

MURPHY, M. PATRICK, Ph.D. *Military Veterans and College Success: A Qualitative Examination of Veteran Needs in Higher Education*. (2011)  
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Military veterans are a rapidly growing population of non-traditional students in the United States. The new Post-9/11 G.I. Bill effective in 2009 has made it easier for military veterans to fund higher education costs upon discharge from the military. Traditional four-year colleges and universities are well suited to serving students who have recently finished high school. However, are they properly prepared to serve military veterans? Military veterans bring with them a host of personal issues and needs beyond educational funding which may tax the capacity of student services professionals, faculty, and campus architecture. Veterans, like many non-traditional students, encounter barriers to success which are not present for the majority of traditional college students. This qualitative study conducted as an analysis of personal interviews with 13 Post-9/11 G.I. Bill veterans reveals, through examination of theoretical and heuristic knowledge, a multitude of individual and collective needs in college. Military veterans at the research institution seek anonymity on campus, treatment as adults, a veteran's center for transition assistance and camaraderie and administrative help, better marketing of available services, college credit for military training and experience, and a stake in guidance of their future in college. The interviews also reveal that even with the perceived lack of solutions for the above listed needs, a knowledgeable and compassionate veteran's liaison on campus may make college a successful venture for military veterans.

MILITARY VETERANS AND COLLEGE SUCCESS: A QUALITATIVE  
EXAMINATION OF VETERAN NEEDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

by

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Approved by

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Committee Chair

This dissertation is dedicated to the military veterans of the United States who selflessly served their country. When you then attend college, it is the duty of colleges and universities across the nation to serve you.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been accepted by the following committee of the Faculty of  
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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Throughout the last 66 years, many men and women who joined the United States military enjoyed the education benefits provided by the G.I. Bill of 1944, also known as the Montgomery Bill. The end of the Second World War introduced large numbers of veterans to college campuses and forever changed the landscape of higher education (Cohen, 1998). The increased quantity of veterans eligible for education benefits during the early years prompted college and university administrators to accommodate quickly the increased enrollment. However, there was little recognition that military combat veterans presented a special challenge to college campuses until veterans of the Vietnam War began to enroll in college. For example, shortly after cessation of United States involvement in the Vietnam conflict, Horowitz and Solomon (1975) asserted that a returning veteran may adapt well to society and establish a marriage, find satisfactory employment, or return to school, only to experience the emergence of nightmares, daytime intrusive images, or emotional attacks related to war experiences. In addition, symptom emergence may occur as late as a year or more following release from military service, and it may be triggered through the provocation of new conflicts or events, such as interaction with professors or classmates who questioned their actions during war. This interaction can precipitate various traumatic responses for which college and university administrators may not be prepared.

When interviewed for another post-Vietnam War study by Leventman (1975), many veterans stated they felt used and discarded and that they were destined to be educated in low-tuition state run institutions or local community colleges. In addition, in a large measure, the 6.7 million men and women who served in the military between 1964 and 1974 were from the American poor and working class because the selective service laws granted deferments to college students (Pilisuk, 1975). The veterans who returned and chose to attend college dropped out sooner and more frequently than traditional college students. Being a military veteran and then a successful college student had become a difficult task.

Effective August 2009, the United States Congress established the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, which greatly expands the already existing Montgomery G.I. Bill with additional benefits available to service men and women who served on active duty after September 11, 2001 (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2008). The wars against terror centered in Iraq and Afghanistan in the last ten years have considerably increased the number of young men and women who will be coming out of the military and are available to seek a college degree.

According to the CUNY Newswire (2008), it was estimated that at least 10,000 veterans and reservists would be returning to New York City alone following service in Iraq and Afghanistan over the following two years, and that number provides scope to the overall number of returning veterans nationwide. Veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars who may intend to attend college with assistance from the G.I. Bill are returning to the United States with a wide variety of experiences, concerns, and injuries, and they are

unlike the traditional student who attends college directly after the completion of high school. Studies show that between 11% and 17% of contemporary veterans returning from deployment overseas will suffer acute war-zone stress reactions that include depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as well as social adjustment problems (Stringer, 2007). A study by the Rand Corporation (2008) concluded that almost 20% of military veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, almost 300,000 in number, suffer from PTSD or major depression. Many others will return home after suffering severe physical injuries such as missing limbs, burns, hearing loss, blindness, and traumatic brain injury.

Administrators at several colleges and universities such as Texas A&M and DePaul University have made announcements that they wish for their institutions to become veteran friendly (Chicago Sun Times, 2009; San Antonio Express, 2008). Colleges and universities are generally well prepared to handle the multitude of students who seek higher education immediately upon achieving their high school diploma, but are they capable of serving students who have experienced several years in the military? Regardless of whether these veterans have endured combat, they will face major transitions when returning to civilian and college life. In reaction, the administration at the University of Minnesota (2007) has recognized this issue and has established an online resource for faculty and staff to become familiar with the needs of military veteran students. The resource covers issues of alienation, family relationships, education, mental health and disabilities, and general needs. These special needs attributed to war veterans who desire to attend college are just now being fully recognized at many college

campuses across the United States. Military veterans often find themselves returning home after being members of an intense and close community fortified by common experiences, and when they arrive to a campus environment, they may encounter people who do not understand their difficulties or the events they endured.

Given the newfound recognition of veteran needs and the difficulties they find on college campuses, we need to know more about these veterans and their experiences in higher education. Unfortunately, few studies specifically address the experiences and success or failure of military veterans in higher education. The greatest majority of modern applicable literature centers on the generic experience of non-traditional students, students with physical and learning disabilities, students who have difficulties adjusting to college life, and those who must stop-out of school for periods of time for financial reasons (Baker & Siryk, 1986; Bergerson, 2007; Cavote & Kopera-Frye, 2007; Kinser & Deitchman, 2007; McCleary-Jones, 2008; Richardson & King, 1998; Tierney, 1992). Even though the literature typically does not address veterans explicitly, a comparison may be drawn between the populations, and it will be used for this discussion.

### **Prior Consideration of the Problem**

Donahue and Tibbitts (1946) published an early article that specifically addresses military veterans and higher education following the Second World War, and it focused upon the reorientation to society for veterans seeking collegiate education. The introduction to the article stated, “Veterans present a special problem to colleges and universities not only because of their numbers and their differences from ordinary students but also, and primarily, because of special characteristics associated with their



recent experiences and their maturity” (Donahue & Tibbitts, 1946, p. 131). Donahue and Tibbitts explained how veterans showed differences that were due not only to age but also in personal values, vision, goals, motivation, emotional needs, responsibility, and to a need for independence. In the end, they concluded that (a) veterans in higher education needed special services, and (b) even though some colleges developed those services, institutional leaders often failed to acknowledge fully the needs of veterans. The article closed with the promise that the college of the future would have the needed services and would be renowned for the effort put forth on behalf of military veterans. I do not believe this prediction has come true, although there have been steps made in recent years. In my own experience as a financial aid director at a prominent private university who discusses such issues with cohorts at other universities, it seems common for school administrators to look to certain populations of students as a source of revenue without fully comprehending the special needs of that population and the impact they have upon the whole campus.

As stated above, the awareness of military veteran needs in higher education is presently coming to the forefront, and research specific to the problem is beginning to emerge. DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell (2008) studied military veterans who had all recently been on active duty in Afghanistan or Iraq between 2003 and 2007 and enrolled at one of three research universities. Their approach, based on the theoretical framework of Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989), examined the ideas of “Moving In, Moving Through, and Moving Out” as how individuals cope with transitions. When moving through the phases, individuals take time to evaluate the transition, determine any

positive or negative effects, and collect resources to manage the change. A person considers his or her strengths and weaknesses based on psychological and personal factors, available support, and the ability to cope with the changes and manage the stresses. When a soldier is called to active duty to face potential combat, there is a major transition to be managed. Leaving the military and entering college is another transition that must be managed, and it becomes another link in the chain of stresses that may affect the college experience of a military veteran.

In the end, many studies that regard military veterans involve discussion of physical disabilities and social problems they possess that effect readjustment and coping with a society that may not have had similar experiences. Researchers however are not able to read much literature that is specific to the needs of the veteran in higher education. They may easily find material that addresses what college and university administrators perceive veteran needs to be, but it does not appear that veterans who have subsequently experienced college have been asked outright what those needs are and how the needs may be adequately met.

### **The Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to determine (a) how military veterans view their college experience, (b) how military veterans attempt to have their needs met, (c) what college resources were available for meeting needs of military veterans, and (d) what needs could not be met. The needs of military veterans were examined to assist college administrators in the development of programs to help meet those needs. The results of this research will be helpful to upper level administrators for setting policy and to student

affairs personnel for identifying useful programs and practice designed around meeting the needs of the military veteran in college. Unless more is known about the specific needs of military veterans in college, veterans may continue to be placed in the dominion of non-traditional students, or those with various disabilities, and the needs of those who have served their country and deserve the ability to obtain a college education may not be met.

Through interviews with military veterans who subsequently attended college, this research reveals (a) what college and university administrators did, or did not do, at one university to affect a successful college experience for military veterans, (b) how a university aligned, or failed to align resources with the needs of veterans, and (c) how program planning efforts may contribute to desired student outcomes and produce successful navigation of the barriers to success.

### **Importance of the Study**

The findings of this study may inform practice and theory. Padilla (1999) viewed undergraduate education as a “black box” with defined inputs and outcomes, but with mostly unexamined internal processes (Bothamley, 1993). According to Padilla, the advantage to thinking of college in this way is that it allows us to study phenomena without possessing knowledge of what specifically is happening as inputs are transformed into outputs. Details may be known about both a student’s background and experiences before entering college and the profiles of the students who successfully graduate or leave college. What is not known, on the other hand, are the educational processes that lead to success or failure. Once a given group of students enrolls at a

college or university, the individuals within that group may experience college in different ways primarily because of the varied choices they make (Astin, 1993). It may be assumed that some students may successfully navigate the barriers to success whereas others will not, and the difference is whether the needs specific to the student are met. Military veterans in the United States are a well-defined population. Anecdotally and empirically, it is known who takes advantage of education opportunities extended by the G.I. Bill through Veteran's Administration records; however, researchers do not appear to know first-hand what college and university programs veterans deemed helpful for navigating their specific barriers to success. Success defined is, "a favorable termination of a venture" (Merriam-Webster, 1977, p. 1163). This researcher deems the successful termination of the college "venture" to be graduation with satisfaction of the experience. This research is not intended to determine whether military veterans were transformed into successful students. It is rather to identify their needs and how needs identification and the creation of specific programs and processes designed to meet those needs can reduce the barriers to success, and to determine how one university assisted them in successfully navigating around those barriers that could have stood in the way of success. Specifically, the findings of this study may encourage college and university administrators to be intentional in the creation of programs and processes that are specific to military veterans seeking a college degree.

### **Research Questions**

The four questions addressed in this study are:

1. How do military veterans experience college?

2. How do military veterans describe their attempts to have their needs met in college?
3. What college resources do military veterans find useful in meeting their needs in college?
4. How do military veterans describe unmet needs in college?

### **Rationale for a Qualitative Study**

Given the nature of the research questions, a qualitative approach is utilized to examining the needs of military veterans in college. Through analysis of responses to interview questions, the answers to the research questions are derived through inquiry that resides in the interpretive arena (Schram, 2006). Schram opines that an interpretivistic lens is used when (a) documenting real events or cases defined by time and circumstance, when (b) the researcher wishes to understand how participants in a real setting made sense and gave meaning to their life experiences, when (c) the researcher desires an understanding of processes by which events and actions take place, and (d) identifying unanticipated or taken-for-granted influences and phenomena. An interpretation is made of what the military veteran's college experience revealed about his or her needs and institutional efforts to assist him or her achieve an education through a process that is essentially a conversation with the data. The veterans will not be viewed as an oppressed population, but rather a population that may be misunderstood and therefore not adequately served.

### **Summary**

Military veterans are taking advantage of government education benefits at the highest rate since World War II (CUNY Newswire, 2008). College and university administrations across the United States are beginning to proclaim their institutions as veteran friendly and seek their enrollment. As a researcher, I am not confident that veterans are not characterized in the same vein as other special needs students and are recognized for their specialized needs. The intent of this research is to establish, through interviews with military veterans who have subsequently attended college at a large southeastern state university, whether veterans have had their unique needs met while they attended college.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The purpose of this chapter is to blend the various concepts, theories, and writings concerning a wide variety of students that may be applicable to the population of military veterans who are attending, or have completed college. Because I anticipate that the results of this research may guide college and university administrators in recognizing the need for special programs for military veterans, I will begin with a discussion of program planning and various program-planning models. I will then discuss the literature that describes the various student attributes that are often used as labels for military veterans. The chapter closes with the conceptual framework for the study, centered upon needs of students in higher education, and how a needs study may be applied to college-bound military veterans. Padilla's (1999) concept of the college as a "black box" is described to aid understanding of how meeting needs will assist a student in successfully navigating ever-changing barriers to collegiate success.

As stated earlier, little research specifically addresses the subject of the experience and success or failure of military veterans in higher education. Nearly all peer-reviewed literature that addresses the subject of the experience and success or failure of military veterans involves discussion of the particular physical and social problems veterans may have that effect readjustment and coping with a society that has not endured the same experience. The writings, for the most part, do not address higher education

needs. The pertinent literature involving higher education discusses non-traditional students and students with physical and mental disabilities. The subject of veterans and college is however gaining in popularity amongst the public as veterans return home from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. Articles appear in newspapers on a daily basis that identify the growing problem of government bureaucracy and the eagerness of higher education administrators to declare their institution military friendly and seek to attract a new source of revenue. An example is the huge interest by “for-profit” schools. Recently, Democratic Senator Tom Harkin, the Chairman of the Senate committee that oversees federal education policy stated, “for-profit schools see our active-duty military and veterans as a cash cow, an untapped profit resource, and it is both a rip off of the taxpayer and a slap in the face to the people who have risked their lives for our country” (Lipton, 2010, para. 11). While this example is specific to for-profit schools, it represents the growing concern for the true motives at institutions of higher learning and exemplifies the requirement for needs analysis and program planning to meet the needs of veterans in higher education.

### **Program Planning**

In program planning, 13 fundamental programming models are available for examination to facilitate the creation of any new model that fits a person’s preferences for program planning style. These models are addressed in chapter two of *Developing Programs in Adult Education: A Conceptual Programming Model*, by Boone, Safrit, and Jones (2002). Boone et al. state that programming in adult education encompasses three basic sub processes of planning, design and implementation, and evaluation and



accountability, and they proceed to break the 13 models down into the aforementioned sub processes for easy analysis for future program planners. The models range from Tyler (1949), to Brookfield (1986), to Sork (2000). Many of the models that Boone et al. discuss have overlapping concepts, and some do not use all of the three sub- processes when describing the best practice for program planning. I will describe what I deem to be the salient components of many of the models and then use what I consider the most relevant segments to create later a recommended program-planning model in Chapter V. I will purposely choose from models that I find relevant to program planning for military veterans and their needs in higher education.

### **Planning**

The planning sub process consists of several stages involving the organization, its renewal process, and the linking of the organization to its publics (Boone et al., 2002). The organization and renewal segment defines what the actual purpose of the organization is and how it fits into the education needs of the constituents. The mission, philosophy, and goals of the organization ultimately drive the planning process. Once the organization's purpose has been determined, the next task is to link that purpose to the publics and the stakeholder groups. In this stage, the purpose of the program is determined usually in conjunction with a needs assessment of the learner. Young (1994) defines need as a gap between current outcomes and desired outcomes, or the difference between "what is" and "what could be." Cervero and Wilson (2006) define need as a discrepancy between a learner's current state of knowledge and performance or attitude, and a desired state. They articulate that a researcher must obtain empirical evidence to

verify the discrepancy, and that needs assessment is a critical first step in program planning, although some research indicates otherwise. Cervero and Wilson also point out, in contrast to their own opinions, that there is considerable argument among researchers whether a needs assessment is truly beneficial to program planning. Pearce (1998) writes that many very successful programs have not had a needs assessment, and although there are numerous needs-assessment models available, few actually are utilized in practice. I will now look at several of the models listed by Boone et al. and point out the prominent planning sub process points.

Tyler (1949) proposes three sources to define educational purposes, which are, the learners themselves, contemporary life, and subject matter specialists (Boone et al., 2002). This approach seems to be very fresh given the year of development. Lippitt, Watson, and Westley (1958) describe the purpose of a program to be a change agent for an existing problem and the focus of their model *is* change. Knowles (1970) created his model based on his assumption that adults move toward self-direction and use their experience as a learning resource. Needs in his model are determined thorough interviews or surveys. Freire (1970) presents a model that is contextualized in the community and the larger political arena and focuses upon the oppressed. I find this approach intriguing, but when thinking of terms of military veterans, I prefer not to think of them as oppressed, but rather misunderstood. Kidd (1973) advocates letting learners explore their own needs and investigating those needs through normal needs assessment methods. This on the surface seems like a good idea, but I speculate about the discovery of “analyzed” needs with Kidd’s approach. Analyzed needs are “unfelt” needs, or needs that are not

expressed, but rather uncovered during the relationship between the educator and learner (Boone et al., 2002). Research indicates that many publics are not aware of some of their most pressing needs and therefore these needs are unfelt (McMahon, 1970). While the model does include some standard needs assessment and engagement of the learner, the primary focus seems to be the learners stated needs, and focus on such may leave some needs unaddressed.

Boyle (1981) makes several assumptions about the role of program planning, or planned change. He believes that planned change is essential to economic and social progress, and the most desirable change is predetermined and democratically achieved. Boyle also believes learners *need* the guidance and leadership of an adult educator to help learners solve their problems and make a better living. This model is more suited to continuing education and community college vocational education, but may be modified to encompass military veterans in college. Care must be taken in assuming that learners need the guidance and leadership of an adult educator. In the case of military veterans, the educator may be merely the person in the position of authority and not the person with the expertise or answers.

Brookfield (1986) is an advocate of applying adult learning principles in program planning and he is emphatic that adults in learning situations must be treated as adults. In the planning stage, the feelings, perceptions, and experiences are used to develop a program that tailors to their needs (Boone et al., 2002). Brookfield is adamant that every program planning context will be unique and every situation must be fully examined for that uniqueness. The planner must also be flexible and adaptable and not make

assumptions that one size may fit all. Cervero and Wilson (1994) describe a planning stage that is a social activity where people negotiate with each other in answering questions about the form, purpose, content, and format of a program (Boone et al., 2002). The important factors are the planner's ability to recognize those who hold power and to have political shrewdness. Caffarella (1994) outlines a very generic sounding planning stage that establishes a basis for the planning process, identifying program ideas, and sorting and prioritizing of those ideas. Although simple is usually desirable, Caffarella's approach to the planning stage seems a bit too simplistic to be applicable to military veterans and their needs. Sork (2000) also has a simplistic approach of analysis of the context and learner community followed by justification and focus of the plan with a clarification of the intentions of the plan.

### **Design and Implementation**

The design and implementation subprocess is focused upon the organization and implementation of an intentional educational reaction by the organization and teachers to the expressed and analyzed needs of the target publics identified in the planning subprocess (Boone et al., 2002). As can be expected, the design and implementation subprocess consists of two distinct but connected elements of, designing the planned program, and implementing the planned program. According to Boone et al., designing a planned program consists of four stages:

1. Analyzing and translating the expressed needs of the target publics and organizing them in order of importance,
2. Formulating a learner objective for each of the ordered needs,

3. Selecting a learning experience for each of the objectives identified above,  
and
4. Defining an intended outcome for each learning objective.

Implementing a planned program is broken into the two areas of designing incremental and sequential plans of action consequent to the planned program and invoking the strategies required to make the plan of action work. The 13 program planning models outlined by Boone, et al. have varied and distinct strategies for design and implementation.

Tyler (1949) opines that when a planner is selecting a learning experience, he or she must be cognizant that the learner must have the opportunity to practice the desired behavior and achieve satisfaction from it. In addition, many learning experiences may be used to fulfill one learning objective and a single learning experience can have many outcomes. The model by Lippitt et al. (1958) stresses the continual exchange of information between the learner and adult educator where new behaviors are tested and established emotional needs are explored. The key to Knowles' (1970) model is unity. The planner is encouraged to choose from many possible learning formats with artistic principles of line, space/shape, color, texture, and tone to maintain harmony. This feeds back to his assumption that adults move toward self-direction and use their experience as a learning resource.

