as branch of service and declared major, and one stated no data regarding student veterans who receive VA educational benefits were tracked.

Table 5

Tracking for Student Veterans Who Receive VA Educational Benefits

	Attendance	Graduation	Retention	None	Other
Research University <i>n</i> = 2	100%	50%	50%		
Comprehensive University <i>n</i> = 3	100%	66.7%	66.7%		
State University <i>n</i> = 5	100%	80%	80%		40%
State College <i>n</i> = 6	85.7%	71.4%	14.3%	14.3%	14.3%
Total Institutions Tracking Element <i>N</i> = 16	94.1%	70.6%	47.1%	5.9%	17.7%

The institutions who identify student veterans who do not receive VA educational benefits also could have not tracked elements of semester attendance, graduation, and/or retention, as shown in Table 6. Fifteen respondents answered this survey question with six (40%) reporting no tracking of semester attendance, graduation, or retention of identified student veterans without VA educational benefits. For student veterans who were identified but were not receiving VA educational benefits, seven or 46.7% institutions that identify student veterans without VA educational benefits tracked semester attendance, and four, or 26.7%, tracked graduation rates as well as retention rates. Other data being collected for student veterans not receiving VA educational benefits reported by one institution (6.7%) included entry term, major, and branch of service.

Table 6

Tracking for Student Veterans Who Do Not Receive VA Educational Benefits

	Attendance	Graduation	Retention	None	Other
Research University <i>n</i> = 2	50%			50%	
Comprehensive University <i>n</i> = 2	50%			50%	
State University <i>n</i> = 4	100%	50%	75%		
State College <i>n</i> = 7	14.3%	28.6%	14.3%	57.1%	14.2%
Total Institutions Tracking Element <i>N</i> = 15	46.7%	26.7%	26.7%	40%	6.7%

Offering of transitional resources. The survey listed several transitional resources from which participating institutions indicated as offered at the institution. The resources shown as options included a military student organization, credit for military training, a military lounge, personnel to assist with the admissions process, the financial aid process, the benefit application, faculty/staff training on veterans' needs, advising personnel, disabilities personnel, or counseling personnel who assist veterans only, a mentoring program for veterans, connections with community organization, disabilities personnel who assist with veterans only, orientation for student veterans, or some other transitional resource. Each responding institution (100%) offered at least one transitional resource. The availability of the listed transitional resources ranged from being offered by all 17 responding institutions for the military student organization to being offered by five responding institutions for disabilities personnel who assist student veterans only. Four

institutions provided other transitional resources not provided in the survey. Table 7 displays the availability of transitional resources among the responding institutions. Each transitional resource is later discussed separately to include highlighting the transitional resource offering by sector for responding institutions.

Table 7

Institutions That Offer Various Transitional Resources

Transitional Resource	Survey Responses (including “Not offered”)	Offering Resource (of Responding Institutions)
Military Student Organization	17	100%
Credit for Military Training	17	88%
Military Lounge	16	94%
Personnel to Assist with Admission Process	16	94%
Personnel to Assist with Financial Aid Process	16	94%
Personnel to Assist with Educational Benefits	16	100%
Faculty/Staff Training on Veterans’ Needs	16	81%
Advising Personnel who Assist Veterans Only	16	44%
Mentoring Programs for Veterans	16	63%
Connections with Community Organizations for Student Veterans	16	81%
Disabilities Personnel who Assist with Veterans Only	16	31%
Counseling Personnel who Assist with Veterans Only	16	44%
Orientation for Student Veterans	16	44%
Other	5	80%

Four reasons for which the institutions could offer transitional resources were listed in the survey in addition to the option of the responding institution to provide a

reason not listed. The four reasons listed were to aid in academic success, to be perceived as military friendly, to aid in the transition to academic/civilian life, and to show appreciation for military service. The data reflect transitional resources were offered by at least one institution for the four reasons provided but no reason was not cited for any transitional resource for all responding institutions across sectors. “Other” was also an available option for providing a resource and was cited as a reason 25 times. However, the specific purpose in these situations was not investigated as part of this research.

A military student organization was a transitional resource offered by the 17 responding institutions. The most popular reason for offering this resource was to aid in the transition to academic/civilian life (94.1%) followed by 76.5% providing this transitional resource to aid in academic success and to show appreciation for military service. To be perceived as military friendly was noted by 64.7% as the reason for having a military student organization. “Other” was the reason for 11.8% of the institutional providing a military student organization as a transitional resource. Table 8 shows the reasons for offering a military student organization as a transitional resource by sector.

Table 8

Reasons Institutions Offer a Military Student Organization

Sector Type, Number Offering Transitional Resource	To Aid in Academic Success	To Be Perceived as Military Friendly	To Aid in the Transition to Academic/ Civilian Life	To Show Appreciation for Military Service	Other
Research University <i>n</i> = 2	100%	50%	100%	100%	50%
Comprehensive University <i>n</i> = 3	33.3%	66.7%	100%	33.3%	
State University <i>n</i> = 5	100%	60%	100%	80%	
State College <i>n</i> = 4	71.4%	71.4%	85.7%	85.7%	14.3%
Total Responding Institutions <i>N</i> = 17	76.5%	64.7%	94.1%	76.5%	11.8%

Providing credit for military training was reported by 15 institutions as an offered transitional resource. The majority reason for providing credit for military training was to aid in academic success at 93.3%, followed by to be perceived as military friendly and to aid in the transition to academic/civilian life at 53.3%, to aid in the transition to academic/civilian life at 53.3%, and to show appreciation for military service at 40%. One institution (6.7%) reported “other” as the reason it provided this transitional resource. Table 9 shows the reasons for providing credit for military training as a transitional resource by sector.

Table 9

Reasons Institutions Offer Credit for Military Training

Sector Type, Number Offering Transitional Resource	To Aid in Academic Success	To Be Perceived as Military Friendly	To Aid in the Transition to Academic/ Civilian Life	To Show Appreciation for Military Service	Other
Research University <i>n</i> = 1	100%				
Comprehensive University <i>n</i> = 3	66.7%	33.3%	100%	33.3%	
State University <i>n</i> = 4	100%	100%	100%	75%	
State College <i>n</i> = 7	85.7%	57.1%	14.3%	28.6%	14.3%
Total Responding Institutions <i>N</i> = 15	93.3%	53.3%	53.3%	40%	6.7%

A military lounge was reported as a transitional resource by 15 responding institutions. To be perceived as military friendly and to aid in the transition to academic/civilian life were cited by 93.3% as a reason for this offering. To show appreciation for military service and to aid in academic success was cited as the reason by 86.7% and 80% respectively. Two institutions cited “other” as the reason for offering a military lounge. Table 10 shows the reasons for offering a military lounge as a transitional resource by sector.

Table 10

Reasons Institutions Offer a Military Lounge

Sector Type, Number Offering Transitional Resource	To Aid in Academic Success	To Be Perceived as Military Friendly	To Aid in the Transition to Academic/ Civilian Life	To Show Appreciation for Military Service	Other
Research University <i>n</i> = 1	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Comprehensive University <i>n</i> = 3	33.3%	66.7%	100%	33.3%	
State University <i>n</i> = 5	100%	100%	100%	100%	
State College <i>n</i> = 6	83.3%	100%	83.3%	100%	16.7%
Total Responding Institutions <i>N</i> = 15	80%	93.3%	93.3%	86.7%	13.3%

Fifteen responding institutions provide the transitional resource of personnel to assist with admission process. To aid in the transition to academic/civilian life was listed as a reason for the transitional resource by 92.9% while to aid in academic success was noted as a reason for 85.7% of the responding institutions to offer personnel to assist with the admissions process. Meanwhile, to be perceived as military friendly and to show appreciation for military service were noted by 57.1% of the institutions providing this resource. One institution noted “other” as the reason for providing this transitional resource. Table 11 shows the reasons for having personnel to assist with admissions process as a transitional resource by sector.

Table 11

Reasons Institutions Offer Personnel to Assist With the Admissions Process

Sector Type, Number Offering Transitional Resource	To Aid in Academic Success	To Be Perceived as Military Friendly	To Aid in the Transition to Academic/ Civilian Life	To Show Appreciation for Military Service	Other
Research University <i>n</i> = 2	100%		50%		
Comprehensive University <i>n</i> = 2	50%	50%	100%	50%	
State University <i>n</i> = 5	100%	100%	100%	100%	
State College <i>n</i> = 6	67%	33%	83.3%	33%	17%
Total Responding Institutions <i>N</i> = 15	85.7%	57.1%	92.9%	57.1%	7.1%

Fifteen responding institutions indicated they offer personnel to assist with the financial aid process as a transitional resource for its student veterans. To aid in academic success and to aid in the transition to academic/civilian life were both reported by 86.7% of the institutions as a reason for this transitional resource. Approximately 47% of the institutions providing personnel to assist with the admissions process reported to aid in the academic success and to show appreciation for military service as the reason this transitional resource is offered. One institution (6.7%) reported “other” as the reason it provided personnel to assist with the financial aid process. Table 12 shows the reasons for having personnel to assist with the financial aid process as a transitional resource by sector.

Table 12

Reasons Institutions Offer Personnel to Assist With the Financial Aid Process

Sector Type, Number Offering Transitional Resource	To Aid in Academic Success	To Be Perceived as Military Friendly	To Aid in the Transition to Academic/ Civilian Life	To Show Appreciation for Military Service	Other
Research University <i>n</i> = 2	100%		100%		
Comprehensive University <i>n</i> = 2	50%	50%	100%	50%	
State University <i>n</i> = 5	100%	100%	80%	80%	
State College <i>n</i> = 6	83.3%	16.7%	83.3%	33.3%	16.7%
Total Responding Institutions <i>N</i> = 15	86.7%	46.7%	86.7%	46.7%	6.7%

Sixteen responding institutions indicated they offer personnel to assist with the benefits application and to aid in the transition to academic/civilian life was cited as the number one reason at 93.8%. Subsequent reasons included to aid in the academic success at 75%, to be perceived as military friendly at 62.5%, and to show appreciation for military service at 56.3%. One institution (6.3%) indicated “other” as the reason for offering this transitional resource. Table 13 shows the reasons for having personnel to assist with benefits application as a transitional resource by sector type.

Table 13

Reasons Institutions Offer Personnel to Assist With the Benefits Application

Sector Type, Number Offering Transitional Resource	To Aid in Academic Success	To Be Perceived as Military Friendly	To Aid in the Transition to Academic/ Civilian Life	To Show Appreciation for Military Service	Other
Research University <i>n</i> = 2	50%		100%		
Comprehensive University <i>n</i> = 3	66.7%	66.7%	100%	33.3%	
State University <i>n</i> = 5	100%	100%	100%	100%	
State College <i>n</i> = 6	66.7%	50%	83.3%	50%	16.7%
Total Responding Institutions <i>N</i> = 16	75%	62.5%	93.8%	56.3%	6.3%

Providing faculty/staff training for veterans' needs was reported as offered by 13 responding institutions. The most common reasons were to aid in the academic success and to aid in the transition to academic/civilian life, reported by 11 institutions or 84.6%. To be perceived as military friendly was reported as the reason by 76.9% and to show appreciation for military service was reported as the reason by 61.5% to provide faculty/staff training for veterans' needs. Two institutions (15.4%) reported "other" as the reason for offering this transitional resource. Table 14 shows the reasons for providing faculty/staff training on veterans' needs as a transitional resource by sector type.