Kidd (1973) utilizes a mathematical approach to programming that is very learner centered, specific, and methodical in development. He allows the learner to explore his or her own needs, and the focus is on engagement of the learner. As I mentioned before, this

approach has potential to ignore analyzed needs if the planner relies too much upon letting the learner set the course. Boyle (1981) uses a very straight-forward design and implementation process which includes, selecting and organizing the learning experiences, identification of instructional design with suitable methods, utilization of effectual promotional priorities, and procurement of needed support for the program. Brookfield (1986) has an easy to understand method when he recommends the adult educator determine the objectives and content of the program as well as the methods through collaboration with the learners. He also prescribes an enduring evaluation of the process in conjunction with the learner. Brookfield sees the learner as an integral part of the planning and design process throughout the entire program. Cervero and Wilson (1994) are similar to Brookfield since they recommend a program that is resultant of collaboration with the learner. Their design and implementation process proceeds a bit further by recommending the continued negotiation involving planners, primary institutional power figures, and beneficiaries of the program. The program is an emergent product of everyday activities of those stakeholders who performed the planning.

Caffarella (1994) seems to build upon Brookfield (1986) and Cervero and Wilson (1994) by suggesting that program planning is an interactive and action-oriented activity where decisions and choices are made about adult learning opportunities with flexibility being a key component (Boone et al., 2002). Caffarella also opines that program planners must be free to choose which components of the model on which to work first and there is no specific order, nor deliberate beginning and end to the process. Caffarella gives the planner extreme leeway in how he or she chooses to conduct the design and

implementation. Houle (1996) looks at programming through the eyes of the learner and he has nine prevailing assumptions. Those assumptions include; learning occurs in a specific situation and is influenced strongly by it, educational activities are based on the realities of human experience, and planned education must be recognized as a complex of interacting elements and not merely a sequence of events. Houle's model gives the planner great ability to adapt to a myriad of situations.

### **Evaluation and Accountability**

According to Boone et al. (2002), evaluation and accountability “closes the loop” on the program planning process and provides objective and valid feedback about the impact of the program on the targeted publics and other stakeholders. Evaluation and accountability allows adult educators to make informed judgments about the resultant value of the program. It also provides justification for the decisions made and the resources and time expended. Evaluation is the process where the outcomes of a planned program are measured and the effectiveness is determined. Accountability is the process by which the organization and the adult educators are held accountable for desired outcomes and the effectiveness of the efforts made in producing them.

For Tyler (1949), evaluation centers on whether desired results are achieved and then with an examination of the program's strengths and weaknesses. Tyler is fundamentally looking for the program to have effected a change in behavior. Lippitt et al. (1958) have an unusual evaluative stage that they refer to as the “terminal relationship.” Their form of evaluation is looking for procedural answers; primarily if the planned program was truly the way the effort should have been carried forth. The

evaluative process is essentially to question the purpose of the program, and Knowles (1970) offers up a choice of evaluative process for reviewing a planned program. Those who focus on behavioral change may use quantitative techniques, and those focused upon self-development are urged to allow the participants to assess the program (Boone et al., 2002).

Kidd (1973) is simplistic and defers to the recommendations of the American Adult Education Association for evaluation of a program by asking how much change and growth have occurred by utilization of standard evaluation methodology (Boone et al., 2002). Brookfield (1986) once again has methods of evaluation that are logical. His evaluative process is to examine the resultant outcomes of a program through a collaborative process. The process is also evaluated continually from beginning to end in collaboration with the publics. I feel this method is highly suitable for programs involving participants with a strong sense of self-direction and motivation, which is much like many military veterans seeking higher education. Cervero and Wilson (1994) once again borrow from the ideas of Brookfield by recommending an evaluative process that is cooperation between planners, stakeholders, participants, and power figures. The assessment is continuous, and ideas and decisions from all parties are used throughout the planning process and implementation.

For the most part, the planning models cited in this section have many recommendations for planning and design and implementation, but they largely appear to lose momentum when it comes to the evaluation and implementation segment. Many



models borrow from each other, and some simply seem to refer the reader back to the planning stage in a sort of “rinse and repeat” motif.

### **Program Planning Summary**

Boone et al. (2002) highlighted 13 prominent Program Planning models, which range from the years 1949 to 2000 in creation. While some are very distinctive and many share common themes, my preference is for the program planning model put forth by Brookfield (1986) with some small additions suggested by Freire (1970), Cervero and Wilson (1994), and Houle (1996). My model for chapter 5 will be centered upon the needs of the target public with recognition of the need for satisfaction of those who hold power. I also believe in the need for flexibility and adaptability and the involvement of all interested parties. Perfection is rarely attainable, and criticism and mistakes along the planning process can be expected. I subscribe to a program planning model that allows for adaptability and includes as many stakeholders as possible.

### **Needs**

#### **What are Needs?**

Since this research involves the study of military veterans’ needs in higher education and the programs designed for them, a discussion of needs is necessary. Need is a psychological, physical, or physiological feature that causes an organism to move toward a goal, and it has been the subject of many scientific and subjective writings (Cervero & Wilson, 2006; Maslow, 1943; Witkin & Altschuld, 1995; Young, 1994). Maslow designed a hierarchy of psychological needs that have a range from the basics of security, to safety, to social, to esteem, and culminate in self-actualization. In theory, a

person with unmet needs will regress to the nearest level where a need has been met. As mentioned earlier, Young defines need as a gap between current outcomes and desired outcomes, or the difference between “what is” and “what could be.” Witkin and Altschuld (1995) break need into being either a noun or a verb. As a noun, need refers to the gap or present state (what is), and a desired end or future state (what could be). This is the same definition provided by Young. Need as a verb points to what is required or desired to plug the deficiency, or a means to an end. Cervero and Wilson (2006) define need as a discrepancy between a learner’s current state of knowledge and performance, or attitude, and a desired state. They articulate that a researcher must obtain empirical evidence to verify the discrepancy, and that needs assessment is the critical first step in program planning, although some research mentioned earlier (Caffarella, 2002; Lee, Altschuld, & White, 2007; Pearce, 1998) indicates otherwise.

Program planners must be aware that there are numerous interests to be satisfied and that all stakeholders have political and educational needs derived from their interests (Cervero & Wilson, 2006). Planners must always assess those needs but also be cognizant that empirical evidence may not be the basis for the assessment. Many planners often mistakenly assume that the collection of evidence and needs assessment are the same. According to Houle (1996), needs-assessments are merely judgments since the impetus to teach or learn is derived from multiple sources. Judgments are often formed by evidence, but the evidence cannot truly determine a need. People consciously and subconsciously determine what their needs are and planners will often make judgments about a learners’ needs whether or not clear evidence is obtained to create the judgments.

Needs assessment tends to become political in that groups or individuals often desire to influence which of the needs of other people will be addressed (Cervero & Wilson, 2006).

### **Types of Needs**

In program planning, needs have permutations or a metamorphosis. The origin and magnitude of needs are linked to systems of interactions and processes of society through which an individual acquires his or her lifestyle. A person's lifestyle is defined as the psychological, social and cultural manifestations of behavior that has accumulated over time and slowly learned in response to the surrounding social environment (Boone et al., 2002). Needs can be felt, expressed, diagnosed, assessed, and analyzed. Boone et al. indicate that felt needs and expressed needs are alike, however I believe there is a fundamental difference. A felt need is something that happens to a person, or anything that they consciously lack or desire. A felt need does not necessarily have to be made known to other people, and may remain internalized by the person feeling the need. An expressed need is a felt need that is made known, either individually or as a group. Difficulty may exist in trying to match a needs assessment by a provider to the will of the people (Boone et al., 2002). Boone et al. give the example of how education providers, who are convinced they are right, may force the public or stakeholders into acceptance of their opinions. This is aided by the tendency of the public to utilize crowd tactics and simply go with the flow. The expressed needs therefore may not exactly match the felt need of each individual and this can make it difficult for a program planner to truly know what the felt needs are for the stakeholders.

A diagnosed need is the interpretation of the felt, or expressed need, and is the opinion of the program planner, whether or not the conclusion was reached in conjunction with the stakeholders, or by objective observation. The adult educator must display significant impartiality in working with stakeholders since program planners tend to assume they know what is best for the publics (Boone et al., 2002). Taking a stance that they are “all-knowing” can seriously damage the relationship between the educator and the learner. Diagnosing the needs of the learning public is a continuing process that requires interfacing with leaders, listening skills, community studies, surveys, and observation. For a program planner to diagnose properly the needs, he or she must associate with the stakeholders to the extent that he or she becomes part of the group and the diagnosed need is a felt or expressed need. Since many community leaders speak for only a select group of individuals, it is important for the program planner to associate with a large number of leaders to ascertain the true voice of the public. A properly diagnosed need is one that is determined by thorough coordination with the target publics and understanding properly what they feel are their pressing requirements.

An assessed need is a diagnosed need that is prioritized. As described earlier, a need is defined as the gap between current outcomes and desired outcomes, or the difference between “what is” and “what could be” (Young, 1994). A properly diagnosed need may still be a need that does not require a planned program to achieve fruition or be worth the required resources to accomplish. Needs in society are often confused with wants, and an educator must be able to delineate the difference between them. The needs assessment is the examination of a situation to determine the prospect for an educational

program to be a solution to a real problem or a proper response to a need. The assessment should evaluate discrepancies in the diagnosis and establish priorities of responses to the perceived need.

An educator's task should be to reach beyond the felt or expressed needs of the public and spawn the discovery of analyzed needs. Analyzed needs are "unfelt" needs, or needs that are not expressed, but rather uncovered during the relationship between the educator and learner (Boone et al, 2002). Research indicates that many public are not aware of some of their most pressing needs and therefore these needs are "unfelt" (McMahon, 1970). The best example I can create is that of a public who do not realize that their traditions are causing their children to play with toys decorated with lead-based paint. Their felt, or expressed need may be the ability to obtain more of the traditional toys for an upcoming holiday, but the analyzed need is to teach the public to utilize a different supplier that uses safe paint. The educator must go beyond what the public feels are their needs since the felt needs may not be representative of the most pressing needs. The analyzed needs must be recognized since felt needs tend to focus on immediate interests and not more basic, long term needs. I would personally caution a program planner about how analyzed needs are presented since we desire to avoid the perception of "all knowing" mentioned above that could damage the relationship between educator and learner.

### **Developmental Needs**

A program planner must consider the developmental needs of the learner when planning the education program. Adult learners may be in several different

developmental stages much like children can be at widely varied stages. Chickering and Reisser (1993) describe the seven vectors of development through which adults pass, from developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward independence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity. People may find themselves paused at certain stages while others move on, and there may be a wide mix of stages within the learner group. Nancy Schlossberg (1984) developed her “Transition Theory,” which created a framework to facilitate an understanding of adults in transition. The Transition Theory helps us to understand why people react and adapt differently to life evolution and why the same person may react and adapt very differently at varied points in his or her life. Transition is defined as any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, assumptions, routines and roles (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Both positive and negative transitions produce stress, and the impact of the stress is dependent upon the balance of recent positive and negative experiences a person has endured. A program planner must take into account the developmental level of the target learners and be cognizant that a group that appears homogeneous may be experiencing a wide variety of developmental issues.

### **Military Veterans and Needs**

Recognition and assessment of needs for military veterans who wish to receive a four-year college degree following military service in Iraq and Afghanistan, along with how college administrators integrate those needs into policy is the reason for this research. As stated earlier, effective August 1, 1999, the United States Congress

established the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, which greatly expands the already existing Montgomery G.I. Bill with additional benefits available to service men and women who served on active duty after September 11, 2001 (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2008). The wars in both Iraq and Afghanistan have greatly increased the number of young men and women who have come out of the military and are seeking a college degree. The Military.Com newsletter (2009) indicates that Columbia Basin College and Washington State University Tri-Cities had assisted over 1,500 veterans in the last year and a half prior to the article. Many more examples like this can be found that show colleges and universities are dealing with a greatly expanded number of military veterans in the classroom.

College administrators must be cognizant of the many needs that military veterans may possess. Veterans will come to campus empowered with their “felt” needs, but there could be significant diagnosis and assessment required of those needs and the ability to recognize the analyzed needs of which the veterans may not be aware. The felt needs might be in the form of services to handle physical and mental disabilities and the possible disconnect from the traditional student body due to age. The analyzed needs may be in the form of changes needed to institutional programs, attitudes of faculty and staff, and socio-economic and cultural capital variances between students.

### **Military Veterans in Higher Education**

#### **Motivation to Enter the Military**

There are many reasons why young men and women will forgo college immediately after high school in favor of military service. Several studies have indicated

that the military may afford a source of mobility for disadvantaged minorities due to the offer of steady employment, benefits and compensation above and beyond the civilian sector, a less discriminatory environment, and G.I. Bill benefits to fund a college education (Kleykamp, 2006). The cost of a college degree at a doctoral through baccalaureate granting institution of higher education has risen over the past several decades at a rate that is growing faster than the consumer price index and the average family income (College Board, 2006). The average tuition and fees at a four-year private college in 1976 was \$2,534 per year. The same education in 2006 cost \$22,218. The costs at four-year public institutions rose from \$617 to \$5,836 over the same period of 1976 to 2006. From the above data, a person may see that even though they are less expensive, public college costs have risen at a higher average percentage increase than private institution costs.

Research regarding college aspirations shows that many high school students intend or aspire to attend college. Increased enrollment in the 1990's driven by gains by minorities and higher returns of a college degree reduced the number of quality recruits for the military (Bachman, Freedman-Doan, & O'Malley, 2001). The recent high costs of college have overridden or delayed aspiration in some high school graduates, and the military has benefited in increased participation fueled by the college funding provided by the Montgomery G.I. Bill and the new Post-9/11 G.I. Bill.

Kleykamp (2006) found that sociologists who ignore the military when studying the transition to adulthood miss an important route to college education and upward mobility. She determined that the military assisted the non-college population possessing



high educational aspirations to attain their goals, and young men with college aspirations are more likely to join the military than pursue some other work when college is not the immediate option.

DiRamio et al. (2008) interviewed military veterans who had recently served on active duty and were enrolled at large research institutions. When they asked the participants about the motivations to join the military, a theme emerged that the cohort had experienced the 9/11 terrorist attacks as teenagers and the effect was life altering. Of the 25 veterans interviewed, 15 cited the attacks as his or her reason for joining the military. DiRamio et al. refer to Strauss and Howe's (1991) description of the Millennial Generation's propensity to emulate the patriotic generation of their grandparents who willingly served their country in the mid twentieth century. The teenagers witnessed the terrorist attacks on television and determined they must serve their country rather than go to college.

Motivation to enter the military is mixed, but the primary reasons may be attributed to the lack of financial capability to pay for college upon completion of high school coupled with a sense of patriotism. The military is perceived as the best alternative to college for young men and women who have a desire for advancement and knowledge, yet lack the financial means to pay for higher education.

### **Non-traditional Students**

Colleges and universities have recruited large numbers of students from the older segment of the population since the mid 1970's (Richardson & King, 1998). Lenz and Shaevitz (1977) defined adult, or non-traditional, students as those who are over 22 years

of age at their time of entry into higher education. In Australia, students over 25 years of age when admitted are called “mature-age” students, and in the United Kingdom students over age 21 are considered “mature students” (Hore, 1992). The definition of an adult, or non-traditional student can be arbitrary, but for the purposes of this research, I will consider anyone entering college for the first time after the age of 21 to be an adult and/or non-traditional student. Most students who have served in the military upon completion of high school and then enter college for the first time will be at least 21 years of age.

Richardson and King (1998) concluded through study of the available literature that although adult students will encounter various barriers to higher education, they are capable of learning just as well as younger students and they are more adept at probing and taking advantage of their prior experiences to make sense of new information. Their study, which compares adult learners to traditional students, closes with the perception that adult students typically better utilize time management skills, are more compatible with the goals of higher education institutions, and significantly contribute to the classroom experience. However, does this generalization fit the example of the military veteran who attends college after active duty? I contend that military veterans are focused more on goals and better utilize their time because of the strict training received in the military and the long lasting sense that such attributes are necessary for survival. The events of wartime are life changing and personality altering, and this change is manifest in a level of maturity not often found in the traditional college student (DiRamio et al., 2008).

In 2004, a document titled “Learning Reconsidered” was produced for The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and The American College Personnel Association (ACPA), which proposed wide-sweeping alterations in the way college student affairs administrators should view the college experience (Learning Reconsidered, 2004). The Learning Reconsidered document adequately sums up the nature of non-traditional students with,

There are more adult college students, some of them far older than traditional undergraduates, and students of all ages now live more complex lives, coping with the competing demands of work, family, classes, and other campus roles, organizations, and activities. More and more students are not just students anymore; many of their responsibilities, commitments, and communities are found off campus. (p. 2)

Military veterans will, as a population, likely fit into the above description of non-traditional students. We should not think of military veterans as a problem with which to be subjected, but rather as a potential resource for the bettering of education for all. The authors of *Learning Reconsidered* also state that a transformative education frequently exposes students to numerous opportunities for intentional learning through the traditional academic curriculum, collaborative co-curricular programming, student life, and community based and global experiences. Military veterans carry a wealth of global experience within them and they may contribute significantly to the classroom experience of all students.

### **Portrayal of Veterans in Popular Publications**

There are many higher education publications such as the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Current Issues in Education*, *Greentree Gazette*, *The Financial Aid Journal*,

*and Business Officer*, that refer to and discuss non-traditional students, financial independence, full-time employment, being a parent, delayed enrollment, career changers, distance education, and part time students. Military veterans may be considered part of the aforementioned groups, and college and university administrators are often presented with information about how to cater to many non-traditional students by organizations such as HigherOne (2010). However since most literature regarding military veterans and higher education pertains to disabilities, PTSD, and social maladies, the assumption that military veterans are automatically going to be different from traditional students should not be made and thus create a mislabeling that in itself creates a problem. Recent events covered in the news media that focus upon the negative aspect of the military, such as the mass murder shooting at Fort Hood, TX, and the high suicide rate amongst military personnel may act to hinder public perception of the ability for veterans to attend college with the more traditional student body. It is common to see stories which depict military members and veterans as heroes, but the negative aspects carried in sensational articles that sell newspapers and television commercial time may be creating a “not in my back yard” mentality amongst the general public who attend college.

Is it possible that negative textual connotations in regard to military veterans mentioned above have an effect on the creation of institutional policies? Many higher education institutions do not accept military experience as transfer credit (Zagier, 2009). The military has long used the language for recruitment purposes that entering the military will be excellent preparation for college, but veterans often find that none of

their years of experience in the military, often in very technical fields, will count towards college credit.

The power over veterans who wish to attend college is shared between the federal government, college and university administrators, and the military veterans themselves. In regard to the government, provision of financial aid for veterans to attend college provides an incentive for young people to join the military, and it is politically advantageous. College administrators may seek to secure an additional population of students and be able to announce publicly that their institution is friendly to veterans. Veterans have a more broad choice of where they may attend college and now find that institutions are much more receptive. The ultimate power however, resides with the federal government and the Veteran's Administration which set the rules to which all parties must abide if any funding for tuition is to be provided. As a financial aid administrator at a medium sized university, I have heard of the effects of the power relationship. Military veterans are encouraged to attend college by the military, the federal government, and the college and university administration. The promise of funding is a guarantee by the federal government and the veteran enrolls. The veteran, who is now a college student must then await the arrival of the government guaranteed benefits to pay the tuition bill and obtain money for living expenses. Governmental bureaucracy delays the disbursement of funds, and the college business office has not received revenue to satisfy operating expenses and the veteran does not have money for living expenses. As an example, according to representatives of Iraq and Afghanistan veteran groups, some veterans enrolled in college are being threatened with eviction, and

others are facing tuition bills for an upcoming semester while still waiting for the prior semester to be paid (Nelson, 2009). In addition, a recent poll of students indicates 10% of veterans enrolled at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis will not be returning for the next semester because of financial strain. Meanwhile, all parties to veterans who are considering college are still disseminating information that encourages enrollment. Military veterans are often a cohesive cohort, and information regarding financing difficulties will spread from those already in college to those who are considering attendance. School administrators can tout their schools as veteran friendly, but without the flow of funding, the information is fruitless. The language in the government texts, which encourages college attendance by veterans, is often not matching the action. The ultimate power held by the government in the chain of events has the overwhelming effect over the outcome.

When examining the writings, or texts, that refer to veterans in higher education, it seems that an ethos that is analogous to structuralist mentality prevails. Many writings are fixated on the social and physical problems that veterans may have and may cause school administrators and the Veteran's Administration to categorize all veterans as educationally challenged. It seems that most texts that contain discussion of veterans and college attendance place the veteran firmly in the realm of handicapped, impaired, or disadvantaged in some manner. As represented by statistics cited earlier in this paper, up to 35% of veterans will display some type of difficulty, which is not a majority of veteran students. The percentage is greater than the overall student body on average, but it is not representative of all military veterans attempting to complete college. A 1999 report from

the National Center for Educational Statistics indicates overall that 6% of college students reported upon initial questioning that they possessed some type of disability (NCES, 1999). However, when questioned further, up to 29% of students possessed some sort of disability, whether it is learning disability, hearing and vision problems, or orthopedic conditions. When comparing military veterans to the overall student body, the difference is not significant. The media and public appear to perpetuate and accentuate the awareness of problems with military veterans by the attention given to the service men and women involved in the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

### **Identities**

Gee (2000) explains that people typically are categorized as a “particular type” by the way they interact in any given context in society. Being recognized as a certain type of person assigns an assured identity to that person, and depending upon the context, a person can have multiple identities. The multiplicity of identities however does not change a person’s core identity. Identity may be a label placed upon a person in several different ways. Gee describes four identities and calls them N-Identity, I-Identity, D-Identity, and A-Identity.

N-Identity is one over which a person has no control, such as being born as an identical twin, or male or female (Gee, 2000). The source of power in the creation of this identity is nature. The I-Identity results from one’s role in a particular institution, such as a person being a plumber or a professional athlete, and is something the person helped to create as a course of his or her association with a particular type of lifestyle or occupation. The D-Identity, or discursive identity, relates to the I-Identity in how a

person finds individuality within that identity through mannerisms and language, and not simply by rituals, traditions, and laws. An example could be the difference between someone being labeled a “good lawyer” versus a “crooked lawyer.” The difference is not in the occupation but rather in the manner in which the person conducts him or herself and positions their behavior in society. The fourth identity, A-Identity, is in relation to how a person aligns him/herself with a particular affinity group, such as being a NASCAR fan or a member of the local chess club.

Veterans of the military may find themselves being positioned within the above-mentioned identities, and at times, that identity can be a misaligned label. Take for example the statistic that 35% of veterans will have some type of disability. A disability, such as being confined to a wheelchair would be, as Gee (2000) describes, an N-identity. The injury that caused the need for a wheelchair was likely imposed upon the person without his or her control and becomes a part of the person’s identity. The condition of post-traumatic stress disorder is also an N-Identity of sorts. Now, take the example of a military veteran who does not possess any physical or mental infirmities who is attending college. This person is attempting to create his or her own I-Identity and D-Identity by choosing to participate in higher education and employing his or her own personality in how he or she relate to other students, faculty, and staff. This person may have an A-Identity imposed upon them by the other students, faculty, and staff because he or she is a military veteran and they are positioned as a member of the military as an affinity group. I contend that this new A-Identity may become manifest in the minds of other people on campus as an N-Identity and/or I-Identity. A perfectly healthy and normal person who is



a military veteran may have the N-Identity of a person with physical and mental disabilities imposed upon them because of perceptions of the public that focus upon those veterans with disabilities. The issue may become a two edged sword, since we as a society should do our part to promote and enhance the educational opportunities for military veterans who have served on our behalf, yet we must avoid the bulk categorization of veterans as a special and disabled class of people because of the sensationalism from the media and benevolent activism. Discourse intended to aid a veteran in the process of going to college could actually hinder his or her success due to the creation of non-existent identities for the majority of veterans, and thus create barriers to success.

Being a military veteran will often give that person an A-Identity. According to Gee (2000), members of an affinity group will have a primary allegiance to a common set of endeavors or practices and secondarily to other people in terms of shared culture or traits. The practices and experiences they share, or shared, create and sustain the allegiance to the affinity group. When I observe the various printed or web-based material available regarding veterans and higher education opportunities, it seems that the emphasis is on maintaining the affinity group for the veterans. The Stars and Stripes Education Guide (2009) contains many articles that emphasize the importance of sticking together for motivation and support. It is probably sound advice, but it stands to reinforce the A-Identity of the veterans and can possibly work to isolate them from the rest of the student body and perpetuate the N-Identity and I-Identity of veterans envisioned by other

students, faculty, and staff. School administrators must be vigilant not to create pockets of isolation for veterans when designing programs on campus to serve them.

### **Institutional Programs**

According to Tinto (1990), if an institution is to have a successful retention program, students must be sufficiently involved in the college campus. Tinto maintains that successful retention programs, regardless of school type, student gender and race, are dependent upon the existence of a conscious effort to reach out and make contact with students to affect personal bonds between students and the faculty. Of utmost importance is for faculty-student contact to exist in various settings outside of the classroom. Tinto also states that the first year of college is critical in the incorporation of the student into the college campus to lead to a successful graduation. This would indicate that incorporating military veterans into the college culture and forming proper faculty-student bonds should in theory, be effective for successful retention and graduation.

Cavote and Kopera-Frye (2007) reject the importance of the first year experience as a key to retention and graduation for non-traditional students. In their quantitative study, which utilized the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS) Risk Factor Index and focused upon students in Nevada, Cavote and Kopera-Frye examined the potential impact that first-year experience courses had for students with four or more non-traditional traits as compared to traditional students. They fully expected that the first year experience would have a positive effect, but concluded that the first year experience did not enhance persistence for non-traditional students, and that highly non-traditional students actually had a lower persistence rate. It should be noted that the students who

contributed data for the study enrolled in 1999, and the researchers admit that Nevada did not have a state sponsored financial aid program until 2000, so the results of this study may not be generalizable to the student population of the United States. In the end, Cavote and Kopera-Frye (2007) conclude that a one size fits all approach to student engagement may be less helpful to students with a high risk factor for non-traditionality as defined by the U.S. Department of Education (1999). A high risk factor non-traditional student possesses four or more of the following traits: first generation status, delayed entry, part-time attendance, off-campus employment, financial independence, dependents/single parenthood, and absence of high school diploma. Military veterans attempting to achieve a four-year college degree have a good chance of demonstrating four or more of the aforementioned traits.

Longwell-Grice and Longwell-Grice (2007) determined in a study of first-generation and working-class students that those students can become intimidated by the idea of seeking out faculty for support. Their purposeful sampling, qualitative method study examined the perceptions of six White males who were first generation college students, from the working-class, and first semester freshmen at a single college. The theoretical framework used was Tinto's (1990) theory that students must be sufficiently involved on the college campus for an institution to have a successful retention program. Through in-depth primary interviews with the six students, and systematic follow-up interviews with four students from the original six, the researchers determined that in able to support Tinto's theory, college authorities must be more systematic and strategic in finding ways to develop faculty-student interactions for the type of student being studied.

Again, military veterans will tend to fit the description of the subjects of the study sample. Care must be used in generalizing the results of Longwell-Grice and Longwell-Grice's (2007) study to the entire non-traditional student population in general, but the study produced an interesting point of support for the theory of Tinto and my belief that school administrators must be proactive in multi-faceted support for military veterans on campus.

There are varying opinions from the literature on whether integration into the campus culture and purposeful programs designed by college administrators to increase interaction between constituents on campus are effective. I believe that it is more advantageous to make efforts to increase integration and involvement of students into the campus culture and make the experience positive rather than to put forth no effort and let nature take its course.

### **Physical Disabilities**

Students with physical disabilities have thinly participated in higher education for over 100 years (Belch, 2004). Before the early 1900's, higher education in the United States was primarily for the education of clergy and social leaders (Malakpa, 1997). Over the years, higher education organizations became more focused on extended opportunities for education and career development, which has led to a more diverse student body and a greater range of education activities and services (Milani, 1996). The original G.I. Bill resulted in the recognition of disabled citizens attending college since it addressed the rehabilitation of veterans with disabilities. Prior to the 1970's, disabled students were denied access to college specifically because they were disabled. Over 36

years of intervention by legislation (e.g., Rehabilitation Act in 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA) has guaranteed equal access to higher education and sparked a large increase in college attendance by students possessing physical disabilities.

Persons are considered to have a physical disability if they experience functional limitations in one or more of life's essential activities (ADA, 1990). 'Functional limitation' is described as impairment of vision, mobility, speaking, hearing, or information processing (HEATH, n. d.). Colleges and universities often enroll students with visual impairments, deafness or hard of hearing, mobility impairments, and brain injuries (Belch, 2004). These impairments are becoming more commonly found in veterans of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Administrators at colleges and universities who wish to serve the growing numbers of college bound veterans must be prepared to deal with an increased number of students with physical impairments.

An interesting problem is the use of the same admissions standards for military veterans wishing to go to college as for a traditional student. James Wright, the President of Dartmouth recognized this following his visits to injured Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans in 2005 (Wright, 2008). Wright visited the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, MD and walked among rows of severely injured Marines suffering from missing limbs, face and head injuries, and speech and memory problems. Wright spoke with those soldiers, who were not too heavily medicated to speak, and asked what they wanted to do next and suggested obtaining a college education. The Marines expressed

interest in pursuing their college degree, but had questions regarding elevators in classroom buildings since they were reliant upon a wheelchair, and whether military experience would count as transfer credit. Dartmouth welcomed several veterans, but did not establish any social or educational programs specific to them. It was however determined that if the admissions office recognized that the standard SAT scores and high school grades were less relevant to a 21 year old with the military experience, adjustments could be made. Dartmouth also responded to special housing needs and facilitated connections with medical providers. The action of the Dartmouth administration can be called admirable, but is the action truly proactive, or merely the treatment of a symptom?

### **Socio-economic Differences**

Kinser and Deitchman (2007) examined what they termed “tenacious persisters.” They proposed that there was no difference in the risk of failure to complete college by adult students than traditional students because of age. Failure rather tended to be due to socioeconomic status, involvement in the college environment, or external demands on the student’s time. Standard persisters are students who completed a college degree without interruption, whether traditional or non-traditional. Tenacious persisters are students either whom delayed entry into college for more than three years after high school, or who had dropped out of college at least once before completing the degree. Military veterans may often be interpreted to be in the tenacious category due to their delayed entry into college or having left college to serve and then returning to finish the college degree. Kinser and Deitchman concluded that rather than seeing adult students as

categorically at-risk for leaving college, future research should focus upon what brought them into the classroom. Their mixed-methods study involved quantitative survey data followed by qualitative follow-up interviews. They recommend that future studies should focus on the differences among students who return to college after taking time off or have delayed entry, and retention efforts should recognize different persistence patterns and the experiences of students that create those patterns. I propose that some of the difference between veterans choosing to enter college after experiencing military service and traditional students may be due to variances of cultural capital that helped create the life path following high school graduation.

Cultural capital is the system of factors derived from a person's parents that defines the person's class status. As stated by Perna and Titus,

Cultural capital refers to the system of attributes, such as language skill, cultural knowledge, and mannerisms, that is derived in part from one's parents and that defines an individual's class status. Middle- and upper-class individuals possess the most valued forms of cultural capital. (2005, p. 488)

Parental involvement is an important component to a student's ability to attend college. A 1999 survey by the College Board showed that 70% of college preparation programs that were intended for underrepresented minority groups had a parental component. Perna and Titus go on to report however that many parents are not involved due to lack of time, poor funding and inadequate staffing of the programs. The effort is being made to get parents involved in their children's higher education, but the attempt is failing. Parental involvement and support is vital to the ability of underrepresented minority students to attend college. As Perna writes,

Individuals who lack the required cultural capital may (a) lower their educational aspirations or self-select out of particular situations (e.g., not enroll in higher education) because they do not know the particular cultural norms (b) over-perform to compensate for their less-valued cultural resources, or (c) receive fewer rewards for the educational investment. (2000, p. 119)

The unfortunate reality is that lack of cultural capital hinders many African American and Hispanic students from enrolling in college. Their parents are simply too busy with the daily task of providing for their family to have the time and ability to be involved in the activities that promote knowledge and access to higher education. This is in contrast to their counterparts in the higher socio-economic status group who have more leisure time and ability to focus on assisting their children in going to college. When compared to Whites, Blacks and Hispanics have less access to information and general knowledge of how to achieve a college education (Perna, 2000).

Tinto (1993) writes that among members of the high-school class of 1980, a greater proportion of females, Whites, and persons of higher ability and social status origins entered college than males, Blacks, and Hispanics. And Tinto adds that the students who were most likely to delay entrance to college were male, non-White, and of lower socio-economic status. If one looks at a snapshot of the population in the military today, it still mirrors the population Tinto spoke about almost 20 years ago. For this population, lack of knowledge of the processes behind entering college may lead to other options for advancement such as the military. But while in the military, ambitions for college may develop because of intense training and the “can do” attitude of the military which instills a sense of motivation and the drive to seek achievement.



### **Social Interaction and Mental Health**

There is widespread data concerning the increase and prevalence of mental health issues among students (Reynolds, 2009). All students are utilizing counseling services at an increasing rate and are exhibiting serious emotional, psychological, and behavioral issues. A 2008 survey of college counseling center directors indicated that 95% of center directors believe that the number of students with significant psychological issues has increased in recent years and the ability for the available staff to handle the problems is being stretched to the limit (Gallagher, 2008). The same survey indicated that almost one-third of the directors believe that psychiatric counseling is very inadequate or does not exist on their college campus.

According to McDonald, Beckham, Morey, and Calhoun (2009), it is estimated that 35% of military veterans will seek assistance from mental health services in the first year after returning home, and 5-20% will be classified as suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). If institutions of higher education are unable to serve the current student body's mental health needs, I have concern for military veterans who choose to attend college directly after discharge from the armed services and attempt to seek out mental health services.

### **Faculty and Staff Attitudes**

The relationship between faculty and special populations of non-traditional students may often be different from that of the traditional student. In his review of literature regarding students with disabilities in higher education, Paul (2000) cited an unpublished dissertation by Farbman (1983) that described the relationship between

science faculty and mobility and visually impaired students. The approach by the faculty was widely varied. Some faculty was willing to change his or her teaching styles and spend extra time with the students, while other professors refused. Special equipment rarely was used, and most consideration was in the form of extra time or scheduling modifications. The accommodations are reportedly directly related to how the students approached the faculty member, and the better the student was able to describe his or her needs, the more likely he or she succeeded in obtaining special consideration. The researcher determined that the degree of autonomy given to the faculty members due to academic freedom may be detrimental to a disabled student and that preparing a student with negotiation and advocacy skills bettered his or her opportunity for education.

Faculty attitudes toward college students with disabilities are an important contributor to the success of students at their institutions (Rao, 2004). Fichten (1988) concluded that faculty and administrator attitudes might be a vital component of the success or failure of disabled students. In addition, as the amount of information about persons with disabilities increases, negative stereotypes are reduced and a better relationship exists (Ibrahim & Herr, 1982). In his dissertation, Junco (2002) reports that negative attitudes of instructors and professors may prevent disabled students from employing self-advocacy skills. In addition, Beilke and Yssel (1998) studied the relationship between faculty and students with disabilities and found that a commendable relationship between them aided in the establishment of a person's identity within the classroom. These studies clearly indicate that a positive relationship between faculty and

students with disabilities is vital to the creation of proper mentoring relationships within the classroom and may lead to a sense of belonging.

Many veterans utilize a socialization strategy, which is described best as “blending in” which DiRamio et al. (2008) discovered in their research. Interviews revealed that veterans do not like to stand out from the rest of the student body. They begin to grow their short hair out and attempt to look like the mainstream student body. They will seek to avoid situations where they would be asked if they had killed someone or if they thought they would be required to return to battle. The interviews also reveal that many veterans do not feel comfortable being called upon in class purely because they are a veteran, and that a faculty member who insists on violating anonymity may hinder their attempts to blend in and make him or her uncomfortable. DiRamio et al. also state some veterans revealed how faculty will push them for opinions of military conflicts and then label them as extremists when they finally speak and reveal their opinions. Not all faculty relationships are like this however, and the research indicates there are also good relationships between veterans and faculty members, especially with faculty members who themselves have prior military experience.

School administrators, such as those at Springfield Technical Community College, have established professional development for administration and staff on personal and mental health issues specific to veterans to assist in better interaction on campus (Springfield Technical Community College, 2011). Effort is being made to cause staff to have better interaction with veterans; however, the emphasis still tends to focus on disability and issues of mental health.

### **Perceptions by Other Students**

A large part of the college experience is association with other students. Military veterans find themselves returning home after being members of an intense and close community fortified by common experiences. When he or she arrives to a traditional campus environment, a veteran may encounter people who do not understand his or her difficulties or the events he or she endured. Almost all veterans are older than the traditional students with which they must mix. Military life is much regimented and veterans may become frustrated by the less structured life found on college campuses. While in the military, the veterans may have been called upon to make life or death decisions rather than the comparatively mundane decisions of how to manage classes and assignments. Veterans may view college as being much easier than what they had endured after two tours of duty in Iraq (Redden, 2007). This leads to feelings that the responsibilities of being a student are far less significant, and thus the lack of emphasis or effort could lead to academic problems. This concept can be supported with the findings of Tierney (1992), who in refutation of Tinto (1993), claimed that entry to college represented a departure from one society entrance into another and that differing groups will have varied reactions to the change. Tierney used the example of Native Americans leaving the tribe and going to college, but the concept could easily be expanded to military veterans.

The study by DiRamio et al. (2008) revealed that connecting with peers was an issue for many military veterans in college. Even though the ages of students were not significantly different, the level of maturity created by military service becomes a

divisive force. Veterans stated that they had seen so much more of the world than their non-military peers had seen and had experienced significantly higher levels of responsibility and leadership. They frequently felt that other students complained about very insignificant matters and did not understand true hardship and dedication to a task. The disconnect often leads to veterans choosing to seek out other veterans on campus and a natural segregation occurs.

A study by Savage and Smith (2007), that concentrated on Air Force master sergeants of the United States Air Force and their efforts to achieve an associate's degree, focused upon the value of hope. The study used logistic regression analysis to determine if the attainment of a degree was significantly related to the level of hope and specific desire to attain the degree. The quantitative study determined that achievement of the college degree was directly dependent upon the level of hope or goal orientation of the student. A major part of the result is the institutional effort in maintaining a positive outlook and hope for the student. An intriguing qualitative/mixed-methods follow-up to this study could be the use of interviews and discussion of the linkage of hope to degree attainment to inform better the results of the quantitative study.

The majority of students who attended college prior to World War II were young White males who attended full time and lived on campus (Cavote & Kopera-Frye, 2007). There were concerns that the influx of non-traditional students to college following the end of the war would dilute the quality of the student base. The concern however proved to be misguided as the increased number of college-educated veterans promoted an era of scientific and economic expansion (Summers, 2004). Summers, the President of Harvard,

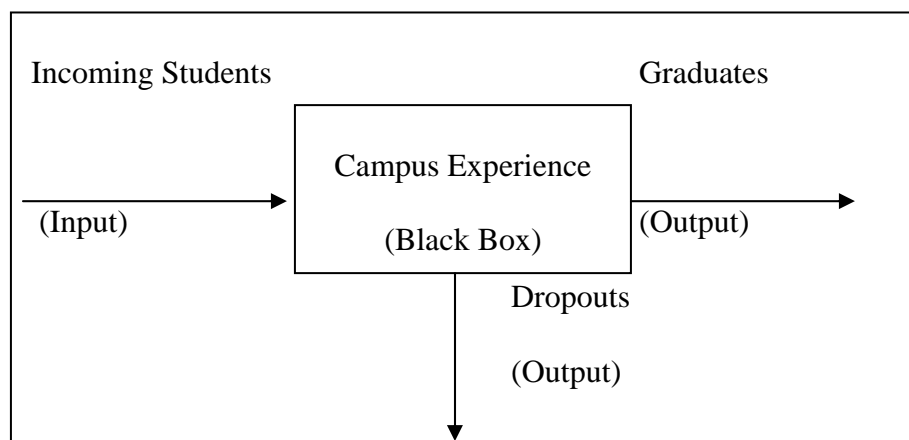
revealed while addressing the American Council on Education that the success of the G.I. Bill and the success of the students it brought into the nation's colleges had a far reaching positive impact on the United States. Thus, there is historical indication of the importance of assuring a college education for military veterans.

### **The College as a Black Box and Theoretical Framework**

As mentioned earlier, the theoretical framework of this research is based on the needs of military veterans. To emphasize the usefulness of a needs study, I will discuss Raymond Padilla's theory of the College as a Black box and his study of Chicana/o students in college. Padilla (1999) writes that many studies conclude that successful college students are ones who are academically talented and supported in their efforts to obtain a college degree, possess a high level of motivation and commitment to their educational goals, and apply a quality effort in their studies that enhances their previous knowledge and experiences. Padilla goes on to posit that the aforementioned traits may be true to students who are advantaged, but he asks how success is explained for students who do not claim the same advantages. Padilla's research centered on the concept of college as a "black box" in which there are inputs and outputs that are clearly defined, but the actions that occur within are understood very little or not at all. The black box is shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 represents in an abstract manner that students arrive on campus with varied background characteristics, interests, and goals, and are subjected to an equally diverse range of academic experience. The experiences are determined by the institution, the student's major and the social and academic culture (Padilla, 1999). Padilla explains

that there are only two possible outcomes for each student. They either successfully graduate or they leave the institution without achieving a degree. Padilla's research focused upon what happens to the student inside the black box of the campus experience.