Table 14

Reasons Institutions Offer Faculty and Staff Training to Understand Veterans' Needs

Type Institution, Number Offering Transitional Resource	To Aid in Academic Success	To Be Perceived as Military Friendly	To Aid in the Transition to Academic/ Civilian Life	To Show Appreciation for Military Service	Other
Research University <i>n</i> = 2	100%	50%	100%	100%	50%
Comprehensive University <i>n</i> = 3	33.3%	33.3%	100%	33.3%	
State University <i>n</i> = 4	100%	100%	75%	75%	
State College <i>n</i> = 4	100%	100%	75%	50%	25%
Total Responding Institutions <i>N</i> = 13	84.6%	76.9%	84.6%	61.5%	15.4%

Seven responding institutions reporting having advising personnel who assist with veterans only as a transitional resource. Reasons ranged from to aid in academic success (85.7%), to aid in the transition to academic/civilian life (71.4%), to be perceived as military friendly (57.1%), and to show appreciation for military service and “other”, both at 42.8%. Table 15 shows the reasons for advising personnel who assist with veterans only as a transitional resource by sector.

Table 15

Reasons Institutions Offer Advising Personnel Who Assist Veterans Only

Type Institution, Number Offering Transitional Resource	To Aid in Academic Success	To Be Perceived as Military Friendly	To Aid in the Transition to Academic/ Civilian Life	To Show Appreciation for Military Service	Other
Research University <i>n</i> = 1	100%		100%		100%
Comprehensive University <i>n</i> = 1	100%	100%	100%	100%	
State University <i>n</i> = 2	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%
State College <i>n</i> = 3	100%	66.7%	66.7%	33.3%	33.3%
Total Responding Institutions <i>N</i> = 7	85.7%	57.1%	71.4%	42.8%	42.8%

Nine out of 10 (90%) of the responding institutions who reported offering mentoring for student veterans cited to aid in the transition to academic/civilian life. Seventy percent of the institutions reported to aid in academic success, and 50% reported to be perceived as military friendly and to show appreciation for military service as the reason for mentoring as a transitional resource. Table 16 shows the reasons for providing mentoring for student veterans as a transitional resource by sector.

Table 16

Reasons Institutions Offer a Mentoring Program for Veterans

Type Institution, Number Offering Transitional Resource	To Aid in Academic Success	To Be Perceived as Military Friendly	To Aid in the Transition to Academic/ Civilian Life	To Show Appreciation for Military Service	Other
Research University <i>n</i> = 2	100%		50%		
Comprehensive University <i>n</i> = 1	100%	100%	100%	100%	
State University <i>n</i> = 4	75%	75%	100%	50%	
State College <i>n</i> = 3	33.3%	33.3%	100%	66.7%	
Total Responding Institutions <i>N</i> = 10	70%	50%	90%	50%	

Of the responding institutions, 13 offer connections with community organizations for student veterans as a transitional resource. The most popular reason for offering this transitional resource was to aid in the transition to academic/civilian life (92.3%) followed by to aid in academic success (69.2%). To show appreciation for military service and to be perceived as military friendly were cited as reasons for offering this transitional resource by 61.5% and 46.2%, respectively, of the institutions offering it. “Other” was cited as a reason by one or 7.7% of the institutions providing this transitional resource. Table 17 shows the reasons for offering connections with community organizations for student veterans as a transitional resource by sector.

Table 17

Reasons Institutions Offer Connections With Community Organizations for Student Veterans

Type Institution, Number Offering Transitional Resource	To Aid in Academic Success	To Be Perceived as Military Friendly	To Aid in the Transition to Academic/ Civilian Life	To Show Appreciation for Military Service	Other
Research University <i>n</i> = 2	50%		100%	50%	50%
Comprehensive University <i>n</i> = 3	33.3%	33.3%	100%	33.3%	
State University <i>n</i> = 5	100%	100%	100%	60%	
State College <i>n</i> = 3	66.7%		66.7%	100%	
Total Responding Institutions <i>N</i> = 13	69.2%	46.2%	92.3%	61.5%	7.7%

Only five responding institutions indicated the offering of providing disabilities personnel who assist with veterans only as a transitional resource they provided. Three institutions (60%) cited to aid in academic success and to aid in the transition to academic/civilian life as reasons for this offering. Two institutions, or 40%, offered this transitional resource to be perceived as military friendly, and one institution, or 20%, offered it to show appreciation for military service. Three institutions (60%) indicated “other” as a reason for having disabilities personnel who assist with veterans only. Table 18 shows the reasons for providing disabilities personnel who assist veterans only as a transitional resource by institution type.

Table 18

Reasons Institutions Offer Disabilities Personnel Who Assist Veterans Only

Type Institution, Number Offering Transitional Resource	To Aid in Academic Success	To Be Perceived as Military Friendly	To Aid in the Transition to Academic/ Civilian Life	To Show Appreciation for Military Service	Other
Research University <i>n</i> = 1	100%		100%		100%
Comprehensive University <i>n</i> = 1	100%	100%	100%	100%	
State University <i>n</i> = 1					100%
State College <i>n</i> = 2	50%	50%	50%		50%
Total Responding Institutions <i>N</i> = 5	60%	40%	60%	20%	60%

For responding institutions who provide counseling personnel who assist veterans only, two (28.6%) noted to aid in academic success, to be perceived as military friendly, and to aid in the transition to academic/civilian life as the reasons for offering this transitional resource. To show appreciation for military service was noted as the reasons for offering this transitional resource by one institution (14.3%). Five institutions (71.4%) noted “other” as the reason for offering counseling personnel who assist veterans only. Table 19 shows the reasons for providing counseling personnel who assist veterans only as a transitional resource by sector.

Table 19

Reasons Institutions Offer Counseling Personnel Who Assist Veterans Only

Type Institution, Number Offering Transitional Resource	To Aid in Academic Success	To Be Perceived as Military Friendly	To Aid in the Transition to Academic/ Civilian Life	To Show Appreciation for Military Service	Other
Research University <i>n</i> = 1	100%		100%		100%
Comprehensive University <i>n</i> = 1	100%	100%	100%	100%	
State University <i>n</i> = 1					100%
State College <i>n</i> = 4		25%			75%
Total Responding Institutions <i>N</i> = 7	28.6%	28.6%	28.6%	14.3%	71.4%

To aid in academic success and to aid in the transition to academic/civilian life were the most common reasons (71.4%) responding institutions conduct an orientation for student veterans. To be perceived as military friendly was noted as the second most common reason (57.1%) for this resource to be provided. Three institutions or 42.9% provided an orientation to their student veterans to show appreciation for military service and one institution (14.3%) indicated “other” as a reason. Table 20 shows the reasons for conducting an orientation for student veterans as a transitional resource by sector.

Table 20

Reasons Institutions Offer Orientation for Student Veterans

Type Institution, Number Offering Transitional Resource	To Aid in Academic Success	To Be Perceived as Military Friendly	To Aid in the Transition to Academic/ Civilian Life	To Show Appreciation for Military Service	Other
Research University <i>n</i> = 2	100%	50%	50%		
Comprehensive University <i>n</i> = 1	100%	100%	100%	100%	
State University <i>n</i> = 3	66.7%	66.7%	66.7%	66.7%	33.3%
State College <i>n</i> = 1			100%		
Total Responding Institutions <i>N</i> = 7	71.4%	57.1%	71.4%	42.9%	14.3%

Four responding institutions provide a transitional resource other than those resources listed in the survey, which were described by the institutions as veteran scholarships, an awards ceremony, being a VSOC site, and reserved veteran parking spaces. Seventy-five percent of the institutions who provide transitional resources not provided in the survey do so to show appreciation for military service. Two institutions (50%) provided these other transitional resources to aid in academic success and to be perceived as military friendly. One institution (25%) offered this other resource to aid in the transition to academic/civilian life. Two institutions or 50% cited “other” as the reason for offering an unlisted transitional resource to its student veterans. Table 21

shows the reasons for the four responding institutions to offer a transitional resource not provided in the survey.

Table 21

Reasons Institutions Offer Other Transitional Resources

Type Institution, Number Offering Transitional Resource	To Aid in Academic Success	To Be Perceived as Military Friendly	To Aid in the Transition to Academic/ Civilian Life	To Show Appreciation for Military Service	Other
Research University <i>n</i> = 1	100%			100%	100%
Comprehensive University <i>n</i> = 2	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%
State College <i>n</i> = 1		50%		50%	
Total Responding Institutions <i>N</i> = 4	50%	50%	25%	75%	50%

The survey responses indicated 159 transitional resources were provided among the 17 responding institutions, as shown by sector in Table 22. The two responding research institutions provided 22 transitional resources, an average of 11 each. Twenty-nine transitional resources were provided by the three responding comprehensive universities, averaging 9.67 resources each. Five responding state universities provided 49 transitional resources, an average of 9.8 each. The seven responding state colleges reported 59 transitional resources, with an average of 8.4 each. In considering the total transitional resources reported, the mean was 9.35 with a median of 9 and a mode of 8.

With 14 transitional resources identified in the survey, the average offering varied from 79% for research institutions to 60% for state colleges.

Table 22

Transitional Resources, in Total and Average

Sector Type	Total Number of Transitional Resources	Average Number of Transitional Resources
Research Institutions <i>n</i> = 2	22	11
Comprehensive Universities <i>n</i> = 3	29	9.67
State Universities <i>n</i> = 5	49	9.8
State Colleges <i>n</i> = 7	59	8.4
Total Responding <i>N</i> = 17	159	9.35

Survey respondents selected among five options as to why a transitional resource was offered – to aid in academic success, to be perceived as military friendly, to aid in the transition to academic/civilian life, to show appreciation for military service, and other. The reasons for offering a transitional resource shared some commonality across sectors. For research institutions, to aid in academic success and to aid in the transition to academic/civilian life were the reported as the most popular reasons for offering transitional resources.

Research institutions noted “other” eight times and to show appreciation for military service seven times as reasons for offering a transitional resource by research institutions. To be perceived as military friendly was noted three times by research institutions as why a transitional resource was offered. As with research institutions,

comprehensive institutions ranked to aid in transition to academic/civilian life as a common reason for offering transitional resources, being noted 28 times. To be perceived as military friendly, to aid in academic success, and to show appreciation for military service were noted similarly by 17, 16, and 14 comprehensive institutions respectively. “Other” as a reason for offering a transitional resource was noted by one institution.

State universities closely ranked to aid in academic success, to aid in transition to academic/civilian life, and to be perceived as military friendly as reasons for offering transitional resources, noted 44, 43, and 42 times respectively. To show appreciation for military service was noted 37 times as a reason for offering a transitional resource. Four instances noted “other” as a reason for offering a transitional resource. Like research institutions and state universities, to aid in academic success was the most common reason noted for offering transitional resources for state colleges, being noted 41 times. Like the other sectors, to aid in the transition to academic/civilian life was noted as a popular reason for offering transitional resources at state colleges, being noted 39 times. To be perceived as military friendly and to show appreciation for military service were both noted 30 times as a reason for offering a transitional resource. Twelve state colleges noted “other” reasons for offering transitional resources.

Figure 3 shows the reasons for offering transitional resources for the 17 responding institutions. Across all sectors of participating institutions, the most popular reason for offering transitional resources was to aid in the transition to academic/civilian life, noted 29% of the time. To show appreciation for military service the second most popular reason for offering transitional resources, noted 24% of the time. Twenty-three

percent of transitional resources were offered to increase academic success. Closely following at 20% was transitional resources being offered to be perceived as military friendly. “Other” or reasons not included as options were the reasons why transitional resource were offered four percent of the time.



Figure 3. Reasons for offering transitional resources, by percentage, at 17 responding institutions.

A survey question requested institutions to briefly describe how decisions are made to continue or discontinue a transitional resource, to which the decision-making process varied and may not be linked to retention and graduation. The following comments were noted from some of the responding institutions. A research university noted:

While Graduation/Retention/Persistence rates are all valuable in gauging the success of any IHL program, to include our military/veteran programs, it simply stands to reason that providing transitional resources will aid in both attracting and retaining veterans to this institution.

A comprehensive university shared:

The institution uses data to inform decisions, but student participation also can affect the longevity of resources. Both qualitative and quantitative data spoke to the need for tutoring resource for veterans, but the students did not use the service, resulting in the decision to discontinue it and reallocate the resources until we could figure out how to get them to take advantage of the resource. Thus, decisions to continue are based on (1) need as determined by both qualitative and quantitative measures and (2) return on the investment of the resource.