Source: Padilla (1999)

**Figure 1. Visual Diagram of College as a Black Box**

Padilla (1999) describes the black box as being full of barriers or obstacles that a student must overcome. Those students who graduated figured out the way around the barriers and successfully navigated through the box to the point of graduation, and those who did not graduate were frustrated and blocked by the barriers. Padilla's qualitative study used an "unfolded matrix" in which students freely wrote down the barriers they perceived to obtaining a college degree and what knowledge and actions they used to overcome each barrier, and which barriers they could not avoid. The selected students were encouraged to discuss the subjects amongst themselves and a moderator collected the comments. Through analysis of the data, Padilla breaks the barriers to college completion into four segments:

1. Discontinuity—The difference between where a person came from and where they are.
2. Lack of nurturing—The lack of family support, lack of role models, and the lack of expectation.
3. Lack of presence on campus—Being socially isolated and a lack of important issues in the curriculum.
4. Resources—The lack of money and financial aid.

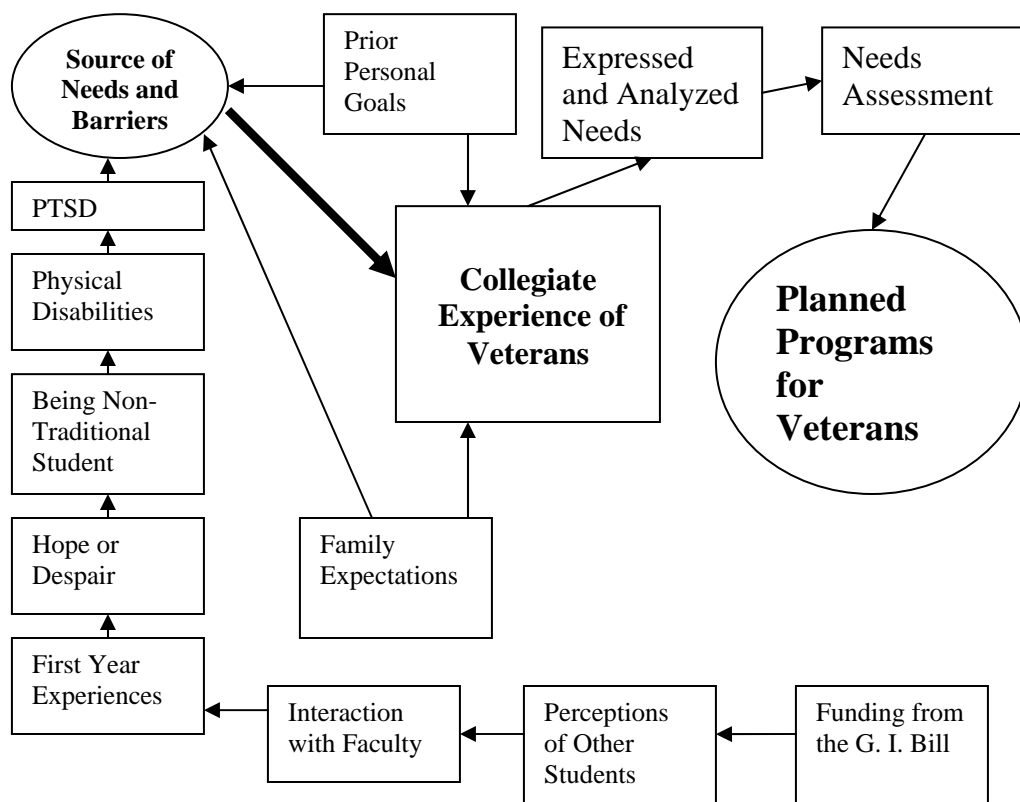
It may be considered that there can be many barriers to collegiate success for military veterans given all the aforementioned problems and conditions. A study totally based upon the concept of the college as a black box, however, could only exist with the premise that the barriers within the box are a constructed truth that are identifiable and may be permanently fixed. I however believe the content of the black box to be constantly changing and evolving. Therefore, the direction of this research is to inquire of veterans, at a point in time, what they deemed to be their needs in college, met and unmet. The identification of the needs that college administrators can see and assess will possibly assist in the production of programs to aid military veterans in collegiate success and reduce the various barriers they may find within Padilla's black box. This program planning process would not have a finite beginning and ending point, and will require frequent assessment as needs evolve.

I do wish to make it clear there may be a difference between objective barriers to success and the ways in which veterans may experience barriers. Barriers may be structural/organizational barriers, or they may be barriers erected by the veterans



themselves; specifically, his or her interpretation of an event or experience may be the barrier. The barrier may be internal to the veteran based on how that veteran perceives the experience. The potential barriers to graduation for military veterans who will be entering college in the next few years are numerous. According to the literature, they may face enormous amounts of government red tape, frustration at the lack of regimentation and discipline of classmates, innocent curiosity by other students on campus, and they may carry mental images of atrocities they have seen and have physical deformities that hamper educational efforts. It is with these barriers in mind that my research determines what school administrators and faculty may do to recognize the numerous needs of a military veteran and to assist that veteran wishing to obtain his or her college degree in navigating the barriers to successful college graduation. Various factors such as PTSD, being a non-traditional student, interaction with faculty, and perceptions of other students become sources of needs to be met and possible barriers and ultimately feed into the collegiate experience. Family expectations and personal goals may either be sources of needs and barriers or feed directly into the collegiate experience. Funding from the G.I. Bill is designed to satisfy the most expensive tuition at State-controlled institutions and is therefore considered as the first step in the chain of events that leads a military veteran to college. Given that the funding from the government is designed to help rather than hinder, it may not be a barrier to success, but it does feed into the collegiate experience of the military veteran who attends college since it is controlled by the federal government and is an additional step the student must take to pay the tuition bill. The chain of factors

that create needs or barriers are delineated in the visual map of the research displayed in Figure 2.



**Figure 2. Visual Diagram of the Research Framework**

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODS**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to examine the needs of military veterans who are attending or have graduated from college, and to discover what they deemed to be their needs, met or unmet, and how they used that knowledge to navigate around the items that may become barriers to success. Various barriers had been identified within the numerous examples of literature that discussed problems and issues facing non-traditional students or veterans, such as the first year college experience, hope or despair, physical disabilities, injuries and post-traumatic stress disorders, perceptions of other students and interaction with faculty (Baker & Siryk, 1986; Bergerson, 2007; Cavote & Kopera-Frye, 2007; Kinser & Deitchman, 2007; McCleary-Jones, 2008; Richardson & King, 1998; Tierney, 1992). Tuition assistance funding from the G.I. Bill may also present itself as a problem even though the funding is designed to be adequate to cover education at the most expensive state institutions (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2008). Through semi-structured interviews with military veterans who first attended college, or continued college after military service, my research goal was to determine what needs military veterans have in achieving a college education, what steps veterans took to have their needs met, what college administrators can do to increase the likelihood of graduation, and what needs were not addressed. The questions addressed were:

1. How do military veterans experience college?
2. How do military veterans describe their attempts to have their needs met?
3. What college resources do military veterans find useful in meeting their needs?
4. How do they describe unmet needs?

### **Design of the Study**

This study used a qualitative research method. Creswell (2009) describes qualitative research as

a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data. The final written report has a flexible structure. Those who engage in this form of inquiry support a way of looking at research that honors an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of the situation. (p. 4)

I chose to conduct this study of military veterans with a qualitative design because I desired the voices and opinions of the research participants to be the direct source of the data, rather than gather numerical results of survey instruments and archival statistics. I agree with Maxwell (2005) when he asserts that a qualitative approach is useful when the researcher desires to comprehend the meanings drawn by participants, understand the processes that influences actions, understand particular contexts, and identify unexpected influences. It may be argued that a quantitative approach will effectively provide answers to whether veteran needs were functionally met by using Likert-type scale surveys and statistics of college and university graduation rates. However, I believe a quantitative

approach cannot fully reveal the personal needs and feelings about those needs that are individual to each veteran and that a qualitative approach allows. This study was a mix of a population-specific study and a phenomenological study since it is restricted to the opinions of military veterans and particularly their experience in a single university.

### **Research Site**

I used a purposeful selection method and interviewed military veterans from a single public university located in the southeast United States. Maxwell (2005) states that purposeful selection is where “particular settings, person and activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can’t be gotten as well from other choices” (p. 88). The selection of participants from a single university was also a matter of convenience for the researcher to prevent myself from the tiresome and expensive task of interviewing a participant at his or her location across the United States. I intended to interview 12 military veteran students and was afforded the opportunity to interview 13.

The institution that the military veteran participants attend or from which they graduated is a public, coeducational, doctoral-granting, residential university that has existed for well over 100 years. The school is located in a metropolitan area with a population of roughly 250,000 with ten other four-year colleges and universities in close proximity. The enrollment is approximately 18,500 students drawn from 46 states and more than 90 countries. Minority enrollment is approximately 27%. The university employs a military veteran in the office of the Dean of Students who is responsible for student services and conduct. This employee is active in promoting the interests of military veterans, and was concurrently a Master’s degree student at the university. The

university also employs a Veteran's Representative, or liaison, in the Office of the Registrar who is responsible for guiding veterans through the G.I. Bill process.

### **Participants**

Once IRB approval was granted from The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, my degree granting institution, I purposely selected participants for semi-structured interviews by contacting the Veteran's liaison at the research university from whom I obtained a university-approved list of all students who are attending or had attended that target university over the last ten years. The list contained start-term dates, email addresses, and identification of the veteran's G.I. Bill Chapter. The list contained 1920 names. I reduced the list to 363 names by focusing on those students utilizing the Post 9-11 G.I. Bill. The Post-9-11 G.I. Bill is a benefit that is transferable by the veteran to a spouse or dependent. Therefore, many of the 363 names were possibly not actually military veterans themselves. I contacted the students on the list by email in groups of 30 beginning with the top of the alphabet, and then moving to the middle, and then back and forth as I progressed through the alphabet. The email sent to participants is shown in Appendix A. There was excellent response at the onset, followed by a lull that caused concern for the researcher about whether an adequate sample could be obtained. Contact began in early April 2011. Given the academic calendar nature of college, the summer months proved to be problematic and email response was slow. Ultimately, all 363 names from the list were contacted and eventually, fourteen veterans agreed to interview, and only one had time conflicts that would prevent the interview. I also received responses from many students who are spouses or dependents of veterans. The

messages were apologetic that they could not participate and very supportive of the research intent.

One challenge I faced was to determine how many interviews were appropriate to achieve the proper level of saturation. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) performed a study of women in West Africa that utilized interviews. A side product of their study was a determination that saturation occurred within the first 12 interviews and basic elements for meta-themes appeared as early as six interviews. Based on this finding, I chose to conduct a minimum of 12 interviews.

### **Demographics**

According to the United States Department of Defense (2011), the enlisted personnel in the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines make up 84% of all personnel in the United States Military. Table 1 below describes the enlisted demographics of the United States military, and a comparison of the participant sample compared to the national statistics. The participants are over-represented by members of the U.S. Marine Corp in comparison to national statistics. However, when the reader examines the male/female and White/Black numbers, the participant group closely mirrors that of the national statistics for enlisted military personnel. The reader may want to know why the Marine Corp is over-represented in my sample and if more Marines enroll in college, but that issue could be a study in its own right and is outside the scope of this paper. I believe my sample in terms of gender and race is an adequate representation of the military in general.

**Table 1***Demographics of the Enlisted U.S. Military Compared to Study Participants*

Branch of Service	National #	Percent	Participant #	Percent
Army	463,674	39.17	3	23.08
Navy	272,568	23.02	4	30.77
Air Force	266,137	22.48	1	7.69
Marines	181,510	15.33	5	38.46
Total	1,183,889	100.00	13	100.00
Gender	National #	Percent	Participant #	Percent
Male	1,017,075	85.91	11	84.62
Female	166,814	14.09	2	15.38
Total	1,183,889	100.00	13	100.00
Race	National #	Percent	Participant #	Percent
AMI/ALN	22,749	1.9	0	0.00
Asian	43,301	3.7	0	0.00
Black	219,069	18.5	2	15.38
Multi	24,082	2.0	0	0.00
P/I	8,236	0.7	0	0.00
White	812,692	68.7	11	84.62
Unknown	53,760	4.5	0	0.00
Total	1,183,889	100.00	13	100.00



### **Role of the Researcher**

I have a particular interest in the educational needs of military veterans since, as a financial aid director at a medium-sized private university, I have been involved with the development of the Yellow-Ribbon Program on campus, which offers scholarships in conjunction with the Veterans Administration to enhance the offerings of the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill. I have attended Post-9/11 G.I. Bill meetings in Washington D.C. conducted by Pentagon personnel and have spoken to many military veterans who are seeking financial assistance for college. Upon completion of my own undergraduate degree 28 years ago, I joined the United States Navy and attended Flight Officer Candidate School in Pensacola, Florida at N.A.S. Flight Command, Pensacola. That experience gave me the fundamental understanding of fellowship of the military and the relationship between members of the military and the public. My military experience, however, was after college completion, and did not involve leaving the United States in a time of war and is not to be compared directly to the experience of the military veterans who participated in this study.

### **Methods of Data Collection**

Data collection strategies for this study consisted of semi-structured interviews in which my questions were pre-formulated, but the answers were open-ended and expanded upon and enhanced by various probes utilized at my discretion (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). The interview protocol is shown in Appendix B. The protocol design is similar to that discussed by Creswell (2008). I designed an interview protocol that would last approximately one half/hour in length since I believed the subject matter would lead to a much longer interview should the participant open-up and desire

to relay detailed stories of his or her military experience. Many of the questions in the protocol were answered with very little prompting once the participant perceived there was proper rapport and he or she felt free to speak about his or her experiences. The interview protocol was also designed for multiple interview prompts to pertain to more than one of the four research questions. This would allow me to perceive any conflicts or contradictions in a participant's answers, of which there were several. The first three interviews I conducted provided rich data to inform my research, but I learned from the transcriptions after observing my own behavior and adjusted for the remaining interviews to allow the participant more leeway to answer the prompts without interruption. Answering the questions seemed to be therapeutic in a manner for many of the participants, and he or she each tended to answer multiple questions from my protocol without needing to specifically be asked each question.

The interview questions began in a general information-gathering manner, to determine facts of the participant's life and what guided them to join the military. The questions then progressed into a more specific and pointed manner about his or her college experiences as the interview took shape. The questions in the middle of the interview were to establish the level of involvement in which the military veteran participated in his or her school while enrolled. The more pointed questions near the end of the interview had intent to answer specifically the research question of what needs remained unmet during the college experience and how the participant describes the needs.

Through the interview prompts, the answers to the research questions of this phenomenological study are derived through inquiry that resides along the interpretive/critical continuum between the goal of understanding the issue and attempting to effect a change through discovery of needs (Schram, 2006). I have made an interpretation of what the military veteran's college experience revealed about institutional effort to meet his or her needs while achieving an education. The critical aspect is due to my want to instill a positive change in the design of veteran services and programs at colleges and universities. My intent is not to view veterans as an oppressed population, but rather as a population that is possibly misunderstood and therefore not served adequately.

### **Methods Matrix**

Maxwell (2005) teaches researchers that a useful tool for assessing the compatibility of the research questions and the methods to be used to answer them is a matrix in which the research questions appear along with the reasons why the answers are important and how the data are to be gathered. The matrix, or crosswalk, for my research is presented in Appendix C. The creation of the matrix was informed by a pilot interview I conducted with a military veteran for a class project several years before the commencement of this research.

### **Data Analysis**

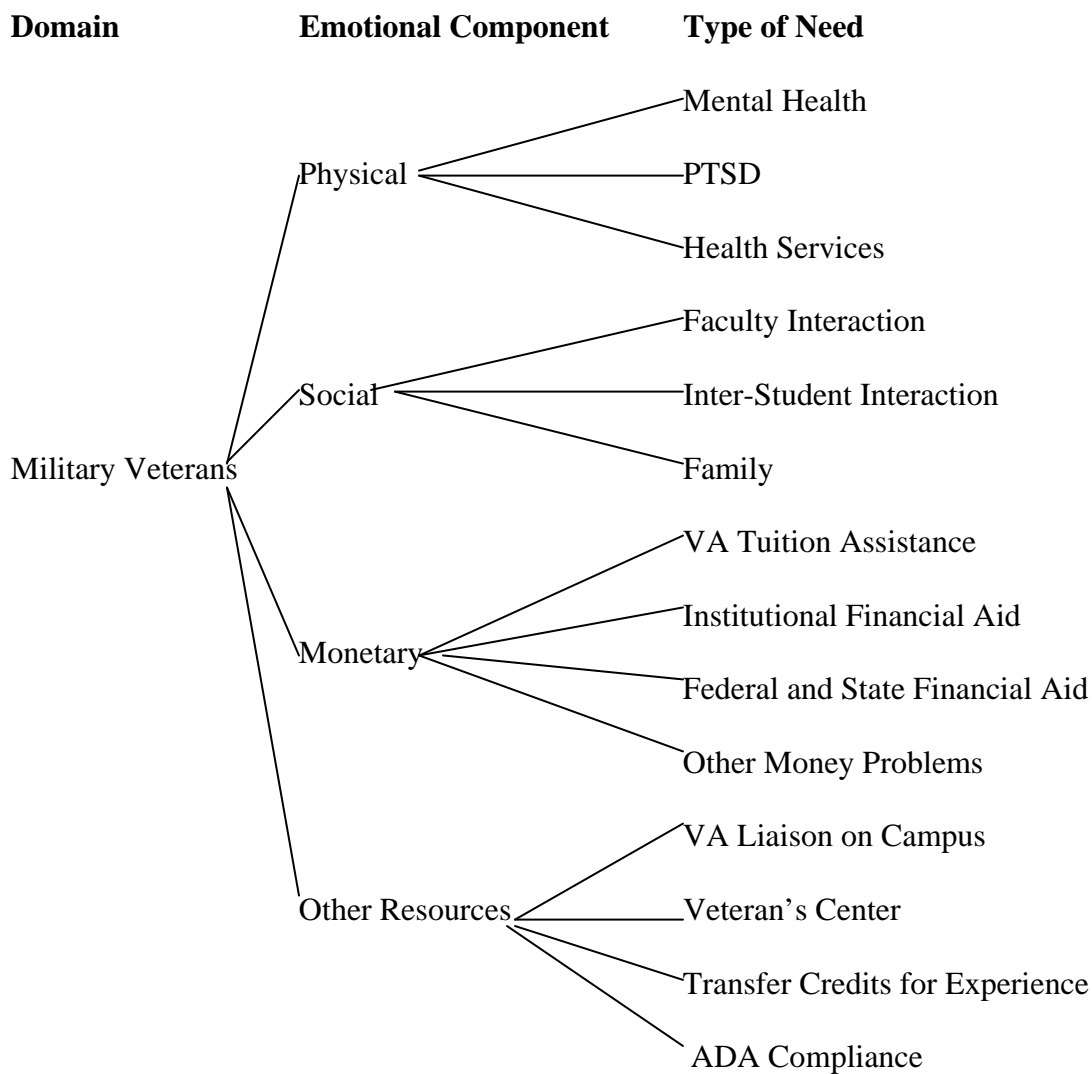
Data collection strategies for this study were comprised of semi-structured interviews, personal transcription, member checking, interpretation, and verification by participants of the interpretation. The data were analyzed initially through verbatim

transcription of the interviews. I believe that filler words such as “um” and lengthy pauses are important windows into the mood or emotions being experienced by the participant that were being drawn out during the interview. Therefore, my transcription of the interviews was word-for-word and included notation for pauses to allow me to visualize the tempo of the interview. Themes from the interviews were identified and categorized to derive common opinions from the veterans to provide answers to the research questions. I agree with Maxwell (2005) however that much more than coding is required to make sense of the data. Maxwell recommends the use of memos, coding and thematic analysis, deep thought about the interview transcripts to examine speaking patterns, and observation notes. The primary method of analysis is, as Shank (2006) describes, to have a conversation with your data.

Each interview produced approximately 10 to 13 pages of single-spaced transcript. Because my research is interpretive, I did not have a pre-designed data-coding scheme and rather designed the data analysis scheme as the data emerged from the interview transcripts.

The analyses of the data were performed using strategies suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) and James Spradley (1980). Miles and Huberman recommend putting all data into text and the creation of contact summary sheets. Spradley determined that participant observation should be broken into areas of domain, component, and taxonomy. The domain for my research is military veterans who have attended, or are attending college. The components are the various needs the veterans may possess while attending college. Several categories of needs revealed by the literature to which veterans

may be exposed, outlined in the taxonomy of the research, is displayed in Figure 3. I conducted the participant interviews with the various types of possible needs above in mind.



**Figure 3. Taxonomy of the Research**

As I stated above, my data analysis strategy was informed by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Spradley (1980): however, my final analysis was of my own design. Each interview was transcribed word-for-word within a few weeks of the interview, and submitted to the participant to verify accuracy. Each participant responded with minor technical corrections and confirmation that the transcription of the conversation was accurate. I then created four contact summary sheets for each participant that related to each of the four research questions. Each interview was examined line-by-line and each contact summary sheet was populated with excerpts from the interview that informed the answer to the research question. Upon completion of all contact summary sheets, the pertinent information from each participant for each research question was grouped together into four MS Word documents. I then utilized the computer search function to look through each document to identify common themes from the participants.

Ten common themes were identified for each of the four research questions. I entered the ten themes, in no particular order, into an Excel spreadsheet under each of the four research questions. The spreadsheet was then submitted to all 13 participants and they were requested to rank-order each theme under each research question in terms of importance to them, with number 1 being most important. I collected the rankings from the participants and the top themes relating to the needs for military veterans attending this university emerged. Please note that two participants failed to respond to my request to rank the themes. Of those who responded, several failed to rank all items and rather chose to rank a select number of top themes and ignored themes they determined to have

no pertinence to them. I reflected on this fact and determined that responding in this manner may give the participants the feel of a certain level of power over the process. Many had indicated a dislike of being forced into completing some processes, and the theme responses are a sub process that they could control. Given that this is qualitative research, I followed the predominant themes as indicated by the responses available to me.

### **Research Assumptions**

In this study, I made the following assumptions.

1. The semi-structured interview provided data that is valid and trustworthy since each study participant answered truthfully and to the best of his or her ability.
2. The research design provided findings and conclusions that are valid and trustworthy.
3. The research participants selected for interviews had no corroboration with each other for the content of their discussion and had no knowledge of other participants' responses.
4. When utilizing member-checking to verify my interpretation of the interview transcript, I assumed the verification from the veteran was truthful.
5. The findings of this research are not generalizable to all military veterans who attended college, but may be used to guide policy and practice at institutions of higher learning.

### **Research Limitations**

The findings of this study are limited by (a) the military veterans who voluntarily agreed to be interviewed, (b) the degree of truthfulness each participant exhibited, (c) my interpretation of the interview data, even though member checking is utilized, and (d) the willingness of the reader to deem the interview questions as reliable prompts for answering the research questions.

The veterans who agreed to interviews were a self-selected group and their stories may or not be representative of the national population of college-attending veterans. The participants appeared to have self-selected due to their desire to contribute to this research and influence a change in the way veterans experience college. I have no way of knowing if the information provided in the interviews is truthful or merely what the participant thought I wanted to hear or part of a personal agenda he or she wanted to conduct when given the opportunity. Also, none of the veterans interviewed related any opinions or needs specific to the Physical section of the taxonomy diagram previously shown in Figure 3. I observed no physical disabilities and all participants seemed, to my observation, to have normal adjustment to society and did not display any type of malady that would be evident to an untrained observer. Please note that my contact with each participant was within a one-hour period and may have prevented me from seeing any physical or mental disabilities. Since, in my opinion, I did not encounter a veteran with a physical disability, I cannot derive any opinion about the needs of veterans with disabilities nor whether this university meets adequately those needs. Even though the participants were a self selected group, there is also limitation of the degree the



participants may have wanted to be open to me as a researcher. I am an outsider who was asking about their college experience as military veterans and they may have viewed me as a person who did not need to know the whole story.

### **Validity**

Maxwell (2005) defines validity as “the correctness, or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account” (p. 106).

Maxwell goes on to write that a researcher is not required to attain an ultimate truth for a study to be useful and believable. Given that the answers to the research questions for this study are derived from interviews with military veterans, construct validity is a concern.

Construct validity involves the degree to which the interview questions are actually assessing what the researcher assumes the questions will assess (Schensul et al., 1999).

The interviews provided a large quantity of valuable data that, in my mind, indicates that the interview questions are appropriate to the research questions. However, the appropriateness of the information provided in response to the questions is my opinion and must be substantiated with adequate quantities of reason. When I heard common opinions and concerns from many participants, I deemed to have saturation and determined that the data are valid.

Internal validity addresses whether the interview conclusions are representative of the reality that the participants experienced or a true measure of what they feel (Schensul et al., 1999). Internal validity becomes easier to establish as more time is spent with the interview participants and the familiarity gained by the researcher grows in the process. My work as a financial aid director at a medium sized university has exposed me to work

with the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill and the Department of Veterans Affairs Yellow Ribbon program. I frequently talk to military veterans who are interested in attending college and have discussed the monetary challenges. This base level of knowledge has enhanced my awareness of other problems that veterans face in higher education and will assist me in credibility.

Miles and Huberman (1994) point out that two important threats to validity are the selections of data that conform to the researcher' existing theory or preconceptions and the collection of data that are obvious. Both involve subjectivity of the researcher or bias. Therefore, a potential threat to validity that some observers could perceive may be my own experience in the United States Navy as a Flight Officer candidate. My experience however was, in my opinion, not of duration to cause me to form a biased opinion as a member of the military regarding education issues. I did not have any incidents that would cause me to have any collegial or social difficulty.

Another possible threat to validity would be if I had attempted to generalize the data drawn from interviews to the population of military veterans as a whole. Maxwell (1992) distinguishes between internal and external generalizability. Maxwell states that researchers typically study a single setting or a small number of individuals or sites and rarely make explicit claims about the generalizability of the data. Internal generalizability pertains to the generalizability of the research conclusion within the group studied. External generalizability refers to the ability for the conclusion to be applied to an entire population. Given the participants are from one university setting, the data will not be used to make specific claims about military veterans in higher education as a whole. I

will consider the interview responses by participants to be representative of the concerns of military veterans and the actions of the university administration within the setting.

### **Ethical Considerations**

According to Maxwell (2005), research ethics concerns the possibility of the research study being harmful to the participants. The primary ethical concerns of my research are the protection of the identity of the participants who provide opinions and that of the university setting. Reputations of colleges and universities are extremely valuable in today's climate of opinion polls and rankings, and revealing the school, particularly if deemed not veteran friendly by the participants, could be damaging to the school. All participants have been assigned pseudonyms, and the university is not being directly identified.

A secondary ethical concern is whether I would need to provide an incentive to the participants whom I interview. My experience with the pilot interview caused me to believe that a participant will freely discuss his or her experiences and opinions because he or she truly desires to see other military veterans receive an education. Each participant did willingly speak with me and seemed very open and forthright in his or her opinions and experiences. The willingness to speak, however, raised the dilemma of whether the answers provided revealed the participant's true experience, or whether he or she provided answers in accordance with his or her desire to affect a change. I believed I needed to reveal the purpose of my study to the participants. There was a delicate balance of the amount of information regarding the purpose of my study provided to the participants to cause willing participation, but also to deter untruthful answers given

purely for the intent of skewing the results of the data analysis for personal purposes. Herein lay an ethical problem because I had to identify properly the intent of my research to participants, while at the same time attempting to prevent a situation where participants made false claims. I avoided providing monetary compensation or gifts as incentives as a way to avoid attracting interview subjects who may intentionally provide false data. All but two interviews were conducted in or near the Student Center on campus. The off campus interviews were conducted at the house of one participant's parents and at a private hotel lobby convenient to the other participant.

My final ethical concern is what I would do with possible information derived from an interview that revealed illegal behavior. War is an act supposedly carried out under strict rules of engagement; however, self-preservation takes priority in a person's mind in life threatening situations. It is very possible I would interview a combat veteran who would reveal information sensitive to national defense or illegal in nature. No participant revealed any information that can be considered classified, and therefore I was not faced with the need to discard any interview data. One veteran admitted to disciplinary problems that hastened the departure from the military, but the discharge was honorable.

### **Summary**

This chapter began with a discussion for the rationale for a qualitative study and a description of the research site. I then described my home-grown method of analysis and followed with a discussion of the limitations, validity and ethical issues which can accompany a study that involves the derivation of data and opinions from participants

who may find reason to skew the results. The collection and analysis of the data was an arduous task, but the time and effort involved has proven to be, in my mind, invaluable given the opinions obtained from the participants and the progress that may be derived from credence to those opinions.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to examine the college experience of military veterans and have them to reveal their needs, met and unmet, and how they attempt or attempted to satisfy those needs. Very little prior research specifically addresses the subject of the experience and success or failure of military veterans in higher education. Nearly all peer-reviewed literature that specifically addresses the experience and success or failure of military veterans involves discussion of the particular physical and social problems veterans have that effect readjustment and coping with a society that has not endured the same experience. The writings, for the most part, do not address higher education needs.

The research questions that guided this investigation were:

1. How do military veterans experience college?
2. How do military veterans describe their attempts to have their needs met in college?
3. What college resources do military veterans find useful in meeting their needs in college?
4. How do military veterans describe unmet needs in college?

This chapter will reveal findings that I expected due to examination of prior research about military veterans in general, but also revealed a major finding that I did not expect. The chapter begins with an introduction of each of the participants and his or her motivation to enter the military. It then will proceed, in order, through each research question and how I interpreted the collective response to the interview prompts. Excerpts from select participant interviews will highlight each section. Most of the interviews revealed common themes, but in the interest of clarity and being concise, I will use quotes from select participants within each section to solidify the opinions that answer the research questions. I will then close each section with the top themes that the participants collectively deemed to be relevant to their needs in college.

### **The Participants and the Motivation to Enter the Military**

As described in the review of literature, there are many reasons why young men and women will forgo college immediately after high school, or leave college in favor of military service. The reasons derived from the literature are a source of mobility for disadvantaged minorities due to the offer of steady employment, benefits and compensation above-and-beyond the civilian sector, a less discriminatory environment, and G.I. Bill benefits to fund a college education (Kleykamp, 2006). Another motivation is the cost of a college degree at a doctoral through baccalaureate granting institution of higher education has risen over the past several decades at a rate that is growing faster than the consumer price index and the average family income (College Board, 2006). The recent high costs of college have overridden or delayed aspiration in some high school

graduates, and the military has benefited in increased participation fueled by the college funding provided by the Montgomery G.I. Bill and the new Post-9/11 G.I. Bill.

Kleykamp (2006) determined that the military assisted the non-college population possessing high educational aspirations to attain their goals, and young men with college aspirations are more likely to join the military than pursue some other work when college is not the immediate option. DiRamio et al. (2008) interviewed military veterans who had recently served on active duty and were enrolled at large research institutions and determined that the cohort had experienced the 9/11 terrorist attacks as teenagers and the effect was life altering. The following biographies with a few excerpts from participant interviews shed light on motivation to enter the military.

### **Rick**

Rick is a 29-year-old White male who, at the time of the interview, was currently serving in the United States Navy. He enrolled at the university after high school, and after three semesters he realized he was drinking too much and wasting his parents' money. He decided he must do something to change his scenery and perspective on life and gain some maturity, so he left college and joined the Navy. Rick is clear that there was no patriotic or altruistic need to serve something larger than himself, but that the Navy would give him an opportunity to travel and stop being a disappointment to his family. He had returned to college after his service with a new perspective and internal focus. At the time of the interview, Rick had been called back into active duty and was only home on a short leave before heading back to the Middle East the next morning. I felt honored that he took time to speak with me the evening before returning to war. Rick



stated he would finish his service in a few more months and was then returning to the university to complete his degree.

### **Tanya**

Tanya is a 26-year-old Black female who had served in the United States Marine Corps. Like Rick, she had also attended the university directly upon graduation from high school, but left school after two months to work for several years because she was not ready for college. Tanya joined the Marines to experience something different and to emulate her spouse who had also joined the Corps. She experienced Iraq and the Mediterranean and had just returned to the university four months before our interview. I experienced a very confident and poised woman who stated she was ready to focus on college and become an English teacher. Tanya had very strong feelings regarding how the university administration treats veterans in the same manner as traditional first-year students.

### **Jimmy**

Jimmy is a 25-year-old Black male who served in the United States Air Force. Jimmy had no college ambition after high school and he revealed he simply hung out for a year with no employment before joining the Air Force. The military offered him the opportunity for employment and security, and those promises came from people in position of authority. While in the military, he then realized he could utilize government money and go to college. In Jimmy's words:

I never really intended to go to school straight out of high school. In high school I wasn't really into reading or anything like that. I mean, really I didn't play any sports, I didn't do any extracurricular activities. I just hung out with the crowd

and did what I wanted to do basically. I graduated. I never had a problem graduating or anything, you know. I got decent grades, but I didn't get great grades. I never really studied when I was younger. So, I graduated, didn't do anything for like a year. Had some change, talked to a military recruiter who was real with me. He didn't lie. I joined the military and then got out and here I am at (college).

Jimmy experienced Kuwait, Afghanistan, and Japan and said that his military tenure ended due to disciplinary action stemming from alcohol related incidents in Japan. He had contact with a helpful member of the university business school faculty while he was still in Japan, and he enrolled at the current University upon his discharge from the Air Force. Throughout the interview, Jimmy displayed surprise that he is actually a college student and stated that he would not be in college if it were not for the money from the Post-9/11 G. I. Bill.

### **Ethan**

Ethan is a 32-year-old White male who served in the United States Navy. He joined the Navy to serve his country and to earn the money for college. Ethan comes from a family that believes in military service and members have served in many wars. His time in the service ended due to downsizing in the military and he realized his military experience was not serving him in efforts to obtain a job. Ethan was in the Naval Reserves and volunteered to go to Iraq to be back on active duty and receive a paycheck. His inability to obtain a job outside of the military factored into his decision to attend college when he came home from Iraq. In Ethan's words, "Unfortunately, people . . . they respect your military experience, but as far as gaining employment from it . . . it's a myth."

**Matt**

Matt is a 28-year-old White male who served in the United States Marine Corps. Matt had attended college after high school and majored in dance performance. He admits his performance level was not going to allow him to garner an adequate income and he became intrigued by his roommate who served in the National Guard. Matt talked to a recruiter and three weeks later was in Marine boot camp. He served as a hospital corpsman in Iraq near the Syrian border and admits he may still be alive today by pure luck. Upon release from active duty, Matt joined the reserves and attempted to start college. Government G.I. Bill regulations made college not economically feasible and he chose to go to work. The general status of the United States economy caused various business ventures to fail and he and his wife moved to the university area to be near family and a better economy. Matt discovered that the new Post-9/11 G.I. Bill would now provide for most of his college costs and he applied and was accepted and enrolled. He is one of the few veterans I spoke with who has been afforded the opportunity to use his military medical experience and he is slated to teach a first aid class. Matt is still involved in the military and is scheduled to attend Naval Aviation Officer School upon completion of college.

**Tom**

Tom, a 36-year-old, White male, joined the Army National Guard for the G.I. Bill benefits after first attending a small private college. Although he revealed that his family has a long tradition of serving in the military, Tom's motivation for joining the military was very mixed:

I joined the military for the GI Bill benefits, but with that being said, I come from a long line of military. Umm, I was straight National Guard. I joined the National Guard a couple of years out of high school after I had gone to (small private college) for a little while. I just didn't like the atmosphere. It was too small there after growing up in a small town. A little place called XXXX, NC right down the road from XXXXXX. Got out of there . . . went to a community college up in XXXXXX for a little while and joined the military to get the GI Bill benefits.

While attending the small private college, he determined he did not like the small town atmosphere. Tom then attended a large state university while also being heavily involved in the National Guard. He was attending Officer Candidate School while enrolled and was eventually offered a position in flight school. Tom left college in his senior year to serve in Afghanistan. Upon his return from Afghanistan, he flew helicopters for a medical center. The creation of the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill made Tom realize he could once again afford school and he enrolled at the university to finish his degree. The primary benefit Tom has derived from the military is the satisfaction of his love for flying and the tuition benefit afforded by the Post-9/11 GI Bill. His love of flying has caused him to stop out of college several times, and he indicated that it could happen again before he obtains his degree.

### **Kyle**

Kyle is a 26-year-old White male who served in the United States Marine Corps. Kyle graduated from high school with the intent to attend college in the next fall. He was interested in the Officer Program and ROTC, but was given advice to enlist in the reserves as a backup plan. Kyle enlisted in the Marine Reserves and went to boot camp. Boot camp lasted a few weeks too long and he missed his first semester at the State University to which he was slated to attend. Kyle applied to the current University and

was accepted only to discover he was being immediately deployed for active duty. School ambitions gave way to active military service and Kyle spent the next nine months in Iraq. When Kyle returned to the United States, the current University reinstated his acceptance and he is currently enrolled while also serving in the reserves. Kyle states he only feels as if he was in a temporary time warp and now is merely trying to catch up with his friends. However, other statements indicate the military made a great change within him.

### **Jack**

Jack is a 27-year-old White male who served in the United States Marine Corps. He grew up in an economically depressed rural area and enrolled in community college after graduating from high school. Jack had an extreme interest in computers, but he did not believe that he fit well into the community college. He was enticed by promises of computer training by the Marine Corps Reserves, and he served in the Marines for six years. During his time in the Reserves, Jack eventually completed his two years at the community college and then enrolled at the university. He was called to active duty and was sent to Iraq as part of the military surge. Jack returned to the university and graduated from the school of business. He had originally enrolled in computer science, but the department head refused to work with him when he returned from Iraq and Jack subsequently changed his academic major to business. Jack graduated from the university in 2010, re-enlisted in the Marine Reserves, and he continues to pursue his interest in computing.

**Tate**

Tate, a 31-year-old White male joined the Army Special Forces because of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. He was successfully enrolled as a senior at a large state university when the terrorist attacks spawned his interest in the military and specifically the Marines. In Tate's words:

I graduated high school in 1998, and right out of there went to (large state university). And, I was in the allied health program, which I graduated from in 2002, but in 2001 the terrorist attacks were a driving influence to me to look at the military. And, the first thing I did was look at the Marines. I really wanted to be in the Officer Corp of the Marine Corp. And, uhh, a couple of months after 9/11 I managed to do in one month what a normal recruit takes 6 months to do, which doesn't seem that surprising in retrospect, because they were pushing people through. But, the long and short of it was they ended up canceling my OCS class a couple weeks before I was going to ship, so that was a real letdown. And I thought about it, kind of stewed on it a little while, and then I looked at the Army and got caught up in the idea of being able to choose a career path and get some exciting training. I didn't have a lot of incentives, bonuses or anything like that because I already had a college degree. But, they threw in airborne school and stuff like that. I should have argued for more now.

As the reader can observe, Tate's reason for joining the military was an altruistic sense of patriotism given that he was well on the way to degree completion. Following the failure of the Marine Corps to hold up its end of the bargain, his motivation shifted to one of career path and available training even though he was not offered incentives or bonuses. He was deployed to Iraq twice and completed six years of service. Tate is completing his second bachelor's degree and admits he probably does not fit the profile for most veterans in this study. Interestingly, military service seems to take precedence, and Tate's experiences were much like those of the other participants.

**Craig**

Craig is a 27-year old White male who served in the United States Marine Corps. Craig had no educational ambitions beyond high school and he enlisted in the Marines prior to graduation. He chose the Marines because he heard that was the toughest place to test the levels of testosterone, manliness, and machismo. Craig admitted he was rowdy in high school and did not have money, grades, or direction needed for college. He did possess ambition and knew he needed to guide his future, and thus the Marine Corps. Craig was deployed to Japan for several years and then Washington DC. Upon release from the military he enrolled in community college, however he was bored. Craig then signed with a defense contractor and was sent to Iraq three times as a civilian employee with the United States Army. Upon returning to the United States, he decided to try college again and is attending the current University because it was the only institution that would accept him due to some minor legal problems incurred between tours to Iraq. Craig currently holds a 3.99 grade point average and is extremely focused on academic achievement.

**Nancy**

Nancy is a 30-year-old White female who joined the Navy because she simply did not have anything better to do and the military seemed to be the best option to effect a change in her life. As Nancy stated:

I entered the military because I wanted to get out of Florida. Had nothing better to do . . . I was waiting tables, so I figured what the hey, go into the military. The Navy office was open, so that's the one I joined. So it was more of a spur of the moment thing. Umm, college always was something I wanted to do. The GI Bill made it possible for me to actually do it.

Nancy served in both Afghanistan and Iraq. She began college upon completion of her military service. Nancy came to her current University because she could not afford her first choice, and is majoring in Psychology. She revealed she has been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder from her experience of counseling other veterans while serving in the Navy, however she is very goal focused and on a path for graduation.

### **Max**

Max is a 42-year-old White male who served 23 years in the United States Navy aboard submarines. He joked that in today's political climate, if you experience combat aboard a submarine, there are probably many problems going on in the world of which we are all aware. Max joined the Navy following a short stint of work after completion of his GED. While most teens are in high school, Max experienced group homes and a year in reform school. He stated that the Navy changed him and made him mature and responsible. After the Navy, Max found a job driving a forklift and made a comfortable living when combined with his military pension. However, he felt there was more he needed to accomplish and he decided to go to college. Max is the oldest veteran college student I had the opportunity to interview, and oddly he was the most connected to the campus. He loves to work on campus and serves as a University Marshall for official events, works for the orientation team, and volunteers in the community to enhance reading and writing skills. He also works in the office of the registrar with the campus veteran's liaison and is very connected to campus efforts to serve veterans. Max has a major concern that he owes the public his service since he is being paid to attend college



after the honor of serving in the military. He has ambitions of continuing to graduate school upon completion of his undergraduate degree.