Three state universities provided comments to this survey question. One wrote “We have a permanent transitional program for veterans and have no plans for discontinuation. If we were to decide to change the status of this program, I imagine it would be data driven based on retention.” The third state university stated services were initiated by the Veterans Resource Center in collaboration with other on campus departments but did not provide any basis for decisions. Comments were provided by four state colleges with one stating “We listen to student needs and requests and also review student roadblocks or issues that prevent them from attending or being successful while attending – to identify areas we can improve” and another reporting “Our decisions are based on what will encourage the students and benefit them. We also base it on the number of students we serve and the budget that we operate within.”

Qualitative Findings

Thirteen of the responding institutions agreed to be interviewed as part of the qualitative portion of the research, and 11 were interviewed, exploring the processes and procedures of the institutions to address the research questions. Of the 11 institutions

interviewed, all were identifying student veterans who were using benefits, and eight of them were identifying student veterans who were not using benefits. Interviews were conducted on the phone or in person and were transcribed by a third party prior to analysis. Modifications in the data collection process, such as the addition of or change in interview questions, were made to allow the emergence of theory.

Coding. To gain meaning and deep understanding to the qualitative data, the researcher conducted multi-level approach of coding, which included open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Memoing was incorporated in the coding process to recording the researcher's thoughts to aid in the generation of theory. The researcher performed open coding by reading each interview transcript line by line. For ease in reading, the researcher highlighted groups of text of initial codes. This information was then transferred to a Word document in a table for each research question. Using continuous comparison of the data, the identified concepts that were similar in nature were grouped with related codes, and identified concepts that were similar in meaning were combined, deleting duplicated information. The concepts were assigned to an initial category and regrouped as needed. According to Strauss and Corbin (2008), axial coding involves reconstructing data that were broken as part of the open coding process.

Following this idea, the researcher reread each interview line by line for increased clarity of the open codes identified and then recoded and regrouped data, when necessary, into categories and subcategories to show similarity in meaning. Examples and quotes from the interviews became a part of the table and were used to supporting understanding in the selective coding process. The selective coding included, again a regrouping into identifying core categories until no other categories could be identified, building the

theory and identifying a theme. Table 23 provides an example of the axial coding performed for each research question. To further analyze the axial coding, the researcher conducted selective coding with each research questions. Coding provided disclosure and recording as themes for the first research question; tracking and obstacles as themes for the second research question; and collaborations, surveys, gauging effectiveness, and awareness/promotion of transitional resources as themes for the third research question. The themes identified for each research question are discussed within the research question headings.

Table 23

Coding by Research Question

RQ1: How do USG institutions record the identification of student veterans?

RQ1a: How do student veterans disclose veteran status and how do USG institutions record it?

Categories	Subcategories	Codes
Disclosure	Processes	Admissions application Use of benefits FAFSA Readmissions JST
	Non-process	OrgSync DD214 Availability of perks Word of mouth from other student veterans Event attendance Graduation Disclosure campaigns Drill schedules Special populations: ROTC, graduate students
	Incentives	With associated cost Without associated cost

Recording	Obstacle	Academic pursuit without affiliation
	Verification	Update by email Confirmation by document
	Banner	SAAADMS SGASADD SPAIDEN SGASTDN
	Outside Banner	Spreadsheet Other portals
	Obstacles	Asking, not recording at admissions/readmissions Unclear admission questions regarding status Not knowing who needs data Insufficient staff, knowledge
	Collaborations	SCO Registrar Military resource center Financial Aid Faculty Administration Admissions eCampus Academic advising Academic success

RQ2: What data regarding student veterans are tracked by USG institutions?

Categories	Subcategories	Codes
Tracking	Aids in retention	List of students Notification of withdrawal Report of academically dismissed or academic probation
	Aids in graduation	Use of attributes Indicated start term and graduation term on spreadsheet

	Desired tracking	More than IPEDS Reasons for stop outs Employment and career status Satisfaction of services Status of veterans with expired benefits
	Cautions	Small population Subpopulations should not be ignored
Obstacles	Transfers	Transfers in and out
	First time, full time not veteran representative	New formula needed to best represent veteran population
	Expiration of benefits	Expiration of benefits

RQ3: How do USG institutions use this information to make decisions about the transitional resources offered and their effectiveness?

RQ3a: How are decisions made regarding the offering of transitional resources?

RQ3b: What means are used to determine the effectiveness of the transitional resources offered?

Categories	Subcategories	Codes
Collaborations	Community	Area businesses Organizations
	Campus	Specialized committee Financial aid Academic success Bursar Counseling Faculty Student activities Study abroad Administration Academic advising Registrar eCampus
Surveys	Student survey Military friendly survey	

Gauging effectiveness	Nonacademic	Listening to student veterans; survey Ranking in military friendly surveys Student participation, feeling connected Campus climate change
	Academic	Retention Graduation
Awareness/promotion of transitional resources	Campus TV monitors Social media New student orientation Open houses	

The researcher conducted selective coding to further analyze the axial coding performed with each research questions, the primary and the secondary. The secondary research question to RQ1 was written as the researcher understood there were multiple ways in which disclosure was being made and the research needed to reflect the methods of not just how the identification is being recorded but how it was being disclosed beyond the formal processes, such as on the admission application. From the primary research question of how USG institutions record the identification of student veterans and the developed secondary research question of how student veterans disclose veteran status and how institutions record the status, two themes were identified. These themes were disclosure and recording.

Disclosure. Regarding the student veterans disclose veteran status and how USG institutions record it, the first theme identified in the coding process was disclosure. The identification of the theme was anchored in the various means a student veteran may disclose military status. The method could be quite structured through a process or more informally, which was identified as non-processes. Processes, which gathered the veteran status ,included the admission application and submission of the JST and non-processes,

such as joining a student veteran organization or word of mouth from other student veterans. Other processes by which student identification was collected included the use of benefits, FAFSA completion, and readmission. The question of military status was not consistently asked as part of the readmission process or, if it was asked, it was not being recorded in all cases. An example of when an update would be needed is a student could have been enrolled at an institution, stopped out or stopped attending prior to graduation, made a military commitment and then returned to the institution. For this scenario, the military status would need to be updated. The FAFSA provides an opportunity for the student to indicate veteran status, which can be noted on the student's record. The recording of student veterans receiving benefits was noted as being more accurate than self-disclosure and was an easier identification to make and record because, as Institution 6 stated, "[the veterans] have to see us to get their money, so we know who those students are. They seek us out."

Non-processes varied among institution and included providing a DD214, which is a record of military service provided to the service member at the time of discharge (DD214.TLD, 2007), attending an event targeted at military connected students, identifying at disclosure campaigns, providing drill schedules, and targeting special populations, such as Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC; Georgia Institute of Technology, 2019).) or graduate students with similar inconsistency of recording the obtained veteran status in one location. A student veteran could register as a member of a student veterans organization through a third-party portal, such as OrgSync, a student engagement portal (Campuslabs.com, n.d.), or simply provide a copy of his/her DD214. Attendance to veteran or military focused event was a means of identification as well as

requesting a veteran code for graduation. One institution conducted disclosure campaigns with drinks and snacks to draw in student veterans to self-identify, and word of mouth from other student veterans about available resources was also helpful in collecting veteran status on students. Submission of drill schedules for reservists or connecting with special populations, such as ROTC and graduate students, were noted by institutions as opportunities to obtain self-disclosure of veteran status.

The use of incentives may encourage self-disclosure of veteran status, especially if the student veteran desired to pursue an academic goal without any known military affiliation, so incentives was included in the theme of disclosure. The incentives used by institutions for the disclosure may or may not have an associated cost. Priority registration was a popular incentive but was limited to student veterans using VA educational benefits at some institutions. Receiving information regarding job opportunities through a listserv was another no cost incentive. An institution noted self-disclosure could assist an institution in offering more timely assistance in respect to VA educational benefits. Discounted athletic tickets and a military appreciation lunch were incentives with a cost associated with them, even though social benefits and a connection to the institution outside the classroom could be linked to this type of events. With these incentivized actions, the recording of the veteran status needs a single location for recording.

Recording. As part of the coding process, recording was identified as second theme for the first research questions. With updates to veteran status taking place with various documents and potentially by multiple departments, Institution 8 stated there was concern over “making sure that students are accurately coded.” Two institutions shared

this concern and took additional steps to provide another level of ensuring accuracy. Institution 9 sent an email to military connected students on a semester basis with the current veteran/military status indicated and requested a response if the status was not accurate. An example of an update was an application may have been submitted when the student was on active duty and now he/she was a veteran. Any updates were processed by the military resource office without any supporting documentation. Institution 11 created a “confirmed” attribute in Banner and identified using this code when supporting documentation, such as a DD214 ,was provided. The verification of veteran status and noting for that veteran status had been confirmed provided a level of data accuracy other institutions did not have.

Most institutions used Banner to record the veteran status. Banner is a leading “enterprise resource planning (ERP) system” (Ellucian, 2019, para. 3) for higher education that links student data for registration, enrollment, grading, advising, and course planning (Ellucian, 2019) utilized by institutions in the USG (2000). Recording veteran status through admission/readmissions processes, the financial aid application, the use of benefits, and submission of a military transcript for credit evaluation was typically indicated at least one of several Banner screens, such as SAAADMS, SGASADD, SGASTDN, and SPAIDEN, further supporting the inconsistency of recording the veteran status in a single location even within Banner. SAAADMS is the Banner screen that contains the current admission application information submitted to an institution, which is accessed usually by the student’s assigned identification number and where initial attributes are recorded (SAAADMS: Admission Application Form, 2019). An attribute is an identification common to a group of students used to increase report

flexibility. Assigned attributes, which may have an ending term, include first generation student, beginning Fall 20YY, residential student, college athlete, or transfer student (Hyatt, n.d.). Several tabs are present on this screen to store various categories of information. Tabs include the application tab, as shown in Figure 4, the curricula tab, the checklist tab, and the contact, cohorts, attributes tab, as shown in Figure 5. It is the contact, cohort, attribute tab that would store any self-disclosed veteran information from the application (SAAADMS: Admission Application Form, 2019).

Priority	Term	Program	Catalog	Level	Campus	College	Degree
1	201009	B Ed Kindergarten/Ele	200909	Undergraduate	Downtown	Faculty of Education	Bachelor of Educator

Priority	Term	Type	Field of Study	Department	Attached to Major
1	201009	Major	Kindergarten & Elementary Ed	Integrated Studies in Ed	

Figure 4. Banner Screen, SAAADMS, Application Tab. Adapted from McGill IT Services (2016).

Contact Type	Description	Contact Date
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	26-OCT-2010 05:08:17 PM
<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>

Cohort	Description	Activity Date
<input type="text"/>		26-OCT-2010
<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>

Attribute	Description	Activity Date
CUG0	Undergraduate Level Year 0	08-JAN-2010
<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>

Figure 5. Banner Screen, SAAADMS, Contracts, Cohort, Attributes Tab. Adapted from McGill IT Services (2016).

Student attributes are maintained in SGASADD, as shown in Figure 6, and are “used to track special characteristics about a student that are not part of the student’s academic record” (Maintaining Student Attributes in Banner, n.d., para. 1). While attributes can be assigned from the application, others can be updated after matriculation. When applicable, an attribute can have a start and end term, or the attribute can be assigned to indefinitely to the student record (Maintaining Student Attributes in Banner, n.d.). These attributes were used by institutions in calculating graduation rates, and where veteran status, as an attribute, was recorded by some institutions.

Figure 6. Banner Screen, SGASADD. Adapted from USG Information Technology Services Using Student Attribute Process (2013).

SGASTDN is a Banner screen typically populated once the student has an admission decision and is populated with information from SAAADMS, as shown in Figure 7. It contains current and historical student information, so multiple student records may exist. A veteran tab, as shown in Figure 8, exists on this screen to house recorded veteran information (Maintaining Student Attributes in Banner, n.d.) and where most institutions to identify the use of VA educational benefits. Updates to SGASTDN were made by the school certifying official, or Banner was updated automatically with submission of an online form requesting certification. The tabs on this screen allowed for entry of the number of hours certified and additional attributes to identify the need for certain communication, such as an updated certificate of eligibility.

The screenshot shows the Banner Student Summary screen for student SGASTND. The interface includes a menu bar with options like File, Edit, Options, Block, Item, Record, Query, Tools, and Help. The main content area is divided into several sections:

- General Learner:** Fields for New Term (Spring 2011), Student Status (Active), Student Type (New First Time), Residence (Out of State), Fee Assessment Rate, Class (First Year Dental), and Full or Part Time (Full Time).
- Additional Information:** Fields for Site, Session, Block, and Citizenship (U.S. Citizen).
- Curricula Summary - Primary:** A table with columns for Priority Term, Program, Catalog, Level, Campus, Rate, College, and Degree. The primary entry shows Program 'Doctor of Dental Sur' and Degree 'Doctor of Dental S'.
- Field of Study Summary:** A table with columns for Priority Term, Type, Field of Study, Department, and Attached to Major. The entry shows Field of Study 'Dentistry' and Department 'Dentistry'.

At the bottom, there is a footer with the text: 'DUPREC - create new eff term, DUFFLD - go to Advisor Form, HELP - go to Degree' and 'Record 1/1'.

Figure 7. Banner Screen, SGASTND, Learner Tab. Adapted from McGill Student Records and Course Registration (2011).

The screenshot shows the Banner Student Summary screen for student SGASTND, specifically the Veteran tab. The screen displays a table titled 'VETERAN CERTIFICATION INFORMATION' with the following data:

Veteran Type	Description	Term
E	Chapter 33 Post 9/11 - Depts	201905
E	Chapter 33 Post 9/11 - Depts	201905
E	Chapter 33 Post 9/11 - Depts	201901
E	Chapter 33 Post 9/11 - Depts	201805
E	Chapter 33 Post 9/11 - Depts	201805
E	Chapter 33 Post 9/11 - Depts	201801
E	Chapter 33 Post 9/11 - Depts	201708

At the bottom, there is a footer with the text: 'Page 1 of 1' and 'Page 1/1'.

Figure 8. Banner Screen, SGASTND, Veteran Tab. Adapted from McGill Student Records and Course Registration (2011).

SPAIDEN is the identification screen in Banner, containing name, address, telephone, and other biographic/demographic information. The biographical tab of this screen, as shown in Figure 9, contains an area for veteran information, such as veteran file number, separation data, and a place to indicate disabled veteran status (Student

Information Management System User Guide Section 2, n.d.). Institution 1 indicated use of benefits on SPAIDEN, by adding the appropriate social security number in the area labeled as the VA file number. This type entry was used for all military connected students and did not allow for designation of status of veteran or dependent.

The screenshot shows the 'Biographical Information' tab in the SPAIDEN system. The form is divided into two main sections: 'BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION' and 'RACE INFORMATION'. The 'BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION' section includes fields for Gender (Male, Female, Not Available), Birth Date (11/22/), Age (38), SSN/SIN/TIN, Deceased Date, Citizenship (Y - Citizen), Marital Status (S - Single), Religion, Legacy, Ethnicity (6 - White), New Ethnicity (Not Hispanic or Latino), Ethnicity and Race Confirmed (checked), Ethnicity and Race Date (03/05/2018), Veteran File Number (NO), Veteran Classification (Not a Veteran), Date of Discharge, Armed Forces Service Medal Indicator, and Disabled Veteran. The 'RACE INFORMATION' section shows a table with two rows: Race 4 (American Indian or Alaska Native) and Race 8 (White). The bottom of the screen shows a navigation bar with 'Record 1 of 2'.

Figure 9. Banner Screen, SPAIDEN, Biographical Tab. Adapted from Murray State: SPAIDEN – General Person Identification (n.d.).

Veteran status disclosure was also recorded in places other than Banner, such as various spreadsheets and other portals. One institution recorded student veteran information on a spreadsheet with various worksheets and color codes and third-party platforms, such as OrgSync and listservs, were common ways of recording the veteran status outside Banner for non-process events. While spreadsheets and third-party platforms have their benefits to the institution, they allowed the veteran status to be recorded in various location and often without sharing of information between

departments that would have a need to know. Additionally, not all institutions felt the liberty to update or share veteran status information when disclosed during a non-process event without the student veteran specifically stating he/she wished to be identified.

During the interview process, institutions mentioned several obstacles regarding the recording of the veteran status, which could be controlled by the institution, so obstacles were included in the theme of recording. At some institutions, when the veteran status was collected as part of the application/readmission process, but the process stopped there. Collecting the status did not ensure it was recorded, recorded in a manner that would be associated with the student beyond the admission application, or was recorded in a means which could be meaningful for data analysis for the institution, such as in Banner. Some institutions felt students in general, not just student veterans, were confused by the veteran status question on the admissions application and, therefore, were uncertain as to the accuracy of the self-reported data obtained through the application process. As a result, a couple were working on making changes or were discussing changes to provide guidance for more accurate data collection at the point of submission of the admission application, but these changes would not be system-wide and beneficial to all institutions. There was concern regarding the institution understanding with whom the data should be shared and having limited staff or knowledge on how to identify and track the population was also mentioned as an obstacle.

The lack of sharing of student veteran status and the identification being recorded in multiple places created an obstacle for institutions because data were not recorded in single location for ease of analysis. Institution 2 captured the essence the problem with

using multiple platforms to record veteran status by asking “Why cannot I run a report ...that has everybody so that I can ... get a better understanding of our entire size [of veteran students enrolled]?” The representative from Institution 10 agreed, specifically for identifying all student veterans whether they were utilizing VA educational benefits, by saying the goal was to “[create] community for all of our military and dependent students.” With a variety of locations to record the veteran status, running a report of building a community is made difficult.

Collaboration among institutional departments could aid in a more thorough identification of student veterans as there was a lack of consistency in sharing and cross-referencing student veteran identification among various departments. Collaboration was needed for ensuring a thorough review and inclusion of student veterans, particularly for areas where student veterans may be informally identified but not officially recorded. Due to collaboration being an essential part of recording veteran status, it was included in this theme. Administration played a major role in actions center at serving veterans, such as identification and recording the veteran status or allowing access to Banner screens where updates were made. However, this collaborative spirit was not present or fostered at all institutions according to the interviews. The school certifying official and Admissions shared use of VA educational benefits and self-disclosure to ensure the thorough status recording perhaps when self-disclosure was not made at all or it was not recorded as part of the permanent student record. Collaborations between the military resource center and Registrar was shown in comparing departmental lists for communication and military related out of state tuition fee waivers. Other collaborators mentioned during the interviews were advisers, financial aid, career services, faculty,

eCampus, and academic advising who had interaction with students who may disclose veteran status. During an advising session, an advisor may learn a student is a veteran and could ensure the status is recorded. Financial Aid could conduct an event specifically for veterans or career services could host a veteran job fair. A student may disclose veteran status to a faculty member who could encourage official disclosure to an administrative office for recording. At one institution, eCampus was involved in the review of the military transcript, so the department would be a possible collaborator.

Selective coding for the second primary research question, relating to what student veteran data are tracked by USG institutions, also yielded two themes, which included tracking and obstacles. In order to track retention, graduation, and other desired success measurements and to identify transitional resources to impact these measurements positively, two themes associated with data tracked by USG institutions were identified, tracking and obstacles. Aids in tracking retention and graduation were mentioned during the interview process and included notification of student veteran actions, such as withdrawals. Obstacles was the second theme, with some obstacles, such as identifying student veterans with expired benefits, being under the control of the institution while others were not.

Tracking. As tracking identified as a theme for the second primary research questions during the coding process, institutions noted several aids and provided some cautions in relation to tracking retention and graduation. Aids for tracking retention included having a list of identified student veterans from which to work, being notified of withdrawals, and knowing any unfavorable academic standing for identified student veterans. Using attributes, recording start and graduation term on a spreadsheet, and

having a relationship with the institutional research office were aids in tracking graduation. Student veterans may be a small percentage of the overall student population and subpopulations may not be recognized or identified. However, as one institution cautioned during the interview, small veteran population and subpopulations should not be overlooked. Also, any subpopulations, such as reservists who may have active duty time, may vary from the overall veteran population in retention and graduation rates. Tracking these separately may help an institution identify any additional resources that may be needed. To provide focus to these groups, they were included specifically within the theme of tracking.

Several means of desired tracking were mentioned during the interview process among all sectors of institutions for which collaboration would be needed. Research institutions were interested in employment and career information for its student veterans post-graduation. Desired tracking for comprehensive universities focused on why a student veteran choose to not attend the institution while state universities mentioned reason for stopping out and information beyond the requirements of IPEDS. Focus for state universities and state colleges for desired tracking was a general means to know how their student veterans could be served better, which could include collaboration across numerous campus departments. To continue the tracking of successes, being able to track student veterans who had expired VA educational benefits was desired. The representative from Institution 1, which was not conducting any tracking at the time of the interview, stated “[Student veterans and other military students] are a hot topic at our institution right now and, of course, the more data...the more success we will have to be able to implement [beneficial resources].” Having the means to track student veterans to

multiple ways was important to various institutions so embedding the desired trackings within the theme of tracking was essential.

Obstacles. Obstacles was another theme identified for the research question of tracking retention and graduation during the coding process. An obstacle repeatedly mentioned by institutions, such as Institutions 7 and 11, was student veterans seldom meet “first time, full time” U.S. Department of Education criteria for tracking, as Institution 3 said it was not representative of the student veteran population and transferring in and out of various institution may tracking retention more difficult. Institution 11 noted “the Department of Education isn’t particularly interested in this group of students, but they are surely here and they are an important group of students. We want them to have good outcomes so let’s start thinking in ways to talk about their success measures.” Related to the noted importance of tracking this population and measuring its successes, Institution 3 stated a new formula was needed. Another obstacle mentioned in measuring the retention and graduation of student veterans, initially by Institution 2, was ensuring they are tracked event after VA educational benefits expired, which may have excluded some students depending on where student veterans were identified in Banner and how institutional research reports were written.

The third primary research question regarding how USG institutions use this information to make decisions about the transitional resources offered and their effectiveness had two secondary research questions. The two secondary questions were written as the researcher realized the limited use to data in tracking student veterans and the effectiveness of transitional resources was typically not linked to data, such as retention and graduation. The secondary research question of how decisions were made

regarding the offering of transitional resources had collaborations and surveys identified as themes.

Collaborations. Themes identified during the coding process regarding the decisions made regarding transitional resources were collaboration and surveys. Within the theme of collaboration, on and off campus working relationships aided in identification and offering of transitional resources, a finding within the literature review. Often noted in the institutional interview was a specialized committee for service to military students. The Institution 8 representative stated “we have that collaboration culture here. That’s just one of the things that they pride on either community collaborations or inter department or cross campus collaboration.” Individual departments on campus also participated in supporting student veterans on some campuses. The Registrar’s Office provided unofficial transcript review on one campus; Financial Aid conducted workshops to aid in completion of FAFSAs for student veterans and to share information on private scholarships; Career Services hosted workshops for student veterans to set up LinkedIn profiles, to translate military skills to civilian terms and show value to the civilian workforce, and to connect with employers for internships and job opportunities. The Bursar’s Office was another common collaborator as was Counseling where one institution stated, “whole group of counselors who are willing to go out and seek training specifically in dealing with veterans and their needs”.