### **Paul**

Paul is a 32-year-old White male who served for seven years in the Army 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne and Special Forces as a medic until he was severely injured in a rocket attack on his base in the Middle East. Paul did not identify his service location; however, it was one that required intensive language training and culture immersion to fulfill his duties.

Following the rocket attack, he endured almost a year in recovery at Walter Reed Army Hospital to be “put back together”. Paul went to college at a large state university after high school as a traditional student. He had always harbored interest in the military and left college after three years in the summer of 2001 to join the Army due to patriotism and the desire to free the oppressed. Upon release from the hospital, Paul realized his Army days were over and he decided to complete his college degree. He came to the local area to be near his future wife and enrolled in the current University. Paul is studying political science because he believes it will allow him to continue his desire to promote freedom and serve the oppressed citizens.

The examples of all of the participants reflect each of the motivations for entering the military that are common from the available literature. The military afforded them mobility, funding for an education, a channel to exercise his or her patriotism, and a way to make a distinctive change in his or her life. They all avow that the military experience has made a marked improvement over his or her prior performance in college, or in how they perceive they would have performed in the past compared to today.

## **Research Question 1**

*How do military veterans experience college?*

Participant responses to questions 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 10 informed findings related to this research question. During the interviews, a majority of the participants stated that they had attended college prior to his or her military experience. This was an unexpected finding as I started this research with the assumption that veterans in college after military service mostly experienced their time of service immediately upon completion of high school. However, this revelation afforded me the knowledge that the participants predominantly had before-and-after the military college experiences from which to draw comparisons. I will begin this section with a discussion of the before and after experience of several participants followed by the difference in his or her perceived maturity level. Then I will discuss the participant's desire to blend in to the student body and then I will describe his or her interaction with other students, the faculty, and administration. I will conclude this section with discussion of which of the issues are deemed to be most important by the veterans when they were asked to rank-order the themes I drew from the interviews.

### **Before and After Military Service**

As stated above, I was not expecting to find that a large number of the research participants had attended college before joining the military. Whether the participant had prior college experience or not, each one openly talked about his or her perceived improvement in ability to focus and perform in college compared to how he or she actually performed in the past, or think he or she would have performed if they had prior

college experience. All participants opined that military service did not provide for a better college experience, but it instilled in them a level of maturity and vision of how the world works that made them a higher achieving student.

Rick, a 29-year-old White male, was the first participant interviewed. He had attended the current University immediately upon completion of high school as a traditional student. Rick admitted he enjoyed college life a bit too much his first time and he admitted he consumed too much alcohol and was wasting his parent's money. Given the realization that my participants may have already attended college before his or her military service, I asked Rick to describe his expectations of college before and after the military. Rick replied:

My expectations of college when I first got out of high school was that it would be exactly like high school. I could put in the minimal amount of effort and still get a good result out of it. I also thought that when I got there it would be ummm, ahh, sort of a more open and loose forum than I was used to and it would allow me to sort of be more of who I was in a classroom setting than I could be in high school. What happened was . . . , that what happened when I got there I realized you actually really have to work way harder than I was prepared to work at the time. Professors actually do expect you to know the material. They do expect you to do the work outside of the classroom on your own. They're very much there to help you, . . . but . . . if you are the type of person like I WAS that didn't really . . . feel like you needed it or didn't care to engage them that they would let you fail, and I think that coming from a public high school to even a state university, that they really are OK if you want to do D work they'll be more than happy to give you a D, and that was a real shock to my system to be quite honest with you.

Rick revealed that as an 18-year-old, he was not prepared for the rigors of college and he entered the college experience with the unrealistic expectation that it would merely be a continuation of high school. When I asked Rick how he felt about college when he returned after military service, he stated:

I was ready at that point. Umm. I'd had a lot of real world experience, umm, I understood that through the help of the people I was in the military with helped me really grow a lot, changed my perspective. I realized that you have a tendency to get out of what you put in. So it basically sort of like shattered the old way that I thought about the world that you could just sort of like fake it and get through it and it taught me that there is really no substitution for hard work and preparation and you can put in time and that will help you to achieve the goals you want to achieve. So when I got to (college) the second time, I think in 07, I was ready to go. And even the fact that I'd wasted those 3 semesters I knew where I needed to improve and where I needed to be better so that when I got to (college) and I set foot on campus for the second time, there was no confusion about purpose for me being there. I know exactly why I was there. I was there to make my self more intelligent, smarter, to work hard and to actually get an education.

The military instilled in Rick a sense of being prepared, being aware of his surroundings, and not wasting opportunities and learning moments when revealed. Rick described a total reversal of attitude about college before and after the military. He had found a purpose for his life and recognized the value of working hard to achieve his goals.

Paul, a 32-year-old White male, attended a large state university for three years immediately after high school. Like Rick, he claims he had no sense of direction in college, and he changed his academic major many times in search of the right fit. Paul began to look at the military as an option to effect a change in his life shortly after his Freshman year. In Paul's words:

I had always been interested in the military, as a growing up sort of thing. I always had a big respect for the military. And, I started looking into it maybe after my freshman year in college. I thought maybe going into the military, they would have different options that were there. I did a lot of research . . . , over the next two years I did a lot of research on U.S. Army special forces, Green Berets, trying to understand what it was they did. And I talked to a couple people I knew who were retired from the military in special operations. I talked to those guys, figured out that was something I wanted to do. I didn't actually need a degree because I didn't want to be an officer to do the job I wanted to do. I wanted to be a special forces medic, which is an enlisted guy. And so, I decided that college wasn't for me at

that point. I could come back to it. I had already done three years. I knew at that time they were talking about you could come back to college after you retire and come out of the military. So, I went ahead and joined in the summer of 2001. I left college, went in . . . The thing that was motivating me to go in was my desire of . . . love of freedom. I wasn't one of those guys who went in just for the flag, or just for America. Whereas, I loved the idea of freedom. And that is one of the greatest gifts we have. And that is what motivated me to leave college and go into the military and go to special forces, which their motto is "Free the Oppressed."

Paul finally realized his love of country and the desire to spread freedom was stronger than his desire to attend college at the time. His tenure in the military unfortunately ended when he was severely injured by an enemy rocket, and after a year of recuperation, he chose to return to college. When I asked him about his motivation level in college the second time around, Paul stated:

Well, in the military, the big thing is time management. It seems like now I have tons of free time while going to school, and before it seems like I was busy all of the time. I learned that, you learn that kind of self discipline. You learn to listen to what the teacher is saying, you pay attention in class. I pay attention more now than I did. . . . Also I have more of the life experiences and know that I need to pay attention and focus on it to get it done instead of procrastinating and putting it off, the school work.

When speaking of being busy all the time in his first stint in college, Paul is referring to a lack of judgment for which things were important and at the appropriate time. Rather than prioritizing, all things became important and very little was accomplished. The military gave Paul the ability to discern the proper time and place for activities and acting proactively.

Several other participants described his or her level of commitment to college before and after the military. All described a common feeling of a need for direction and

discipline that they obtained in the military and brought home with them as a tool to provide focus and purpose for college. Their current experience in college is one of extreme focus on his or her goals and a vision for how they will obtain those goals.

### **Maturity Level**

A common opinion thread across all thirteen participants is that they feel far more mature than the college community realizes, and they do not like being treated as if they are a traditional 18-year-old student who has come directly from high school with little or no world experience. The reader must remember that this is the opinions of the participants, and the researcher is not proposing that traditional students do not have world experience or direction. Much of the difference between the participants and traditional students may be attributed to age given the mean age of the participants is 30 years, and the median age is 29 years.

When I asked Nancy to describe something about her college classroom experience that is affected by her military experience, the first thing she stated was:

I'm tired of hearing about the 18-year-olds talk about their weekends. That's about the extent. I'm 30 years old now and what they feel is important is not so quite as important for me.

When I asked for clarity, Nancy said she was agitated by the laissez-faire attitude that she perceived within her classmates. Due to this, she prefers to associate with the adult students who maintain a more serious attitude about academic work.

A level of the maturity of veterans appears to come from the rigidness of the military and the level of conformity to the rules that do not exist on a typical college campus. According to Kyle, a 26-year-old, White male Marine:

I get irritated at people a lot because they do ridiculous things in class, like people will be talking on their phones, or their phone will ring in class, or they will show up late. I get so sick of people being late. You know, in the military, when you are in training and stuff, for example when the instructor speaks to you, you stand up before you speak back to them. And everyone is in their seat 15 minutes before the class starts. There is a whole lot of really rigid structure that you , you know it's not really necessary in the civilian setting, but it gets you thinking about like, you know, don't show up 20 minutes late every day for class in your pajamas. It just gets old . . . , you know what I mean?

Some of the maturity level leads to disappointment in the way the veteran experienced college. Craig, a 27-year-old, for example, wanted to experience college traditionally, but discovered that experiencing college like an 18 to 22 years old student would is not always available to someone with his life experience. The following quotes reveal how Craig described his experience in college. The first time was community college following the Marine Corps, and the second time was following his experience in Iraq as a civilian contractor.

. . . when I was in the Marine Corp, I wanted to go to school because I felt that I was missing what my friends back home were doing. Going to college and living in the dorms and all that kind of stuff. But, once I got out of the Marine Corp and I started going to community college, reality struck. It's not what I . . . my friends are doing the same thing they were doing when they graduated from high school. They're sitting on the couch playing video games. I've never been drawn to that. So, I did two semesters at (Local) Technical Community College and in the middle of my third (semester) I got the job offer from (contractor) and I went to Iraq because I wanted to leave the situation that I was in.

When I asked Craig about his second time in college at the current University, he described his experience with a modicum of remorse and disappointment.

I was in Mexico when I found out I was accepted to (current university). It was a really happy moment for my family. My brother had already went to college. My expectations were I was going to have my brother's experience in college. I thought we were going to have the same experience. He went to college right after high school and he did the college life. He was on the basketball team, he went on a full scholarship and he was really involved. He spoke at freshman receptions or whatever they are. I thought I was going to mirror that experience. And that's not what it is. But I wanted the classroom environment. I knew I was going to be able to raise my hand and ask a question instead of doing it online. So the experience I thought I was going to have has been shot down a little bit, but brought back down to reality a little bit. But, certainly not detrimental to my well-being. I got to pick and choose. If I wanted that I probably could have had that, but it wasn't a good fit. I chose to concentrate on my studies more.

Craig realized the traditional mode of experiencing college was not going to be a reality for him. But, he now possessed powerful tools of maturity and the ability to suppress disappointment and move along in a productive manner to achieve.

The veterans who volunteered to participate all expressed a level of inability to fit in and have the traditional college experience because of his or her advanced age and increased maturity level. The age difference and the regimentation instilled within them by the military changed the way he or she view the surroundings and his or her assessment of importance and suitability of each situation they encounter. These differences lead to a level of frustration with the other students with which they must associate, however the maturity level they have attained permits them to keep thoughts and feelings under control, and channel his or her energy into productive study.



## **Blending In**

Nearly all of the participants expressed the opinion that they have made a concerted effort not to stand out from the rest of the student body. They do their best to blend in and not draw attention to themselves. I asked if they ever wear any clothing with military emblems or carry any other items that would identify them as a veteran, and most replied that they did not want to do that and draw attention. Tanya did state that she will on occasion wear Marine Corps garb, but overall, there is an underlying concern and effort that they not openly reveal themselves as prior or active military.

My first interview with Rick revealed the realization that the veterans take measures to avoid identification as prior military. When I asked him if he identified himself to other students as a veteran, Rick said:

If you, if you feel like you want to announce to the world and make it a central point of who you are as a student that, you know, I'm a veteran, I served, I'm different than you, then you can do that certainly, I think you can sort of like construct your mission around that, but I think for the most part, all the guys I know . . . I know about 3 or 4 other ones and . . . of course normal back pack on the shoulder, go to class, go to the library, eat at Chick-fil-A, and . . . but blend, blend in I guess for lack of another word. We don't really try to stick out on purpose.

Rick is apparently successful in his efforts because he said that he has never had any indication that classmates or professors have knowledge that he is actively serving in the Navy.

Even though Tanya, a 26-year-old Black female admitted she occasionally wears Marine Corps clothing, she also stated that veterans do not want to be identified. In Tanya's words:

I think we do purposely try to blend in. The only ones who don't are the Army guys, the National Guardsmen who wear their uniforms, they wear their ACU's around campus, for whatever reason I don't know. But, the rest of us I mean you could . . . honestly not really pick a veteran out of a group unless you were totally locked onto the haircut or, you know, like me, I wear my USMC garb all the time, sweatshirts and t-shirts and stuff. But, that's really the only indication of a veteran around school.

I asked her to describe the reaction she gets when she wears the Marine Corps clothing.

Tanya's answer was:

Umm. I mean I get looks but, I don't really think people . . . not necessarily care, but they just don't pay it much attention. Like when they see me they wouldn't be "Oh my God you're a Marine?" I have gotten that question once, only once. Everybody else is like, oh her boyfriend must be in the Marine Corp or whatever, or she must have family or something like that. But, honestly nobody really approaches me about it.

Tanya's experience is more personal and may have more to do with a more accepting culture on this particular university's campus with which she associates and a prevailing thought that women are not members of the Marine Corps. Several participants revealed trepidation with being identified at the current university and stated they know of various colleges attended by friends where military identity draws jeers and insults.

Ethan, a 32-year-old White male Navy veteran majoring in psychology also stated he avoids the military identity, and he was the first to bring up the term "stigma." I had asked him about his experience in the classroom, and his answer ventured into an area that provided me with new perspective for further interviews. Ethan began by describing his interaction with other students, but the answer morphed into feelings of alienation and avoidance of others. In Ethan's words:

As far as relationships between me and other students, it's almost nonexistent. I live off campus, and I . . . you know I don't really have the opportunity to make bonds with other people because I don't live here and don't see these same people every day. So. Kinda alienating in a way. I mean from my own personal experience. I don't know if that is the same for every veteran. I hope not. But, umm, just speaking for myself, it's kind of alienating in a way. And, in my own particular chosen major, psychology, sometimes I'm afraid to even mention the fact that I am a veteran because there is the automatic stigma that, "oh something must be wrong with him." Especially since he's majoring in psychology. But I did it with the purest of intentions. I want to eventually go on and help veterans myself. Hopefully I'll get there.

Ethan was revealing that he feels there is an underlying thought by other students that there is something wrong with veterans, even if they appear to be normal. In his mind, other students viewed him as seeking out the answers to his own personal problems by pursuing a major in psychology, rather than the interest simply being his desire to help and understand others.

I had not noticed and followed up with the statement about stigma when interviewing Ethan, so I was thinking about Ethan's words when I interviewed Kyle since Kyle also mentioned stigma. We were discussing what Kyle considers a normal college experience when he brought up blending in and avoidance of the military stigma. As Kyle stated:

It's interesting that you mention the whole normal of experience as possible, because what I got here . . ., you know in the military it is always don't be the special case, don't be "the one." You don't want to be the one. If you blend in like everyone else, then you are doing what you are supposed to do. It's the nail that sticks up gets hammered back down kind of thing. You want to fly under the radar. So, for me, when I got here I was just trying to be like everybody else. I didn't want to stir up the shit. I didn't want to make a big deal out of a lot of things. It was just go there. Like where do I get my financial aid. Oh, I go stand in that huge line? Alright, whatever. I kinda . . . to me I was trying to get back to where my friends were from high school. They were doing the whole college

thing. So, for me that was more normal, and like I didn't want to be a "veteran." I guess now later on its cooler being a veteran, so I guess I can say that, but, you start thinking about it more. I never thought of myself as a veteran. I'm trying to be average.

Kyle expressed his opinion that veterans do not want to be identified as veterans, or special cases. They just want to be able to attend school and be left alone. Upon completing the transcription of the interview with Kyle, I realized he had really hit on the topic of stigma. Kyle was gracious enough to expand upon his thought on stigma when he responded to an email request for further description. As Kyle wrote:

The way I experienced it all and what I was going for in this part of the interview was just how different you feel when you get home from a deployment or done with your contract. For instance, when I got home from Iraq I had a barbecue and all my good friends came and it was nice, however, I had nothing to talk to them about. Even though they were all my closest friends, it felt as if there was a grand canyon between us. This continued well into my college career and it's one of those things I had to work for a long time to overcome, but to a point I don't think it ever really goes away completely. The point though is that it has become a struggle to return to normal like everyone else. With this in mind academic programs and administration whom are sensitive and aware of veterans' needs are outstanding, but if taken too far it can have an adverse effect of hammering home how different you are. This is where the stigma comes into play.

I tend to think I have experienced equal parts good and bad in regards to being a vet. The good is, like I said, that people generally are sensitive to the times when I have different needs when it comes to school, and the bad is that there are times that I get treated like "shellshock Johnny." I guess I look at it like this... A person in a wheelchair wants and needs ramp facilities where others use stairs however, they don't necessarily want it sky lined and advertised to the masses that they are a special case; they want to feel like everyone else. It's a rough analogy I know but that's the best way I can explain it, speaking only from my experience.

I found it interesting that many of the participants ultimately reflected this thought, but in other segments of the interviews, they expressed the desire for recognition and special consideration. The balance seems delicate and I will discuss it later in the chapter.

Jimmy had an interesting perspective on blending in. He perceived it from the standpoint of national security and spoke about how military veterans can be a source of information for undesirable elements in the United States wishing to use the information to harm us. Jimmy stated that being identified as a veteran on campus makes a person a likely target for coercion or bodily harm. At first, this thought seemed to me to be extreme and bordering on conspiracy theory. However, as I watched the news events and public figures speaking about the tenth anniversary events of 9/11 and the need for public vigilance, I can understand how some veterans could perceive the threat. The following are Jimmy's direct thoughts on the issue when I asked him about veterans openly identifying themselves on campus:

I don't say people have bad intentions, but I don't know. I think something like that draws attention because just think an 18 or 19 year old kid can't be that hard to take intel from or something. If some organization or something. . . . I don't know, I know that's kind of crazy to say, but, I don't know.

I asked Jimmy if he thought military veterans who wear clothing that identified them as having an association with the military was a problem, and he said:

Well, I don't think I would be dealing with any problems here at (The University). I think people would be "Oh thank you for your service blah blah blah" and honestly I don't want to hear that, none of it. That's what I think I would get, but I mean, you never know. You never know. So, I think it's better to be safe than sorry. Some of those kids look for benefits with those uniforms and I think when you go out looking for certain things, other certain things can happen. I don't

think it's something of epic proportions you know, I just think it would be smarter for the, from the US Army standpoint, unless they go straight to drill, they should have rules just like the Marines. Because I never see a Marine out in uniform. I think that's smart.

Jimmy is adamant that veterans attending college should remain as anonymous as possible and blend into the background.

Max, a 42-year-old White male Navy veteran is an outlier demographically amongst the other participants. Max served on submarines for 23 years and is the oldest of all of the participants, yet he appears to be the most connected to the campus and his classmates. He works on campus and volunteers for orientation and is a University Marshall for official events. Max immerses himself into the campus and he feels the need to enjoy the most that the campus environment has to offer. He does agree however that there is a need to blend in, but it is not to avoid stigma or remain unnoticed. Max feels a veteran just needs to let go of his or her past and live in the present. When I asked him to describe his thoughts on veterans avoiding recognition of their military involvement and associating mostly with other veterans, he replied:

Veterans, once they find out you are a veteran, they are very quick to want to... assume there is some common bond there. And there is of a sort. You know, some shared experiences. If I had an opinion, it would be this. If you are done with the military, you retired or got out, or however you got out, and it is still the defining feature of your life, 5, 6, 10 years later . . . you need to move on. That's just me. You need to move on. Because it's the same way . . . let's say you joined some sort of organization when I was a teenager. Let's say I was a boy scout for ten years as a kid. Now I'm 35 and boy scouting still defines my life, you would think I'm some sort of a creep. But when veterans do it with the military, it's OK, somehow. I just think you need to... I'm retired, had a great life, I'm certainly not going to give up my pension every month. I earned it, I worked very hard for a long time. Separated from my family for a long time. But I just don't feel the need to tell everyone I'm a veteran or wave the flag or do any of that stuff, you know.

With the interview with Jimmy in mind, I asked Max his opinion of the dangers of being identified as a veteran on a college campus. He replied:

I would say based on my personal experience, that's an exaggeration. I don't know anyone who does that, I don't know anyone who is very in your face about being a veteran or it's the first thing they say to you when meeting you. I just don't . . . have I known people like that who aren't in college here? Yes, certainly. And I met people here who once they found out I was a veteran, that kind of became the sole focus of conversation for them with me. Like, all our conversational options were reduced to this one thing.

To Max, the matter of being identified as a veteran was more a problem of being a discussion limitation where people focus on the veteran aspect of a person and will not talk about other subjects, rather than facing negative connotations of being a veteran. He is more interested in discussing school and world events with others without the fact that he was in the military being the primary focus of discussion.