Perhaps less common, Institution 11 mentioned Student Activities and Study Abroad as collaborators for their student veterans. Student Activities, often responsible for social and recreational activities on campus, understood the busy schedules of student veterans but worked to get them involved in activities and Study Abroad was “dedicated

to helping veterans understand how they can get a student abroad experience for much the same cost as they would pay for a fourth year” and the costs the VA would and would not cover. Collaboration with Admissions at one institution included housing a VA student worker in the office to aid with prospective student veterans and other military students. eCampus was noted as a collaborator in aiding student veterans in receiving prior learning credit through portfolio submission or military credit. Ensuring acceptance of classes for VA educational benefits by Academic Advising was yet another collaboration that benefited student veterans. Collaboration with Administration was mentioned by some institutions, including a research institution with student veterans being five to seven percent of the overall student population and a state college with student veterans being two percent of the overall student population, showing the size of the institution and/or the military population did not impact the likelihood of support at this level. Continued collaboration was important in understanding the needs of student veterans as one institution representative believed understanding their needs and “the more complete picture we can paint about our student veterans” aided in receiving additional resources when they were needed. While not linked to a specific area on campus but more to a collaborative culture was the access to data. One institutional representative stated having a level of access to data for analysis greater than others in similar positions within the USG and felt this level of access to data aided in what the institution did to “get people here, to keep them here and get them out successfully.”

Collaboration with off campus resources mentioned by institutional representatives during the interview process included area businesses and nearby military bases and extending informational sessions to the community. Area businesses aided student veterans with mentoring, resume writing, dressing for success, and networking. Nearby military bases were partners in educational programs with at least one institution. Informational sessions, such as lunch and learns, were extended to the community as a means of providing resources and potentially reaching potential students.

Surveys. Institutions also focused on survey responses to make decisions about transitional resources, which resulted in surveys being identified as a theme in the coding process. Student surveys and military friendly surveys are providing insight to what student veterans want and when a change is needed or desired. Demands for resources, such as a computer lab for completion of FAFSA and the application of VA educational benefits and a fax machine for submission of information to the VA ,were a means of an institution “creating its own best practices” by focusing on student veteran input. Survey completion helped an institution review “what can we be doing differently or better for our student veterans” and “reveal areas where we can improve.”

The research question regarding the effectiveness of transitional resources offered and their effectiveness yielded two themes following selective coding. The first theme, gauging effectiveness, describe the range of measurements found during research, including academic and non-academic standards. The second theme was awareness/promotion. Before any tracking regarding transitional resource effectiveness could be calculated, student veterans had to be aware of the resource and, ideally, make use of it.

Gauging effectiveness. As a theme identified during the coding process for the third primary research question, gauging effectiveness in strictly academic or qualitative ways was not practiced at all institutions interview. Through the interview process, it was discovered many decisions made regarding transitional resources were not typically related to tracking of retention and graduation. Instead, the institutions who sought information in this respect were surveying the student veterans in some fashion. The representative from Institution 3 stated, “more than anything, it’s a matter of customer satisfaction.” Several institutions noted the ranking of military friendly surveys was helpful in determining effectiveness of the transitional resources offered because the surveys provided “an opportunity to do an internal audit of sorts” to view student satisfaction and student complaints. Student participation, climate change, and a connectedness to the institution were all noted as a means of success. Student participation in an event or use of a resource aided in the overall student experience and, therefore, impacted retention and graduations rates was the viewpoint of one institutional representative. A change in the climate for students was another measurement of success. Institution 10 noted “the tone ... has drastically changed” and student veterans were using resources in the past by “fake signing papers”. Creating an atmosphere of connectedness for student veterans was also noted by Institution 10, saying “if students come and they don’t feel a part within that first semester, it is very possible they are going to try and find that somewhere else” so the opportunity to connect with student veterans, perhaps with transitional resources, was important.

Awareness/promotion of transitional resources. For student veterans to benefit from transitional resources, they must be aware of and take advantage of them, eluding to

the second theme of awareness identified during the coding process. Due to the demands of student veterans between academics, family, and work, institutions often found engagement difficult to accomplish. Means to remind or inform student veterans of the resources available to them include email distribution, use of campus TV monitors, social media, new student orientations, and open houses. Utilization of promotion of transitional resources were mentioned by Institutions 3, 5, 6, and 10. In addition to student veterans being aware of the transitional resources, the campus departments and personnel who can make decisions about the resources need access to the information.

Grounded Theory of Best Practice

The proposed best practice can be identified in five steps. The first was to ask or collect veteran status information through multiple avenues, such as the FAFSA, the admission/readmission process, submission of JST or use of educational benefits, or a resource center check in. The next step was to collaborate to ensure data are being shared among departments, so it can be recorded in Banner, the single home for student veteran information to be used in tracking academic success and other success measurements to make data-driven decisions regarding transitional resources. The next step was to confirm or verify the accuracy of the data recorded. Confirmation of the recorded military status was accomplished through email, requesting a response if the military status was incorrect. However, verification of the recorded status using supporting documentation of the veteran status, such as the DD214, promotes the highest level of accuracy. Having a verified status recorded in a single location from multiple means of collection supported the desired yield of these efforts. Having an accurate and complete means of identifying this population for reports enabled the data to be used for decision-making.

This study discovered Banner and its functionality as the proposed best single “home” for student veteran identification. Most institutions within the USG used Banner to do record the student veteran identification but not in a consistent way or not in a way that thoroughly identified the student veteran population on the campus. Several components were identified in the analysis as part of a recommended best practice. They were asked for status information and then ensure it was recorded; record the status information in Banner with other demographic, financial, and academic information; make efforts to verify student veteran identifications; and seek out and encourage a collaborative spirit on campus.

To determine any desired tracking on the student veteran population, the recording of the veteran status was essential. To accomplish the recording of the veteran status, institutions were encouraged to take every effort to collect veteran status on their students and to provide incentives for self-disclosure when possible. During the interview process, one institution stated “once that student is identified as a veteran all types of institutional analysis and analytics can be used in terms of tracking the student, looking at their grades, how they perform against other peers, who they perform against the athletics, athletes, those type of things”, even though analyzing retention and graduation data for student veterans “gets hairy”, according to a state college representative. There were standard opportunities, such as during the admission and readmission processes, to request this information, but other unique opportunities that fit the culture of an institution could be created. An example of a unique opportunity to obtain veteran status was the state college who had a disclosure campaign with drinks and snacks. Another institution offered discount athletic tickets to veterans. Even though the initial intent may

not have been for status information, creatively thinking could assist in a through identification of one's student veteran population without the approach being intrusive. Some institutions seemed to be overly looking opportunities to recorded or verify the recording of a veteran status with submission of a military transcript or DD214, receiving a military-related out of state tuition waiver, or disclosing veteran status on the FAFSA. Knowing student veterans were hesitant to disclose, taking advantage of that disclosure was a benefit, which should not be wasted and provide incentives, cost or no cost, to encourage disclosure. Collecting data was only the first step as it must be recorded to be meaningful and become the basis for data analysis regarding the student veteran population.

Research yielded the practice of institutions recording student veteran status in third party portals. The use of the portals themselves were not a disadvantage as they provided beneficial data and were a natural extension of the institutions work with students for communication or other data, such as participation in co-curricular activities. However, cross-referencing and verifying the existence of data was not always an institutional practice. It was a valuable practice to record the use of VA educational benefits in Banner, but it was not recommended to record benefit use in lieu of recording the veteran status. Advising portals may have contained self-disclosed veteran status without it being recorded in Banner. It could be said spreadsheets and listservs were third party portals, though not electronic. Taking advantage of self-disclosed status, which may have been made through simple word of mouth in a resource center or sign in at a veteran exclusive event, was yet another opportunity to ensure Banner was updated.

During the interview process, several institutions mentioned the accuracy of data. A couple of institutions discussed the confusion and misunderstanding of the military status questions on the admission application and were making changes or at least considering them. Only two institutions had efforts to verify and update or confirm the data. One institution located near a military base sent an email providing the current veteran/military status and asked the student to respond if a change was needed. No documentation was required for this type of update. Another institution recorded the veteran status when it was disclosed but went a step further in creating a “confirmed” status. For example, if a student disclosed veteran status, the information was recorded, but, if the same student produced a DD214, the confirmed status was added. Use of supporting documentation and the confirmed status provided a level of verification that helped address the concern for data accuracy mentioned by several institutions during the interview process.

The existence of a collaborative spirit regarding student veterans was not a trait across all institutions as shared during the interview process. One institution mentioned it was stepping on “political” toes to request information from enrollment management office being a member of student affairs while another institution had made gains in identifying their student population by “having the right people in the room”. The other components of a best practice were likely easier to accomplish when a collaborative spirit was present. Additionally, discussions regarding the policies and procedures needed to accomplish the other components and any subsequent changes, such as Banner access to make updates, could be supported on an institution-wide level by working together. Support from administration is beneficial but coordinators, directors, or others who were

passionate about veterans can lead efforts for change. One institution stated collaboration was “the only way to get things done”.

Figure 10 represents how collaboration was the foundation for thoroughly identifying student veterans from the various departments and processes on campus with which a student veteran may have contact. With that contact, the departmental representative or department, which oversaw a process could ensure the status was recorded. For this proposed best practice, the initial recording of the veteran status leads to the status confirmation. The confirmed veteran status is the basis of creating desired reports regarding student veterans using data that were complete and accurate, and using the data to make decisions about transitional resources whether through rates of retention and graduation or student needs assessment or satisfaction.

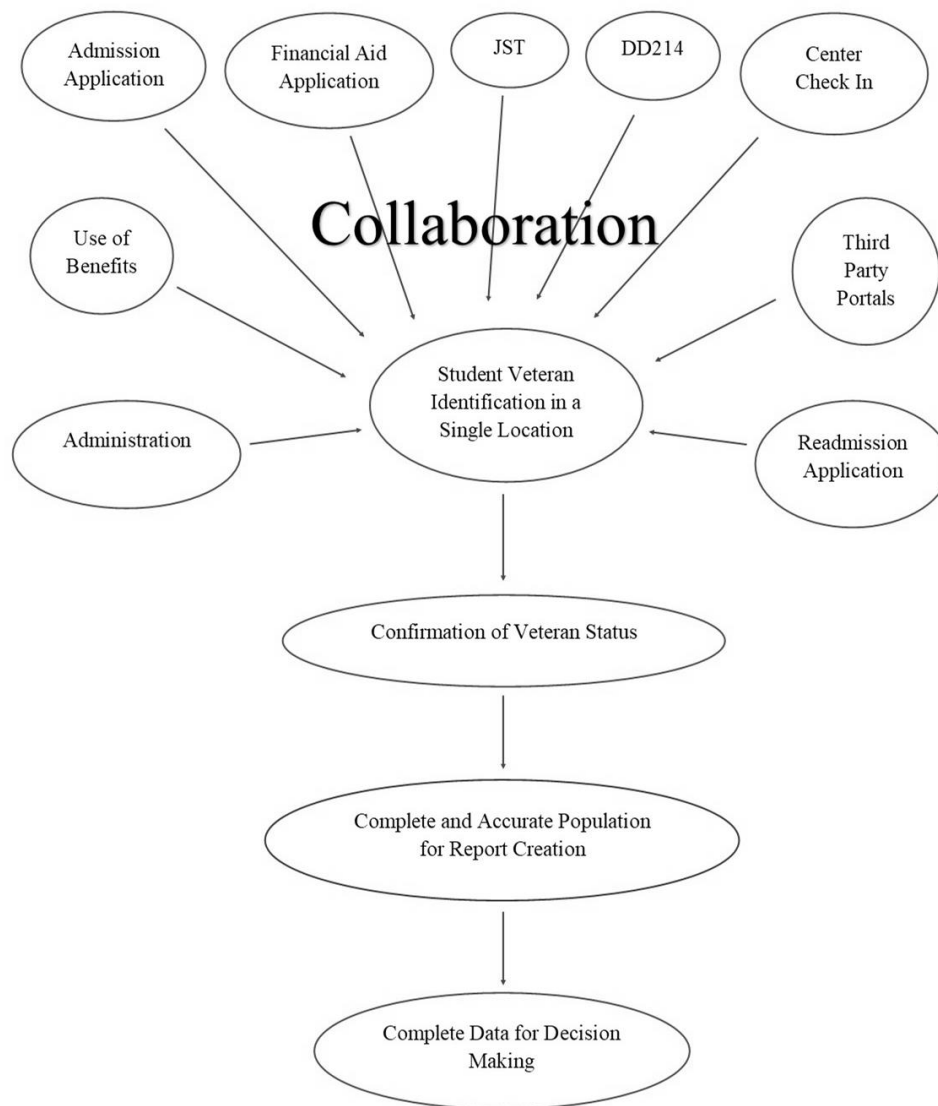


Figure 10. Creating the Foundation for Thorough, Accurate, and Meaningful Data for the Decision-Making Process for Transitional Resources.