Earlier, I discussed identity types revealed by Gee (2000) and how those identities are assigned to a person or group of people. My discussions with the participants drove home the concept that military veterans in college can have an A-Identity forced upon them purely by their prior association with the military. Each participant has attempted to create his or her own I-Identity and D-Identity by choosing to participate in higher education and employing his or her own personality in how they relate to other students, faculty, and staff. Some of them shared thoughts that indicate he or she have had an A-Identity imposed upon them by the other students, faculty, and staff because they are a military veteran and they are positioned as a member of the military as an affinity group. This new A-Identity then becomes foremost in the minds of other people on campus as an

N-Identity and/or I-Identity. A perfectly healthy and normal person who is a military veteran may have the N-Identity of a person with physical and mental disabilities imposed upon him or her because of perceptions of the public that focus upon those veterans with disabilities. This problem of identity may be what inspires Max to wish to put his military days in the past and live only in the present, or what makes Kyle avoid “being the one,” or Jimmy to feel that all veterans are viewed as potential targets for obtaining classified information through coercion or force. This researcher is not trained in psychology; however, it is rather easy to see that the participants feel they must do his or her best to blend in with the crowd and try to remain un-noticed and avoid the stigma. The interviews with the participants reveal to me that the college experience of a military veteran may be wrapped up in the formation of and struggle with identity.

### **Campus Interaction and Classroom Experience**

Given the above discussion of blending in, to assist in answering the first research question I wanted to know how the participants experienced the interaction with other students and faculty and staff. Some of the discussions revealed an interesting opinion conflict as participants would express the desire to be treated just like any other student, yet they also felt the need for special treatment or consideration in some facets of campus life. Overall, there was a wide range of experiences and opinions that led me to adjust my interview protocol after the first four interviews to try to identify the different types of veterans on campus. I identified three different types by the pathway they took through the military and college, their motivation for joining, and the level of heuristic knowledge they brought to the campus to assist in navigating various barriers. Several of the



participants confirmed my thoughts by independently discussing the same types of veterans in college. I will discuss the three types of veterans in detail at the end of the chapter.

A key part of the college experience is what occurs in the classroom with the professors, instructors, and other students. Several participants openly spoke about clear problems they experienced or perceived in the classroom or with faculty. Part of the problem may stem from the desire to cause as few ripples as possible to remain anonymous and blend in. Jimmy described his unfavorable experience in a class on American Politics since he said he has a large interest in the American political system.

In Jimmy's words:

I wanted to do political science. But, the American politics class I took made me so angry. It made me angry that some of the things that the teacher would teach. And, they would say this is how it works and how it should look. And it would really piss me off the way they would teach that class. He said, I remember one of the teachers . . . I'm not going to say his name. He said something about one of the systems is the least dangerous . . ., the judicial system is the least dangerous. And I, when I question, when I want to ask a question I usually wait till the end of the class because I can tell that the teacher is lying, just telling me what I want to hear. I asked him how the judicial system is the least dangerous when they put everybody in jail. They basically run the country, you know, the supreme court . . . I don't know if you know . . . I'm real big into politics. I try to pay attention to what is going on in the world. I think that history repeats itself more often that people pay attention to. I don't think people pay attention to relevant information at all. I think they pay attention to dumb shit. They are focused on the stupid stuff that doesn't do anything for the greater good of people. I think that's a huge problem.

I asked Jimmy to describe better what he was feeling about this interaction with the professor and why he waits until the end of class to ask his questions. He said:

I mean he's the professor, he's teaching the class. He's supposed to know his stuff. I'm not trying to play him into his place and make him say I'm coming at him wrong. But, I like to state myself you know. He's made a comment about countries don't colonialize things. And I said something about OPEC. What I meant to say was Halliburton. And I made a mistake and I didn't have the chance to correct myself. I guess I didn't want to look stupid in front of the class. I'd rather have a one-on-one with him and look at him and tell if he's making up BS or if he's telling me the truth. In class, I can't really tell that. But then other students, they might be able to learn from what he just said. I don't know, maybe I don't think about that in class. I try to correct myself. I wanted to know why the hell he said that because it didn't make any damned sense.

Jimmy clearly has opinions that, if brought up in the class, could spawn interesting discussion. He chooses, however, to remain mostly quiet for fear of being singled out and made the butt of ridicule. When I pressed him further to better understand, Jimmy did not seem to want to elaborate further. I do not know if he was receiving signals from the professor that made him retreat for fear of uncovering his military identity, or if it is cultural given that Jimmy claimed he never dreamed he would find himself in college.

Tate spoke of a clear and recognizable measuring by professors of students when they realize the student is a military veteran. He describes an attitude that could hinder the college experience of a veteran who is trying to blend in. As Tate described:

I think if there are barriers, there are probably more personal barriers than institutional ones. I think that, and uhh, I pretty much had all my education confined to the business school, so that's pretty much all I can speak about, but I think if a student, if they are a veteran or not, makes the effort to truly . . . take as much as they can from the college experience, then they will be successful. And I know I've approached professors and made use of office hours and things like that, and you sort of get this . . . you can tell you are being measured up by the professor that first meeting or two, when you are first meeting with them. Is this someone really looking for a degree? How quick can they get done with it? Are they going to be a C student, and stuff like that. Are they genuinely interested in the field, the opportunities? And things like that. So, you get that sort of standoffishness in the first meeting or two, and once you talk to people, other

students, and things like that, I think it's really just a matter of personal barriers you are going to have to overcome.

Repeated measurement in this manner by professors may have a negative effect on the military veteran student who is seeking help with classroom work and create a divide between the faculty and veterans. The veteran may not have the persistence of Tate to continue to schedule meetings to obtain out-of-class assistance.

Rick chose to focus upon his interaction with the admissions office and termed the interaction as "the runaround." Rick is the Navy veteran who had attended the university for three semesters before leaving college and joining the Navy. He then returned to school and attended for three years before he was called back to active duty. Rick describes a frustrating process that required him to withdraw officially from the university. At the time of the interview, he was nearing completion of his term of active duty and was experiencing the process of re-enrolling at the university. Rick does not think that the process is efficient or proper for the circumstances. As Rick stated:

This all sort of goes back to my quest for readmission to (the university). I was a student there for three years after got out of the Navy, and I got activated to go abroad, and I had to completely withdraw from the university. And now I have to reapply to the university for readmission, and it isn't as arduous a process as applying as a freshman, but I just feel like . . . I feel like if I'm withdrawing because I got activated to go fight or whatever the word you want to use . . . it should, uhh it should basically be pushing a button to put me back in the university.

I asked Rick to elaborate the issue and describe further what he felt was wrong with the process. Rick said:

Like I just, . . . the whole time I'm doing this, I'm thinking I'm in a stack of a bunch of high school seniors who are applying for the first time, or people who, you know, maybe were students ten years ago and left because they couldn't afford or something . . . to me it seemed like when I go to the readmission or admission page, and I pull up the application, it really should be as simple as, are you a previous (university) student who is returning from active military service? And if I click yes, that application should really be about three questions. What is your name, what is your student identification number, and are you in good academic standing with the university? And if I am . . . I feel like I should be admitted back to the university without any of the rigmarole that normal readmits have to go through. I didn't leave because I wanted to. I left because I got called back to fight. And it's not that I think I'm owed that. It's just that I think that you're asking someone who got back from a year deployment in a combat zone to get all of his ducks in a row, . . . in I mean possibly two to three months before the school year starts. And this guy this just wants to get back and finish his program, you know, I shouldn't have to go through this stuff. It's just common . . . umm . . . it's just quizzical to me why I had to, to be honest with you.

Rick was describing a special hiatus status that would be a procedure for military veterans who are members of the reserves and could experience an interruption of college by being called back to active military duty and suspending his or her education. He proceeded to justify this policy by stating:

It is not because I think I'm special. It's not like - I SERVED MY COUNTRY, I'M BETTER THAN THESE PEOPLE, YOU SHOULD LET ME IN FIRST . . . It's just that I didn't leave because I wanted to. It's because I had to. And I just think that it should be a lot easier for me to get back into school than it would be for . . . um . . . I've gone on about this.

I could sense a high level of frustration with the difficulty and red tape to which he was subject when attempting to return to the university.

Tanya professed to have had major problems with the financial aid office. She described a lack of shared information between the Financial Aid Office and the Office of Admissions, and the denial of financial aid for reasons that do not seem proper, according

to federal law. Please note that this difficulty is her opinion and the researcher did not have a way to verify her assertion due to FERPA laws. As Tanya described:

Dealing with the veteran liaison at (the university) is really smooth and really really easy, but as far as dealing with the financial aid department at that school, like the actual financial aid department is when it gets kinda, a little gray. I've contacted them and asked for information from them as far as if I can get any kind of aid outside of my GI Bill, and I was told after I filled out my FAFSA everything would be good. I filled it out and contacted the financial aid office to find out what the overall decision was as far as the financial aid, and I was told I was ineligible to receive any kind of financial aid from the school or based on my FAFSA and all that kind of stuff because I left the school in 2004 without providing some kind of written statement of my leaving. I told them why I left, and that was you know so I could work and help my family a little bit and then I joined the military. When I first, like uh filled out another application to go back to (the university) . . . um for the admittance part of all the paperwork, I already had to explain everything in full detail why I left the school to begin with, what I had been doing since I left in 2004. All that . . . , and I said that to the financial aid representative and she said we're completely different from admissions and you have to fill out some more paperwork, explain again why you left, umm. I got forwarded an email with a link on it to the web site, (big sigh), it's just a lot of extra paperwork that I just . . . not necessary . . . Yeah that I felt was not necessary, like too much to go through . . . just to get financial aid. And, to be told I was ineligible because I left in 2004, you know, and just how that would impact me, six, seven years down the road is a little bizarre.

Given my profession is higher education financial aid, this information did not sound proper, and I prompted for more explanation and whether she was applying for federal, or state, or institutional financial aid. Tanya's response was:

I was told that it was all of those, federal and institutional, and state. Umm, like I said I felt FAFSA was federal aid. And I never even applied for anything from the school, like some kind of school scholarship, or school grant, or something like that. All I ever did was fill out the FAFSA, and I was told I was ineligible to receive any kind of aid because I did not provide sufficient explanation for why I left.

In my professional opinion, Tanya and the personnel from the financial aid office were experiencing a communication problem. Tanya appeared not to be able to describe adequately her needs, and the financial aid office was not proactively seeking a solution to the impasse. Since Tanya was receiving Post-9/11 G.I. Bill benefits, she did have a source of funding for school and she simply gave up on pursuing any other funding for which she could have been eligible.

Paul stated he had trouble with simple communication with other undergraduate students, and also a professor with whom he disagreed on a class subject. He described a fundamental communication barrier that exists between veterans and students with which they must interact in the classroom. Paul blames the disconnect on the language of the military and describes it in the following way:

If I'm talking socially maybe the student talk is more general . . . socially talking to people. But, my experiences in military language is very different than civilian language. And the experience is very different. So, it is hard to share. It's kind of a barrier with communication. Umm, makes it difficult to get my thought across. I have had a few times in class where, I'm taking political science, so we have stuff come up talking about the Middle East, talking about foreign policy, that . . . I can tell, I get somewhat emotional into it and want to get my points across, where it seems like I'm having difficulty getting it across.

Paul went on to describe a communication problem with faculty that a few other participants described. This was when a topic in the classroom was of a nature that the veteran had specific knowledge and direct experience. In Paul's case, the professor acted in a defensive manner and Paul's grade suffered. As Paul described:

And I feel I know a lot about the Middle East, being I was Special Forces and in 5<sup>th</sup> group, we studied the culture, their language, we learned a lot about the history

of the area. I took, I tell you the only class I failed here was Middle Eastern politics. Like I totally disagreed with the professor with a lot of stuff. I feel like I had practical knowledge of . . . because I've been there, I've seen it, I've studied the language and the culture. I know the people. But, he knows what is in the books and he's heard from other people. He doesn't know what I felt like is really there and what I saw. I was . . . it was the only class where I had any kind of academic trouble. My other political science classes have all been A's. That was an interesting experience.

Paul did say that experience happened in only one class, but given that several other participants relayed similar experiences, there seems to be some merit to the opinion. Some professors simply do not value having a member of the class who has first-hand knowledge of the subject and will use his or her authority through issuance of grades to stifle the interaction. I asked Paul if he had good class experiences. He stated the problem happened in only one class, and he was afforded the opportunity in a different class to use his experience to speak on a subject. But, foremost on his mind was the class in which his contribution was squashed.

In another discussion about classroom interaction, Ethan stated that the other students are not serious about their school work. I asked him to expound, and he said:

I can tell they are not really taking it seriously. You see a lot of kids texting in class, playing on the internet. Playing Farmville, in class (laugh). I mean . . . For example, you can tell the ones who take it seriously and the ones who don't. Umm, which is unfortunate for them because, somebody is paying their tuition.

This mirrored Kyle's comments earlier where he expressed dismay at the various things traditional students do in class. I asked Ethan if the actions of the other students caused him any problems. He said: "Not really. Not really. Because I tend to stay focused on what I'm doing." His answer was common among the participants in that they all seem to

have developed the internal guidance that blocks out what Kyle termed “the nonsense” in class, and they focus on their business and the task. I must point out that the level of seriousness about academic work at the undergraduate level may be a factor of the institution. Further research would be required to determine if the problem is systemic to higher education or a factor of the selectivity, price, and prestige of the institution.

For each section being discussed, one particular participant seems to be an anomaly among the others. Matt is a 28-year-old White male Marine veteran and current Naval Reservist, who, unlike most of the other participants, seems to thrive in the classroom environment and openly reveals he is a veteran. He is very proactive about revealing his military experience and uses it to his advantage. I asked Matt to describe his overall experience in the classroom, and he responded:

Once I talk to teachers and establish a little bit of a relationship with them, and . . . it's pretty obvious as we talk that I'm a vet. We talk about the fact I've been in the Navy, was in the Navy and all that kind of stuff. Umm, teachers are very appreciative and receptive to that, at least the ones that I have dealt with. Umm, they respected . . . appreciate what I've done, where I've been. I think part of that is also that I get decent grades and have intelligence. Ha ha! Uhhh, But, uhh, as far as fellow students? Uhh, I mean, some of them go “oh wow, OK” I'm a little bit of a recruiter. I'll be talking to people who say I want to get into that school, but I don't want to have all the debt, but I'm interested . . . and I say “oh, so you should go into the military” . . . Uhh, I've done quite a bit of that.

Matt interacts with students very well and uses his experience and savvy to act as a recruiter for the military by talking about the advantages of the G.I. Bill. He has also had the good fortune of having an academic advisor who is a military veteran. Matt is able to use his medical experience from the Marines, and he is scheduled to teach a first aid course at the university and receive credit for the effort. His experience is counter to the



experience of many others concerning obtaining transfer credits from other schools and credit for military experience. This subject will be discussed in depth in the section that concerns research question two.

In discussing my first research question of how military veterans experience college, I have focused on the topics that, I as the researcher deemed to be the primary themes that evolved from the interviews that reflected prior research described in chapter two. The themes are (a) college experience and performance ability before and after the military, (b) blending in, (c) maturity level, and (d) difficult classroom experience with faculty, and communication barriers with other students. The premise of this research is to have the participants decide what is important to them. As discussed in chapter three, I delivered the top ten themes for each research question to the participants and requested that they inform me what items were of the utmost importance to them as an individual. The next section describes what the participants deemed to be most important in describing how they experience college.

### **Participant Ranking of Themes**

Three clear themes emerged when the participants collectively ranked the themes that I drew from the interviews regarding how they experience college. Their primary themes are:

1. Veterans in college possess a much higher level of maturity than traditional students,
2. A veteran focuses greatly on his or her studies. They are a better student after the military than before, and

3. Veterans in college do not have the ability to participate in the campus life.

They have families, jobs, and other commitments.

The participant ranking of themes is displayed in Table 2. The participants were asked to give a ranking of one to the theme that held the greatest importance to them. A ranking of 10 held the least importance.

**Table 2**

*Participant Ranking of Research Question 1 Themes*

<b>How do veterans experience college</b>	<b>Rick</b>	<b>Tanya</b>	<b>Jimmy</b>	<b>Kyle</b>	<b>Tate</b>	<b>Paul</b>	<b>Craig</b>	<b>Matt</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Tom</b>	<b>Jack</b>
No time for extracurricular activity	3	3	5		3	6	3	2	4		3
Joined the military for the tuition money	4	5	6	3	5	3			10		10
High focus on academics, better student	2	2	9	2	1	2	2	1	1	3	1
More maturity than other students	5	1	1	1	2	1		3	2	1	2
Veterans are not treated as adults	1	7	2	5		9		5	5	2	9
No sense of community	6	4	10	6	4	5	1	4	3	4	4
Faculty show resentment	7	10	7	7		8			9		5
No interaction with other students	9	6	4			7		6	6		6
The university is too liberal	10	9	8	4		10			7	5	7
Veterans desire to blend in	8	8	3	10		4			8	6	8

The difference in maturity level of a veteran from traditional students and his or her focus on studies stood out to me when doing analysis of the interviews. However, the

fact that the participants highly ranked the lack of ability to participate in campus activities indicates a clear lack of connection to the campus. I had asked the participants if they participated in extracurricular activities on campus and almost every person described his or her pressing need to go home after class, which led me to believe connection to the campus was unimportant.

The reasons were as varied as available transportation, spouses and children, lack of interest in associating with traditional students, and jobs. Even Max, who was immersed in the campus culture, ranked not being able to participate in extracurricular activities as the fourth most important theme ahead of the need to blend in or difficulty with faculty interaction. Several participants described the phenomena as being a “Ninja Student.” They come to campus, attend class, and leave. There appears to be a lamentation among the participants that their prime college-attending days have passed where they could have the collegiate experience of an 18- to 22-year-old. Craig summed it up well when he spoke about wanting to have the college experience of his brother, but realized it would not be that way. The result is a heavy focus on his or her studies and the desire to finish. Ultimately, it seems that the participant is using his or her college experience to construct an identity outside of his or her veteran identity. They are experiencing a struggle with establishment of a non-military identity, and if other students and faculty know of the military relationship, the establishment of the non-military identity becomes more difficult.

**Summary: Research Question 1**

Four major themes emerged to answer research question one. First, as stated earlier, an unexpected theme was the participants largely had a before and after the military college experience. The participants who did not have prior college experience possessed firm beliefs of how his or her performance in college now would have compared to how they would have been before his or her military experience. Every participant claimed to be presently a better student than they were before the military, or would have been before the military. They credit the rigor and structure of the military for instilment of work ethic, discipline, and time management that assists them in his or her current academic endeavors. Second, coupled with better performance is the new level of maturity the participants claimed. The responsibilities given to them in the military promoted a level of maturity that they all deem to be higher than the traditional collegian. Linked with the maturity level, however comes a degree of alienation because the veterans no longer fit with the traditional student body in terms of life priorities and needs. Since they are different from the traditional student body, veterans have an additional task of trying to blend in and appear to be traditional. Third, many participants described a stigma they perceived to exist when a person is identified as a military veteran, and most take actions to avoid being identified as a veteran and the subsequent identity that accompanies. Finally, the interaction with other students, faculty and staff appears mixed. This may be attributed to the three types of veterans I have identified with the assistance of the participants. The three types will be discussed at the conclusion of the chapter.

## **Research Question 2**

*How do military veterans describe their attempts to have their needs met in college?*

Participant responses to questions 2, 8, 9, and 11 informed findings related to this research question to shed light on how the participant had attempted to have his or her needs met at the university. One of the needs and the attempts to have it met was revealed when the participants were discussing how they experience college. This pertains to the desire to seek anonymity or blend in, yet still wanting some special consideration. The description of this attempt is expanded in this section. Every participant spoke of his or her attempts to have prior college credits, or his or her military experience be counted toward the current degree attempt. The frustration with the failed attempts was very noticeable in the interviews. A large majority of the participants expressed concern that the Student Veterans Association on campus had gone defunct and his or her attempts to revive it had been unsuccessful or had met roadblocks. Finally, I perceived a yearning for a sense of community, which several participants had actively sought to achieve without success.

### **Seeking Anonymity Coupled with Wanting Support**

In the prior section that addressed research question number one, I describe “Blending In” as a way the participants experience his or her tenure at the university. Many interviews revealed that they did not want to be revealed as a military veteran in his or her day-to-day interaction on campus. But, many participants also expressed a desire to be appreciated and recognized for the sacrifices they made for the benefit of

others. In my first interview with Rick, I ended the conversation by asking if he wanted to say anything to supplement the interview. He did. In Rick's words:

Some people are different. Some people really want to be . . . acknowledged for their service, and, and you know maybe they really want to have professors in the beginning of class say "This is Rick, he served, you know, everyone give him a big round of applause." But, myself and the three or four guys I know who served, we just want to be like everybody else. If you ask us, we'll tell them, but it's not like we're trying to hide or anything like that, but we're just normal people. You know, we, I don't think that any of us were looking for, uh you know, special treatment or any sort of special deference from the faculty or from students or anything like that, like I don't feel like I need my parking space or anything. I just want to mold back into the flow of things, and I think as long as universities just let us do that, I think we'll all be OK. You know. Just let us be part of the community, let us go to class, let us go to the library, we don't need to have special seminars, or I don't need to have special seminars every two months, you know to make sure I'm doing OK and stuff like that. If I have questions, the administration is typically there to help so, I think mostly we just sort of get on with it, you know what I mean?