For institutions using Banner to record veteran status, the processes for updates and recording of use of VA educational benefits varied, but the use of Banner screens was consistent. SAAADMS was populated from the admission application and included any attributes assigned to the application. The attribute assigned at the time of application was the attribute which aids in the tracking of graduation for some institutions.

SGASADD was populated from information on SAAADMS, including any attributes.

For this proposed best practice, the researcher suggested updates regarding veteran status to be made on SGASADD, keeping the integrity of the admission application intact on SAAADMS. Updates from collaborative partners without Banner access would need to follow an established procedure plan for consistency in sharing veteran status information. SGASTND could be used to identify the use of educational benefits and where expired benefits would be indicated, if an institution decided to continue tracking on these students. However, if the student veteran with expired benefits was a military status that is coded on SGASADD, the student veteran would be included in tracking using criteria from this Banner screen. If an institution desired to know the number of student veterans who persisted beyond the availability of benefits, the creation of an attribute to identify the students with expired benefits had benefits. As suggested by the representative from Institution #2 who said not knowing if a current student veteran had expired benefits was a barrier, it would identify student veterans who needed additional resources for degree completion. At a minimum, it was recommended a routinely scheduled email be sent to students indicating a veteran status, requesting any updates. However, a better way of addressing the concern over data accuracy, as mentioned in the interview process, was the creation and use of a “confirmed veteran status” attribute. The “confirmed” status was updated on SGASADD following collaborative discussions about what data were acceptable for this change. Using SPAIDEN as the Banner screen to indicate student veteran status was not suggested as the availability of data on this screen is limited to a VA file number with no further description available. Having veteran status information consistency located and updated in one place allows for thorough data

available for institution research, such as tracking retention, graduation, and other aspects identified among collaborative partners.

Summary

Various means and location of recording the identification of student veterans existed among the responding institutions. The lack of self-disclosure was consistently present at institutions, and some offered incentives to aid in the overcoming this obstacle. Other obstacles were centered on policy and procedures at the institution. Accuracy of data was often questioned, and two institutions found a means to address it. Collaboration in ensuring thorough identification of student veterans willing to disclose in one way or another was helpful on campuses when it was available, but it did not exist on all campuses interviewed.

Tracking of retention and graduation rates varied among participants, with graduation more commonly being tracked than retention. Assigning an attribute to identify student veterans, providing a means to analysis them as a group, was helpful as was Banner recording degree completion. The U.S. Department of Education criteria for “first time, full time” student was noted as not being representative of most student veterans and an obstacle mentioned among others. Institutions noted tracking related to the retention and graduation of their student veterans and collaborations were identified as a theme to aid in providing transitional resources, which were potentially impactful to retention and graduation.

Successes for the student veteran population were not always measured solely in academic ways. Institutions mentioned customer service and student veteran participation were indicators of transitional resource effectiveness. In making decisions about

transitional resources, students must be aware of the availability of the transitional resources so they can participate, and essential campus departments need access to the related data to be a part of the decision-making process.

Consistently identifying and recording the veteran status was recommended to occur on SGASADD and use of VA educational benefits by semester to be recorded on SGASTDN. Confirming veteran status with documentation, such as a DD214, was encouraged to aid in the accuracy of the data. Institutional research activities could refer to identification on these screens for tracking related to student veterans. Retention and graduation tracking could be completed with this criterion instead of a similar “first time, full time” attribute because student veterans were not typically a part of the “first time, full time” population.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Summary of the Study

Literature indicates resources aid in the transition veterans from the military to the academic world as many veterans are using Post 9/11 educational benefits. While the veteran population in the state of Georgia is expected to grow through 2027 and remain stable through 2037, the USG has no systematic approach regarding identification of its student veterans even though they were identified by most institutions as a targeted population for the Complete College Georgia initiative. Information on retention and graduation for this population was also lacking. This study provides a theory of the best practice of identifying student veterans. By identifying student veterans, related data can be utilized to make decisions regarding transitional services offered and establish retention and graduation rates at diverse institutions of higher education in Georgia to fill this gap in the literature. Grounded theory was the methodology used for the research as it provided theory generation that is grounded in the data of a particular phenomenon and the proposed theory for events or actions is grounded in the data found while researching. Further, grounded theory is exemplary for generating new theories and improving professional practices in higher education.

The identification of veteran status was recorded and updated in various ways, if at all, within the USG. Incentives were offered by some institutions to aid in self-disclosure but other obstacles for recording this information existed with institutional

policies and procedures. The retention and graduation rates of student veterans were noted as not being accurately represented by the “first time, full time” criteria of the U.S. Department of Education, perhaps contributing to the small number of institutions that tracked graduation and the even smaller number who tracked retention. Collaboration was identified as a theme with identification of status and tracking regarding the effectiveness of transitional resources. A grounded theory was proposed for a single location of recording and updating veteran status so related data could be utilized in the decision-making process of transitional resources and tracking of retention and graduation.

Analysis of the Findings

Surveys were used to determine what transitional resources were available and why they were offered and to what degree the identification of student veterans was tracked and how associated information was used. The survey provided results that were not expected by the researcher. The researcher assumed the “bigger” institutions were doing “bigger things” and the assumption was not found to be true. Research institutions were no more likely to be tracking retention and graduation than the other sectors within the USG. Responding state universities were conducting the most tracking for student veterans receiving and not receiving VA educational benefits. State colleges were generally doing the least tracking with the exception of graduation for student veterans receiving VA educational benefits. Overall, more tracking for graduation and retention is conducted for student veterans receiving VA educational benefits than student veterans who do not received benefits.

A wide variety of transitional resources were offered within USG institutions, 159 of them among the 17 responding institutions. Themes identified by Griffin (2015) included (a) personnel and services, (b) institutional structures, and (c) social and cultural support to ease transition for veterans into academic life and, therefore, have an impact on academic success. All of these themes were present in the correlating transitional resources among all sectors. Surprising to the researcher was the purpose of offering a transitional resource being to aid in academic success was ranked third, true for only 23% of resources.

Cate et al. (2017) learned collecting service-related information was inconsistent in the application process or was only collected specific military populations only. The findings during the interview phase of this research support the inconsistency in collecting service-related information in that veteran status was not always recorded when it was asked on the admission application or it was not asked during the admission or readmission process. Additionally, this research supports the findings that service-related information from specific populations, which, in this case, was student veterans receiving VA educational benefits. Just over half of the 17 responding institutions reported identifying student veterans without benefits. Similar to the findings of Cate et al. (2017) with confusion on the FAFSA military status question, some institutions mentioned confusion with the military status question on the admission application. Efforts to changing the question to provide more accurate data collection was being discussed and showed the desire for institution to not only collect veteran status information but to do so with as much accuracy as possible. However, the research supported the findings of Darcy et al. (2018) that student veterans did not always wish to

disclose military service in the academic setting but institutions found means to incentivize disclosure with priority registration or other perks. The actions to incentivize disclosure supports the need for creativity within and collaboration among various campus departments to record the identification of student veterans when it is disclosed after the admission process, a finding of Sponsler et al. (2013) that student veteran support was a campus-wide effort. The need for identifying student veterans in the USG as noted within the plans for Complete College Georgia remained an issue as some institutions still seemed to struggle in this process. Perhaps the need for identifying student veterans was due to the inconsistency of recording veteran status, the student veteran not being a part of the “specific military populations” for which identification was recorded, confusion around the admission question regarding military status, or the failure to disclose by the veteran.

The tracking of the academic successes of student veterans was a research question addressed in this study and, it was found approximately three-fourths of the responding USG institutions were tracking graduation but less than half were tracking retention. This finding confirms Knapp (2013) learning gaps exist in basic data regarding the retention and graduation rates of student veterans and, in part, confirms the Sponsler et al. (2013) finding that two-thirds of responding institutions did not have student veteran data for retention and graduation. completion of student veterans. While data were collected by the U.S. Department of Education, Cate et al. (2017) and Itzkowitz (2018) found veterans were not specifically tracked as part of this process and data collected during the interview process of this research revealed the lack of data collection by the U.S. Department of Education and IPEDS as an obstacle for some institutions.

Despite these earlier findings and student veteran information not required by these agencies, this research found some institutions that were motivated to collect data on the student veteran population, regardless of small population (as noted as part of the theme of tracking in the second research question) or required reporting because measuring their outcomes were important to the institution. Measuring the outcomes of student veterans in this way, though perhaps not intentionally, supports Boyd's findings that data on the college success of student veterans "combat clichés and stereotypes in other settings as well" (Boyd, 2017, p. 4). A goal of the Eight Key to Success included documentation for student veterans (Baker, 2013), which seemed to be important within USG institutions participating in this research, although documentation for adequate tracking was, at times, insufficient.

The theme of obstacle in the second research question supports the findings of other researchers regarding collecting and analyzing data for the student veteran population. Sponsler et al. (2013) learned decisions about serving student veterans were being made without complete data or a means to accurately measure outcomes. This research found several institutions were surveying student veterans about the offered transitional resources, and, while the intent was positive, with an incomplete identification of the veteran population, not all student veterans were able to participate in the review and have a voice. Walburn (2017) found knowing the resources desired by student veterans was difficult but, if the institutions within this research that were utilizing the institutional survey regarding transitional resources as it was presented, Walburn's findings could be disconfirmed among USG institutions. The research of Cate et al. (2017) found collecting and analyzing data regarding the academic success of

student veterans was difficult. Difficulty in collecting and analyzing data regarding student veterans could be supported with the finding of this research that transitional resources were usually offered for reasons other than to aid in academic success to allow for a less complicated means of analysis. Also, within the theme of the second research question was the concern over student veterans with expired VA educational benefits not being a part of any measurements. Cate et al. (2017) identified this concern as well. Reasons for stopping out was found within the tracking theme of the second research question as well, as a desire means of tracking for institutions in this study. Sponsler et al. (2013) found only one-fourth of institutions were aware of the reasons for stop outs, confirming this unknown in serving student veterans.

The literature review identified a move away from the (S2S) program as a means to aid student veterans through college (Complete College Georgia, 2016) as institutions began their own initiatives with the release of the Principles of Excellence, a finding of Gorman (2014). A representative from the USG stated the S2S program aimed to utilize “proven methods and best practices that attract and retain military students” (USG, 2011, para. 2). The findings of this research found, if the “proven methods and best practices” for retention purposes were still in place at USG institutions, could not be confirmed or disconfirmed due to a general lack of retention tracking. Protecting resources by leveraging data regarding the effectiveness of transitional resources was recommended in the findings of Sponsler et al. (2013), but this research could not confirm or disconfirm the finding due to lack of gauging effectiveness, whether academically or otherwise. The research of McBain et al. (2012) found services and programs for student veterans were more likely to be available at institutions with larger populations of military students. The

survey question regarding the size of the student veteran population, which did not require an answer, was asked as a percentage and not as a count so the research cannot confirm or disconfirm the earlier finding. Sander (2014) found student veterans were successful in completing their college degrees but took slightly longer compared to nonveteran students. A lack of retention information within the USG prevents the data from confirmed or disconfirming Sander's finding.

The research conducted support the availability of transitional resources for student veterans. Kurzynski (2014) found there was hardship in transitioning from a structured military life to the more flexible academic life, and Griffin (2015) found transitional resources were helpful during this transition. While the researcher expected transitional resources to be offered for academic reasons, the survey found 29% of the resources were focused at aiding in this transition and any academic reason for resources was third of five reasons provided in the survey. Support services being needed to increase retention and graduation, as found by Kirchner (2015), was neither confirmed nor disconfirmed by this research as a consistent measurement for the effectiveness of transitional resources did not exist. Evans et al. (2015) found a wide disparity in the service to student veterans, but this research found the transitional resources offered were consistent, even between sectors, with research institutions offering an average of 11 resources and state colleges offering 9.35 on average. As found in the literature review regarding the offering of transitional resources, at least 90% of the USG institutions who participated in the survey offered a military student organization, a veteran lounge, and personnel to assist with admissions, financial aid, and education benefit processes. Sponsler et al. (2013) found transitional resources should be proactive, not reactive. In

addition, Moore (2017) stated research was key to developing resources that were impactful to student veterans and how they could benefit. Some institutions in the interview phase were using a survey to identify desired transitional resources, as well as satisfaction in the current ones. In the opinion of the researcher, surveying the student veterans to determine needs could be interpreted as reactive but, if a substantial amount of time did not pass between discovery and implementation, others may interpret it as proactive. Nevertheless, the survey results could aid in developing impactful resources but could not be confirmed or disconfirmed by this research.

Institution support for student veterans from orientation leaders to faculty and others was essential in impacting all student veterans was a finding of the research by Sponsler et al. (2013) while Renn and Reason (2012) found each institution could decide for itself how to provide assistance in a student veteran transitioning to academic life. The findings of Semer and Harmening (2015) encouraged a holistic approach, including financial aid, counseling, disability support, academic advising, faculty support, and social connections. Mackiewicz (2018) found transitional resources helpful to provide support academically, socially, and psychologically. The researcher relates institutional support, a holistic approach, and the range of means of support to collaborations, which this research supported was being helpful or desired in providing transitional resources.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations exist as part of this research. The researcher distributed survey information and scheduled interviews during the summer months, a busy time for higher education. This timing may have affected response rates and the willingness to be interviewed. Further responses to the survey may have changed the information collected

during the interview stage, if additional institutions agreed to be interviewed, even though the targeted number of institutions were interviewed. However, there was adequate representation from all sectors in the interview stage. Interviewing different institutions would have provided additional data and could have yielded a different outcome for the proposed best practice. Qualitative data are used to provide contextualized understanding of an experience, in which generalization is not a factor. Biases may have occurred with the information shared by the institutional employees and could have affected the information shared, therefore affecting results. For example, the interviewee may have been hesitant to present the institution in a less than favorable way. Contrasting that possibility is the interviewee “venting” from possible job frustration and/or a lack of support from other campus departments. Researcher bias can be addressed most easily with random sampling, which was not the technique used in this research. Most institutions who agreed to be interviewed were interviewed with the remaining two institutions failing to respond to requests and not eliminated at the researcher’s discretion. The best practice may not be appropriate for another university system and does not include all variables for application among USG institutions.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was designed to identify the practices of USG institutions related to identifying student veterans, using the associated data to track retention and graduation and to make decisions regarding transitional resources. The purpose was to identify a best practice for consistency in student veteran identification because no systematic approach exist. Although the research achieved its purpose, topics for future research were identified. For institutions where the theory of identifying student veteran is

implemented, research could be conducted to gauge its effectiveness or associated satisfaction of the institution. To expand upon this research, a study could include representatives from institutional research to obtain a more in-depth knowledge of tracking student populations and the use of information, such as attributes in this process. One could explore the success of Complete College Georgia in recruiting and educating veterans in the state of Georgia or how methods of identification may have changes with the implementation of the institutions' plans. With the finding that institutions have a focus on nonquantitative results of success for student veterans, such as customer service, future research can explore the correlation of academic achievement of student veterans and the level of perceived customer service provided or the level of participation in determining the effectiveness of a transitional resource. Similarly, another topic of future research is the basis for a military friendly culture and how it affects the collaborative efforts in serving student veterans. Considering the offering of transitional resources, future research could explore why other transitional resources were not offered. Other recommendations for research include whether transitional resources play a role in college choice, where or if to attend when multiple options are available. With some institutions stating they are listening to student veterans in deciding what resources or support to add, a researcher could explore the change in preference or demand for transitional resources over time or in comparison to the transitional resources outlined in this research. Research could include deterrents veterans have or perceive themselves as having for attending college, especially with the availability of financial support from the VA. Related to the receipt of VA educational benefits, future research could include the

academic outcome of dependents who attend college with transferred educational benefits.

Implications of the Study

This study provides several implications for serving student veterans in higher education, not just institutions within USG. Foremost, the proposed model of identifying student veterans within an institution provides a conversation starter about the status of identifying of student veterans. These conversations would benefit from having “the right people at the table”, which would likely be the departments identified in the research as potential collaborators in recording and collaborations in providing transitional resources. A suggested first topic is for institutions establish the level of importance the veteran population has among the overall student population. As mentioned in the research, the role of administration is important in completing this task and sets the tone regarding student veterans for the rest of the institution. If the level of importance is relatively low, the consensus may be no changes are needed. For institutions who deem student veterans important, the conversation can continue while being reflective about their willingness to collaborate and identify collaborations among departments, which may need creating or nurturing. Topics for discussion for institutions who establish the value of the student veteran population include collaboration for identification, policies and procedures for recording identification, collaboration for transitional resources, and desired success measurements. Administration’s dedication to student veterans will likely impact the speed and extent of conversations and the institutional culture to consider and make changes will likely influence the productivity of these conversations. Most importantly in the opinion of the researcher, administration has the opportunity to guide and encourage

the collaborative spirit to support a thorough and complete recording of veteran status and to provide a holistic approach to support student veterans. A collaborative spirit, described by other researchers as a holistic view (Semer & Harmening, 2015), or institutional support (Sponsler et al., 2013), or a range of support options (Mackiewicz, 2018), has been found as essential to providing support to student veterans and was not found in this research to exist on all campuses.

Institutions who have identified the value of student veterans on their campuses can discuss the means in which student veterans currently identify themselves and explore other opportunities they have for identifying themselves. Plan for how the identification for each of the methods will lead to recording of the veteran status, including the department that will update and how information will be securely routed to the recording department. If the department that collects the information will be responsible for recording it, access will need to be discussed and perhaps granted for the update to occur. Policies and procedures for the institution and the affected departments will need updating to ensure consistency. Changes here may include a look as to the reasons processes are currently utilized the way they are. To provide the holistic approach to serving veterans found in the literature to be important, possible collaborators can discuss how they may serve student veterans better or differently. Services may not need to be new or unique, but current services offered to the student population could be conducted with a focus on student veterans. However, student veterans may benefit from a transitional resource that could be offered by a new collaborating campus department. In adjusting existing services or creating new ones, the institution or the participating campus departments can determine a measurement of success, academic or otherwise.

The lack of adequate resources may pose a challenge to making some changes; however, other changes may be operational with little or no cost. The lack of resources in knowledge and staff was indicated in the research as an obstacle to recording veteran status. At the system level, USG could inventory institutions to discover what resources are needed to make improvements to the recording and tracking processes for lagging institutions. The inventory of institutions needing recording and tracking improvements would bring awareness to the importance that the USG gives to student veterans by establishing a minimum standard of recording and tracking in the 26 institutions across the state. A consideration for resource allocation of funding and knowledge could be made for institutions who were willing to better serve student veterans but lacked the ability to launch an improvement process. A starting point could be with graduation of student veterans using VA educational benefits, as, beginning Fall Semester 2019, it was mandatory to report graduation data for student veterans receiving benefits.

Literature shows transitional resources have an impact on academic success of student veterans. The availability of transitional resources varied between institutions, and the research yielded no single resource as being the most important or the most impactful. Institutions could benefit from establishing a means to identify the transitional resources desired by student veterans, what trends are occurring across the country in serving veterans on college campuses, and success measurements for transitional resources offered. Factors, such as the culture of the institution and the caliber of the student population, impacts which transitional resource or resources are best. A rural state college should not attempt to duplicate transitional resources of an urban research institution simply because they are effective in the urban setting without considering the

culture and needs of its own campus. With Walburn (2017) finding the needs of student veterans are not only different than traditional student but also diverse among themselves and Ritchie (1945) understanding the importance for institutions to accommodate the unique needs of the student veterans, each institution has the ability and the responsibility to determine its own “best transitional resource” and to create their own best practices in serving student veterans.

The literature showed the millions of dollars spent in payment of VA educational benefits, and it also showed the likelihood of continued use. With an increase in funding, additional mandates, such as the requirement of reporting graduation, are likely to occur as taxpayers desire to know the return on their investment. The average taxpayer may not understand the focus on the more qualitative measurements of success and may expect success to be quantified with retention and graduation data. Having an effective and thorough means of recording the identification of student veterans will provide the foundation for academic related success measures. The use of non-academic measures is acceptable and even reasonable for campus employees who work with student veterans on a routine basis.

For the researcher, the most important contribution of this study was to provide institutions with a means to identify its student veteran population. In knowing this information, institutions can determine the data important to them regarding their own student veterans. As the need for and type of transitional resources may vary by institution so does the general need for information regarding student veterans and the success measures considered. An institution’s data were only as good as its identification of this population. The proposed theory provides institutions of all sizes and locations the

foundation of giving meaning to their data and allowing it to be used more effectively in serving student veterans through transitional resources. Whether the student is using VA educational benefits or not, an institution can respect the service provided to our country and “repay” that by best serving veterans on its campus.

Dissemination of the Findings

The researcher is excited to present the findings related to the research of identifying student veterans and utilizing the related data to make decisions regarding transitional resource offered and to track retention and graduation rates. The Georgia Association of Veteran Certifying Officials (GAVCO) will likely be the first group with which the research findings will be shared. The GAVCO conference is usually scheduled for the spring, which will soon follow the conferring of the degree. Being the research was based on the USG, it is most fitting to share the findings in the state in which the researcher lives and works to USG and private institutions. Student Veterans of America is a coalition of student veteran groups but their annual conference, conducted in early January, has a track for higher education professionals, who would have an interest in this research. The Veterans in Higher Education Collaborative, a new national organization formed in 2018, is another group that would have interest in the finding as well as the Veterans Knowledge Community of the Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education.

Conclusion

What an honor to conduct this research to determine ways, not just the USG but at my own institution, to serve student veterans better, beginning with identifying them and being able to make data-driven decisions. I did not serve but my daily work, and my

academic work of the last four years in completing classwork and writing this dissertation, is hopefully a reflection of my appreciation for veterans who so unselfishly did.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

IRB Approval Notification

Institutional Review Board
Columbus State University

Date: 5/10/19

Protocol Number: 19-051

Protocol Title: An Examination of the Identification of Student Veterans Within the University System of Georgia to Assist in the Decision Making Progress to Better Serve Them

Principal Investigator: Stefane Raulerson

Co-Principal Investigator: Margie Yates

Dear Stefane Raulerson:

The Columbus State University Institutional Review Board or representative(s) has reviewed your research proposal identified above. It has been determined that the project is classified as exempt under 45 CFR 46.101(b) of the federal regulations and has been approved. You may begin your research project immediately.

Please note any changes to the protocol must be submitted in writing to the IRB before implementing the change(s). Any adverse events, unexpected problems, and/or incidents that involve risks to participants and/or others must be reported to the Institutional Review Board at irb@columbusstate.edu or (706) 507-8634.

If you have further questions, please feel free to contact the IRB.

Sincerely,

Amber Dees, IRB Coordinator

Institutional Review Board
Columbus State University

Appendix B

Email with Link to Survey

Dear Supervisor of Student Veteran Department or School Certifying Official

You are being asked to participate in a research project conducted by Stefane D. Raulerson, a doctoral student at Columbus State University in the College of Education and Health Professions. The faculty member supervising the study is Dr. Margie Yates, the Director of Graduate Studies at Columbus State University. Details of this research are provided below as well as the first question of the survey, where you will be asked to agree to participate.

The survey will take no more than ten minutes to complete and is included in this email. Please complete the online survey within the next ten days. If you are selected to participate in the follow up interview, I will contact you by phone to establish a mutually acceptable interview time. The interview will take no more than sixty minutes and will require you have a phone for a telephone interview, a web camera with microphone, or a meeting space for an in person interview. Your responses will be audio-taped for review, transcription by a third party, and coded for analysis. Documents demonstrating report output will be requested to validate the information shared during the interview process.

All responses will be kept confidential and will be identified by number. At no point in the study will any of your responses be attributed directly to you or your institution. Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

There is no expectation of personal benefit from your participation but sharing information regarding the processes and practices of your institution as it relates to identifying and tracking student veterans and using the data to make decisions regarding transitional resources provide insight and knowledge on how USG institutions are currently serving this population and how this population may be better served in the future.

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact me by phone at 229-392-0810 or by email at raulerson_stefane@columbusstate.edu. This study has been reviewed by the Columbus State University Institutional Review Board to ensure compliance with Federal regulations involving research with human subjects. If you have concerns regarding your rights, you may contact the Columbus State University Institutional Review at irb@columbusstate.edu.

Your time and consideration are appreciated.

Sincerely

Stefane D. Raulerson
Columbus State University Doctoral Student
229-392-0810
raulerson_stefane@columbusstate.edu

Appendix C

Survey Questions

You are being asked to participate in a research project conducted by Stefane D. Raulerson, a doctoral student at Columbus State University. The faculty member supervising the study is Dr. Margie Yates, the Director of Graduate Studies at Columbus State University. Please read the following information and return the signed consent form, if you agree to participate, within seven days of receipt.

- I. **Purpose:** The purpose of the research is to explore the various means in which University System of Georgia institutions identify student veterans and use this information to make data-driven decisions as well as establish retention and graduation rates. Data will be collected from the supervisor of the student veteran department or, if this department does not exist, to the school certifying official of institutions within the University System of Georgia. The data collected from the survey, interview, and document collection. The data obtained in this study will be significant to college administrators, educational governing boards, and staff members who participate in working with and serving student veterans. Data from this study will also aid in establishing a best practice of identify student veterans and using associated data to make decisions regarding transitional resources and tracking retention and graduation rates, an area where many institutions within the University System of Georgia are lacking. This research findings can be used to improve tracking of student veterans and the means in which decisions are made, thereby, improving the means in which student veterans are served within University System of Georgia institutions.
- II. **Procedures:** By signing this Informed Consent Form, you are agreeing to participate in an initial student veteran survey and a possible voluntary individual interview. Surveys will be sent to the supervisor of the student veteran department or, if this department does not exist, to the school certifying official of institutions within the University System of Georgia and will take no longer than 10 minutes to complete. Participants for the interviews will be chosen through theoretical sampling and contacted by the researcher by phone with confirmation of the interview time via e-mail. Individual interviews will last no longer than 60 minutes. The individual interviews will be recorded and transcribed.
- III. **Possible Risks or Discomforts:** No risk is proposed to the participants involved in the survey or interview. It is the researcher's goal to avoid any discomforts or inconveniences to the participant associated with their involvement in this study. Participant discomfort may include answering interview questions regarding their institution's identification and tracking processes. Participant inconvenience may include time adjustments to their schedule for interview participation and documentation collection. The researcher will be mindful of possible discomfort during the interview process and the interviewees are encouraged to express discomfort at any time.

Interview will be scheduled at a mutually convenient time. All survey, interview data, and collected documents will be stored in the researcher's personal password protected computer or in locked files.

- IV. **Potential Benefits:** Your participation in the research study will increase the knowledge concerning identification of student veterans and using the associated information to make data-driven decisions about transitional resources and establish retention and graduation rates for student veterans. Your response and interview answers will also help to identify themes or patterns associated student veterans within the USG.
- V. **Costs and Compensation:** You as a survey and or interview participant will not incur any cost or receive any compensation for your participation in this study.
- VI. **Confidentiality:** Responses to the survey and answers to the interview questions will be confidential but not anonymous. All information will be stored in a password protected computer or locked files.
- VII. **Withdrawal:** Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without penalty.

For additional information or questions about this research project, you may contact Stefane D. Raulerson at 229-392-0810 or raulerson_stefane@columbusstate.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Columbus State University Institutional Review Board at irb@columbusstate.edu.

Do you agree to participate in this research project?

Yes

No

Please answer the following questions regarding your institution.

At what type institution do you work?

Research University

Comprehensive University

State University

State College

Approximately what percentage of your total student population are student veterans?

0

25



Please answer the following questions regarding the services provided to student veterans at your institution.

What transitional resources listed below are offered by your institution for student veterans and why are they offered? (Check all that apply.)

	To increase academic success	To be perceived as military friendly	To aid in the transition to academic/civilian life	To show appreciation for military service	Other	Not Offered
Military Student Organization						
Credit for Military Training						
Military Lounge						
Personnel to assist with Admissions Process to the Institution						
Personnel to assist with Financial Aid Process						
Personnel to assist with applying for educational benefits						
Faculty/staff Training on Veterans' Needs						
Advising Personnel who Assist Veterans Only						
Mentoring Program for Veterans						

Connections with Community Organizations for Student Veterans						
Disabilities Personnel who Assist Veterans Only						
Orientation for Student Veterans Only						
Other. Please specify						

Briefly describe how your institution makes decisions on continuing or discontinuing transitional resources. If your institution uses data on the identification of student veterans and any related tracked data, please include those details.

Which of the following populations are currently identified and have the identification recorded at your institution? (Check all that apply.)

Student veterans who receive VA educational benefits.

Student veterans who do not receive VA educational benefits.

No specific identification or tracking is completed on student veterans who receive VA educational benefits.

No specific identification or tracking is completed on student veterans who do not receive VA educational benefits.

What data regarding student veterans who receive VA educational benefits are currently tracked at your institution? (Check all that apply.)

Semester attendance number of student veterans who receive VA educational benefits.

Graduation rates of student veterans who receive VA educational benefits.

Retention rates of student veterans who receive VA educational benefits.

Other data on student veterans who receive VA educational benefits. Please specify.

No data regarding student veterans who receive VA educational benefits are tracked.

What data regarding student veterans who do not receive VA educational benefits are currently tracked at your institution? (Check all that apply.)

Semester attendance number of student veterans who do not receive VA educational benefits.

Graduation rates of student veterans who do not receive VA educational benefits.

Retention rates of student veterans who do not receive VA educational benefits.

Other data on student veterans who do not receive VA educational benefits. Please specify. _____

No data regarding student veterans who do not receive VA educational benefits are tracked.

Appendix D

Follow Up Email for Survey Participation

Dear Supervisor of Student Veteran Department or School Certifying Official

Please act now! This e-mail serves as your final reminder to complete the research survey regarding how your institutions is identifying student veterans and using this information to make data-driven decisions regarding transitional resources and establishing retention and graduation rates within the next three days. I am hoping to obtain information on the processes, if any, for identifying student veterans attending your institution, tracking related information, and how student veteran data may be used in the decision making process for transitional resources are made.

Remember, you are being asked to participate in an online survey and with a possible telephone, video conference, or in person interview to follow. The initial survey will take no more than ten minutes to complete and is included in this email. If you are selected to participate in the follow up interview, I will contact you by phone to establish a mutually acceptable interview time. The interview will take no more than sixty minutes and will require you have a phone for a telephone interview, a web camera with microphone, or a meeting space for an in person interview. Your responses will be audio-taped for review, transcription by a third party, and coded for analysis. Documents demonstrating report output will be requested to validate the information shared during the interview process.

All responses will be kept confidential and will be identified by number. At no point in the study will any of your responses be attributed directly to you or your institution. Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

There is no expectation of personal benefit from your participation but sharing information regarding the processes and practices of your institution as it relates to identifying and tracking student veterans and using the data to make decisions regarding transitional resources provide insight and knowledge on how USG institutions are currently serving this population and how this population may be better served in the future.

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact me by phone at 229-392-0810 or by email at raulerson_stefane@columbusstate.edu. This study has been reviewed by the Columbus State University Institutional Review Board to ensure compliance with Federal regulations involving research with human subjects. If you have concerns regarding your rights, you may contact the Columbus State University Institutional Review at irb@columbusstate.edu.

Your time and consideration is appreciated. If you agree to participate in this survey, please complete the online survey at the link below.

Sincerely

Stefane D. Raulerson
Columbus State University Doctoral Student
229-392-0810
raulerson_stefane@columbusstate.edu

Appendix E

Email Confirming Schedule Interview

Dear _____

Thank you for your participation in the online survey regarding the processes, if any, for identifying student veterans attending your institution, tracking related information, and how student veteran data may be used in the decision making process for transitional resources are made. Additionally, thank you for scheduling the time noted below to participate in the interview process to allow for further examination into the processes of your institution.

Date: _____

Time: _____

Method/Location: _____

The interview will take no longer than sixty minutes. All responses will be kept confidential and will be identified by number. At no point in the study will any of your responses be attributed directly to you or your institution. Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

There is no expectation of personal benefit from your participation but sharing information regarding the processes and practices of your institution as it relates to identifying and tracking student veterans and using the data to make decisions regarding transitional resources will provide insight and knowledge on how USG institutions are currently serving this population and how this population may be better served in the future.

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact me by phone at 229-392-0810 or by email at raulerson_stefane@columbusstate.edu. This study has been reviewed by the Columbus State University Institutional Review Board to ensure compliance with Federal regulations involving research with human subjects. If you have concerns regarding your rights, you may contact the Columbus State University Institutional Review at irb@columbusstate.edu.

Sincerely

Stefane D. Raulerson
Columbus State University Doctoral Student
229-392-0810
raulerson_stefane@columbusstate.edu

Appendix F

Interview Protocol

Date:

Time:

Participant Number:

Audio Tape Identification:

Introduction

Hello. My name is Stefane Raulerson and I appreciate your time in talking with me today as I study how USG institutions serve student veterans, specifically how they are identified and what information is tracked with this population of students.

As a reminder, the interview will last no longer than sixty minutes and be recorded so it can be later transcribed by a third party. You will receive an electronic copy of the transcription for review as a means to confirm your responses were accurately represented. Any corrections should be noted and returned to me within seven days. If there is no response, the transcription will be deemed as accurate and will be analyzed by identified themes during the coding process. You nor your institution will be identified by name at any point in the study but excerpts of the interview may be included in the final report.

Before I begin recording our interview, do you have any questions for me? Are you ready for me to begin the interview process? At any time, you wish for me to stop recording and/or the interview, please let me know.

Ice Breaker Question

How long have you been working with student veterans?

Sample Interview Questions

1. In the survey portion of the study, you indicated your institution identified student veterans? Can you tell me the process for doing that? From where is the information initially obtained? Where is it recorded? By whom?
2. Were there obstacles in identifying student veterans at your institution? If so, what were they? How were they overcome? What obstacles still exist?
3. In the survey portion of the study, you indicated your institution tracked retention and/or graduation rates of student veterans? Can you tell me the process for doing that? Did you encounter obstacles in tracking this information? If so, what were they? How were they overcome? What obstacles still exist?
4. Is their tracking regarding student veterans your institution feels should be done but is unable to identify the means to do so?
5. How long has your institution been tracking student veterans? Has the process changed over time? If so, how and why?

6. Do you have a means to encourage student veterans who do not receive benefits to identify themselves as veterans? If so, what is it? To what degree do you feel it is successful? What obstacles did you have in initiating this process? Do you feel it could be improved? If so, how?
7. Do you determine the reason for offering a transitional resource is being achieved? If so, can you explain that process?

Is there tracking your institution would like to do but are unsure of how to approach the process? If so, what is it?