Rick expressed that he did not want or need any special treatment from the faculty or the school. But, he did express frustration that he wanted and tried for special consideration for readmission to the university. Rick's personal need was to re-enroll in school more easily than a normal candidate for readmission. His attempts to have his need met were countered with a complicated readmissions process in which he was required to again prove his in-State status and re-submit a background check. Rick needed to be able to return to school following his being called up to active military duty, but his attempts to have that need met were fraught with bureaucratic red tape and frustration. He desires treatment not as a special case in class or on campus, but he needs to have special consideration for readmission to the university.

I have used the example of Kyle earlier in this chapter with his eloquent description of the need for special consideration without identification. To repeat a few of Kyle's words:

The point though is that it has become a struggle to return to normal like everyone else. With this in mind, academic programs and administration whom are sensitive and aware of veterans' needs are outstanding, but if taken too far it can have an adverse effect of hammering home how different you are. This is where the stigma comes into play.

I tend to think I have experienced equal parts good and bad in regards to being a vet. The good is, like I said, that people generally are sensitive to the times when I have different needs when it comes to school, and the bad is that there are times that I get treated like "shellshock Johnny." I guess I look at it like this . . . A person in a wheelchair wants and needs ramp facilities where others use stairs however, they don't necessarily want it sky lined and advertised to the masses that they are a special case; they want to feel like everyone else.

Kyle also described a need to feel and look like a normal student. His mechanism to accomplish that is to live purposely like a regular student as much as possible. As he described:

So, for the most part, through college it always seems like I wanted to be a regular student. Just live on campus like everybody else. Go to class, do like everyone else does, you know. A lot of people graduate. Do what they did and don't draw attention.

Kyle's method of meeting his needs is to try to behave and look as much as possible like a traditional student.

Tate spoke of the interesting need for recognition of his military service, but only when appropriate, or when he chooses to make it known. This reveals a dilemma for

faculty, staff and classmates who may not know when that appropriate time may be. I had asked Tate to talk about his classroom experience and part of his answer was:

I always appreciate it when teacher and Veterans Day (activities) take a moment to recognize veterans. And that happens pretty rarely. But, when it does, it feels great.

I followed by questioning if he ever tries to just be a student and hide his military veteran status. Tate responded with:

I don't think I do. There is definitely a lot of classes, especially when you are in your upper level major classes that tend to be smaller and more focused on individual teaching. There is always that day or two, first day of class where everyone is doing the introduction and things like that. And, I've always included my military background in that. There have been a couple of occasions where we're doing a different activity instead of the whole stand up and talk about yourself that it just didn't seem to come up, and didn't seem to be relevant. I think some people are surprised later to find that out. It is certainly something I don't hide in terms of, you know, I feel embattled here, or embarrassing, or something I shouldn't be proud of. Nothing like that at all. It's just . . . , and additionally, coming from my background, anonymity is certainly an asset. So, I don't feel it was ever an issue.

The last two sentences of Tate's quote reveal the interesting dichotomy in which he reveals selectively his military experience while also stating that his anonymity is an asset. This attempt to have a need for military/student identity is complex.

Overall, the participants to this study expressed the need to obtain special consideration from the university faculty and administration while also maintaining a degree of selectively revealing his or her identity to others.



### **Counting Transfer Credits and Military Experience**

Given that many of the participants had college experience prior to joining the military and all had extensive training while serving in their particular branch of the service, they expressed dissatisfaction with the inability to transfer credits from other schools or obtain credit for military experience. The problem of transfer credits is not unique to veterans, but most participants raised the issue.

Matt spoke about receiving extensive medical training in the military and he was disappointed that he could not use any of it for credit at the university. He was able to speak to his advisor who found a way for Matt to use his experience to teach a class of first aid and CPR and receive credit for the experience as an independent study. Matt is an exception to the rest of the participants and it appears to be because his advisor was also a military veteran and saw the value in taking the extra step on behalf of Matt. I asked Matt if there was any established mechanism for receiving credit for military experience, and he replied:

I talked to my advisor and said, hey this is my background. Well, he's actually a vet himself. I forgot about that. But, the undergraduate advisor for the public health department is a vet. And, so he's really helpful for me personally for me to try to find ways for me to get credit so I don't have to take classes. There wasn't much because the school didn't recognize hardly any of my medical training in the military. Uhh, for any credit. Actually I don't think they gave me anything from corps school. But, we've talked and he was, yeah, we should totally have you doing something. And they actually have a class on the books for first aid and CPR that nobody taught for years. But it was still there, so I'm going to be teaching that in the fall. It's under his leadership. But still. Nice.

I followed by asking for confirmation that he had to seek out proactively ways to achieve credit through his military experience rather than the university having a system in place.

In response, Matt said:

Uhh, yeah, as far as, basically because I had all of this experience I was going “where can I pull credits out of this.” Uhh, talked to my advisor, who again is a vet, and he was able to find, mainly it was from previous college classes I had taken before I went in . . . , but he was able to find ways of getting me out of, like six credits I would have otherwise had to take.

He followed with:

No, it was specifically something that I went and said hey, I think I should be able to get credit for this class because I did this other stuff here. And, he looked at it and figured out how to write it up and submit it to the registrar.

I asked him if he thought most veterans did not know how to pursue the opportunity he had and he responded that it was more the fact that he had an advisor who was ex-military. Matt had a definite advantage working for him in his desire to get something from his military experience to count. Other participants may have been able to be successful in his or her pursuits if they had sympathetic advisors as Matt did.

Tom had extensive college experience before he came to the university. He had attended a small private school and a large State university in the same state as the current university. Tom is the veteran who has stopped out of school several times as he pursues his love of military service and flying. His interview immediately delved into the subject of transfer credits and military experience. Tom expressed a high level of frustration with his efforts to have credits for similar courses transfer from one state

school to another. When I asked him about his transition from one school to the next, he replied:

From what I have seen, it's like they accept you and look at your transcripts, and umm . . . I was a sociology major at (large State University). And uh, you have to have so many electives, or so many classes at the 300 level or above, and none of those classes transferred into (current university). And it is my responsibility to go back and get a description of . . . you have to fill out this form . . ., I can't remember what it is. You have to fill out this form, get a description of the course that you took, sociology course, 300 level or above at (large State University), and you get a description of it, and a web link to the description and send it to the uhhh, I can't remember where you send it here . . .

I asked him if he was referring to the Registrar, and he responded with:

Yeah, probably the registrar's office. But it's almost like you have to do all the leg work for them. Make sense? Which didn't make me very happy because it looks like it being a state institution and it being a common major, it should have transferred in, you know what I mean. I wasn't taking underwater basket weaving or anything, but you know I was taking social research methods and everything else, you know. So it looks like it would have been an easy thing to transfer in if that makes sense.

Tom went on to say:

I don't know where the breakdown is, but if they are going to be an accredited institution, or by the same accrediting agency, let's put it that way, yet social research methods from (large State University) didn't transfer into (current university). And I'm sure that it will, but I've got to go through the process of going to the internet and pulling the description, and the web link and sending it in to the registrar. It's just . . . and to meet some of the requirements here at (current university), I've got to jump through the hoops for doing that for several classes, if that makes sense.

Tom's level of frustration with being forced to work through the system was high. He did not appreciate having to utilize his valuable time to accomplish a task that he felt should

be a natural part of a veteran's experience upon enrolling in school. Provided Tom will graduate without stopping out to do more flying for the military, he stated he will graduate with over 150 credit hours.

Paul was very descriptive in his frustration over attempts to have military and prior college experience be counted. The following quote is lengthy, but it truly tells his story:

I've been told a lot about the training and education you get in the military can be used on the outside. I saw, like, my specific track in the military, I received a lot of training. More than the typical military person would receive. I received a lot of language training. Over six months of language training, which I felt surprised that it didn't transfer in to anything coming in to school. I was kind of expecting that to transfer. Apparently here, I don't know if it is (State) rule, or how it is, but apparently there's a regular Army language school that teaches a language that is recognized. The credits transfer over. But, I was in advanced language school. We cover the same material, we just went through it faster. And, that is not recognized here. It's kind of frustrating. I've already spent a lot of time learning a language and it doesn't count. It's the same thing with a lot of the medical training I had. I actually had a college professor from down in Fayetteville who taught anatomy/physiology. He came and taught us anatomy and physiology in the medic corps. The same professor doing the same material. He just did about two semesters in about three weeks with us. Same material. We actually needed a 75 to pass, which is actually higher than what is needed to be a passing grade in college, 70, but it didn't count. We thought that stuff would actually transfer over, but it doesn't. Extensive medical training . . . uh, they say when you get done with the medical corps, you are almost equivalent as a PA, which is Physician Assistant, level. Yet you don't get anything recognized. Undergrad and all the way up, you don't get anything for all that training I had, and hands on actual work. Which kinda was, it was really frustrating to come back and see I had the knowledge and training but I started at the bottom again. I guess I sort of had an expectation that the school or something would have a process worked out to make that knowledge not be wasted.

Paul brought a different perspective to the problem of a military veteran attempting to have his or her credits and experience counted. He described it in terms of efficiency:

The no recognition of training and education, the military training . . . The redundancy of repeating course that I already have training in . . . and having to do it again here. Kind of wasting, not just my time, but the governments time because they paid to teach me a language once and now they are paying to teach me the same language again here . . .

Even though I had not told the participants specifically what I would be asking, Paul came to the interview with handwritten notes for what he wanted to establish as one of his primary frustrations and needs that had not been met. The lack of credit for his military experience was foremost on his agenda.

Each participant spoke to the lack of available college credit for his or her military experience, and some relayed concerns regarding transfer of prior college credit. What stood out from the interviews was the lack of continuity across the experiences to have this need met. Many ran across barriers and some did not. Paul and Tom had extensive experience, yet Paul was not able to achieve success, while Tom indicated some credits might be awarded. Matt had been able to garner several advantages from his military experience, but it appears it was due to luck of having an advisor who had prior military experience. The institutional policies and patterns of action have no uniformity or continuity.

### **Seeking a Sense of Community through the Student Veterans Association**

Many of the participants told me that they had actively worked to either expand the Student Veterans Association (SVA), or resurrect it from its defunct status. They stated that they needed it for support, community, and camaraderie.

Tanya was my second participant interviewed and the first to delve deeply into the subject of the SVA. I had asked her if there was a group on campus that she was

actively seeking or would like to create that would help her. She spoke of the SVA and the lack of its presence on campus. I asked her to describe her need for the SVA:

(The university) does have a group, it's the SVA. Student Veterans Association that's completely inactive. Umm, I had tried to contact the guy who is the president of that group to see what's going on with that. You know, how do I get involved, and a guy who was only just a part of the group told me the president graduated last year and they are having a hard time getting it back off the ground again. He and I, just the two of us are trying to figure out a way to get the group started again, find out who we can get interested in the idea, and we're actually having a really hard time with faculty help, surprisingly. I don't want to call anybody out . . . but he's tried to contact two individuals who were directly affiliated with the group before, and talking to them and trying to get them to help us to get it started again, and we're not getting any kind of help, at all. So, that's kind of surprising there, and it's also very annoying, very upsetting, you know, and the question that you're asking about (university) programs and stuff and how they help and all that, and I honestly think if they implanted that group again, like really helped us to get the ball rolling again, that could be a sort of program to help us out. But, like I said there's, umm, you know we mesh with the rest of the college population, but it's always nice to know you have that other group that you are more familiar with, if that makes sense.

Tanya is describing her need for a support group that provides a feeling of community with which she can identify and find common ground. She actively sought to have that need met by attempting to re-establish the SVA, but ran across indifference by former organizers. I came at the topic from a different side later in the interview by asking about extracurricular activities. Tanya again spoke of the need for the SVA to fill a void. As she described:

Would I like to do other things? Yes. Umm, that's why I was talking about the SVA. I would totally consider that extracurricular, I'm looking for special interest groups to join up with, and that's the only special interest group that's geared toward the military. And like I said, that's nowhere, totally not off the ground at all. So I'm kinda at a loss there. And being so much older than the other students, even the seniors that are there, you know it's hard for me to think about trying to

join a sorority you know because with the military, its being in a umm, just like in a group, you all have similar interests, you all have a similar purpose. You know that is kinda like what a sorority is as well, but they don't have the same mission that I'm used to. You know. I don't need to go out and party with a bunch of girls, young girls, you now, and call it we're doing our philanthropic duty, or whatever the heck . . . Ha ha ha ha. That's why I really wish the SVA could get kicked off again, or they could just implement some kind of extracurricular something for veterans.

Tanya is describing a crossroads in which she actively wants to have an out-of-class experience in college, yet she needs that experience to be with an affinity group that holds a military identity with which she can relate. This is an interesting paradox to earlier discussion that a veteran experiences college by attempting to distance themselves from his or her military identity, yet the comfort they find is when there are organizations or activities that focus veterans together. This reveals an interesting quandary that may exist within each veteran student.

Jack provided an interesting perspective of on-campus housing. He was housed in the International residence hall his first year at the university. Jack said he was amazed to find that the international students were more supportive of the veterans than the rest of the student body and he found a level of comfort living there. I asked why he thought that happened and he felt the international students may have been screened to not have any anti-American views. When Jack moved out of the international residence hall, he attempted to join the SVA to find a level of comfort he was missing. This was about the same time that the U.S. Military had been ordered into a surge into Iraq, and many veteran students who were reservists were called back to active duty. Jack was the first participant to provide a good explanation for the lack of the SVA. In Jack's words:

My first year, I was in the international dorm. So, I was part of the, whatever their little group is for my first semester. And uhh, I actually found that the international people were more supportive of the troops than the regular students were. I don't know. Maybe that's because it's a screening process where they find people who don't have anti-American views or something. But, everybody loved me over there. . . . Then, when I moved out of the international dorm? I tried to take part in the student veterans association, but what happened was, well actually when I got here that was a pretty big thing. Then in 2007, a lot of people who were in that organization got called up, because they were reservists. So, and that was part of the surge, that was the same time that I went over. And, when I got back we had lost our accreditation. So, because there was nobody here. So, I think they spent my junior year trying to get accredited again, with the school. And in my senior year we had one meeting, and then that was it. That was all we ever did. It was nothing like it was in 2006 when I got here.

Jack had been fortunate to find a community to which he could belong when he first came to the university. When he moved from that situation, he searched for a replacement by looking to the SVA. By the time Jack was making that transition, the SVA had gone inactive due to the large number of military personal being called to active duty and leaving the school. Due to the low number of active members, the SVA lost its campus affiliation. He also told me the president of the SVA had been deployed to Iraq and the leadership of the organization fizzled.

Paul experienced the vacuum created by the inactivity of the SVA when he came to the university and he made efforts to reactivate it. I asked him to elaborate on his thoughts and attempts, and the following is what Paul said:

I was part of a group that tried to get a veterans group started here on campus, because there isn't one. We tried to get it started the beginning of last semester, but it just didn't end up working out because there wasn't a whole lot of interest. There were a few students who wanted to see it happen, but nobody wanted to lead or get it started. I feel like they need something like that. Something nice. To get the guys, the men and women together who have been in the military to share



their common experiences. Give it more of a community feel to the place. As of right now, I don't know of anything that exists like that.

Paul described an organization that was vacated by the troop surge and subsequent lack of leadership and the ensuing unwillingness for people to step up and help to revitalize it. In addition to the community feel the SVA would provide, Paul described it as a potential source of needed information:

A student veterans association would be a great thing to have to bring people together to talk and share experiences. Plus somebody may know more about this program that is available or that program from the state or the federal government programs . . . to make sure everyone is getting what they earned and deserve.

He is describing the need for information from peers who he can trust. Paul tried very hard to revitalize the SVA, but he was unfortunately not successful.

The subject of the SVA was broached in every interview. Many of the participants spoke of the SVA without prompting, and others I needed to ask. There was a wide variety of feelings and knowledge level of the SVA. I came to realize the knowledge level depended upon when the participant started study at the university and the life stage of the SVA at that time. A few participants, such as Max, who were very active on campus seemed ambivalent toward the SVA. Those veterans were finding other outlets for meeting their needs to find belonging and fraternal association. Other participants, like Jack, really sought out the SVA and extended a high measure of effort to see the organization regain life, only to experience failure in the effort. Finally, others chose to find out if the SVA existed, and accepted the fact that it was not active as a way of the campus culture. Jack had mentioned that the SVA lost its affiliation with the school

because of the low number of members. Perhaps the university needed to take into consideration the forced fluctuation of membership due to mandates by the various branches of the military and assist in the maintenance of the organization.

### **Participant Ranking of Themes**

Three primary topics emerged when the participants collectively ranked the themes that I drew from the interviews regarding how a military veteran describes his or her attempts to have needs met in college. The participant rated themes are:

1. They try to obtain credit for prior college classes and military experience,
2. They have attempted to re-establish the Student Veterans Association, and
3. They have been seeking a transition program.

From the interviews, I had identified the major themes that I perceived to be the most pressing to the participants. The selection of seeking a transition program was unexpected when it became a predominant theme. The themes, as selected by the participants, are displayed in Table 3. A rank of one is most important to the participant, and a 10 is least important.

**Table 3**

#### ***Participant Ranking of Research Question 2 Themes***

<b>How do veterans describe attempts to have their needs met in college?</b>	<b>Rick</b>	<b>Tanya</b>	<b>Jimmy</b>	<b>Kyle</b>	<b>Tate</b>	<b>Paul</b>	<b>Craig</b>	<b>Matt</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Tom</b>	<b>Jack</b>
Better readmission process	1	7	7	9		4			4	1	1
Better provision for reserves commitment	3	6	6	6		6			5	2	2
Re-establish the SVA	4	3	10	8	5	8	4	2	2	3	6

**Table 3 (cont)**

<b>How do veterans describe attempts to have their needs met in college?</b>	<b>Rick</b>	<b>Tanya</b>	<b>Jimmy</b>	<b>Kyle</b>	<b>Tate</b>	<b>Paul</b>	<b>Craig</b>	<b>Matt</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Tom</b>	<b>Jack</b>
Transfer credit and military experience	2	4	1	1	1	1	1	4	6	1	3
Better sense of community	5	1	9	5	4	7		1	8	5	5
One stop veterans center	6	5	5	3		5		3	1	2	4
Anonymity to avoid stigma	7	10	8	7		10	2		10		9
Transition programs	8	9	3	4	2	3	3	7	3	3	10
More recognition for service	10	2	2	10	6	9		5	9	1	7
Different processes than traditional	9	8	4	2	3	2		6	7	1	8

Several participants expressed his or her concern that they came to college life after experiencing the structure of the military and realized they did not possess the personal tools to manage that transition. A prime example is Kyle, who outwardly stated that he had transition issues that he did not recognize fully at the onset of his college career. As Kyle stated:

But it's, you know, I know (the university) is really trying to build the reputation of Veteran friendly and all that, I mean I think it would only help if there was like an office or a few people that ran all that kind of stuff. Because, you know, looking back on this I realize there were a lot more issues than I was . . . like when I got home from Iraq, the first thing everyone was like, hey man, you need to take some time off from work. I'm like fine, it's no big deal, whatever, I'm good. But then, looking back on it I realize I had a lot more issues than I was realizing at the time. You don't really know that until later on down the road. And, in that regard, I think a lot of times there are needs that are met or not met that you don't really realize because you don't think about them until later on.

I have discussed the topics of credit for prior college work and military experience, and the SVA, but I have not discussed transition programs. The transition theory of Nancy Schlossberg is discussed in Chapter V.

### **Summary: Research Question 2**

The findings from research question two reveal four major themes. I identified three from analysis of the interviews, and the participants identified the fourth. First, veterans seek anonymity on campus. They bring a host of experiences and maturity with them to campus, but ultimately they wish to attend class in the pattern of a traditional student and not be singled out for his or her prior military experience. However, there is a delicate balance between privacy and the desire for special services or consideration. The participants expressed a need for his or her prior college and military experience to be counted for credit at the current university. As I stated earlier, I was surprised to find that most of the participants had prior college experience, and some had already achieved a degree. The participants collectively expressed a need for the extensive military training they received and responsibilities to be counted for something in college. For example, Paul spoke about his large amount of language and culture training in the Army Special Forces, yet the university would not recognize any of that training to be valid replacement for mandatory curriculum requirements. The Student Veterans Association, SVA, or lack thereof, was a high priority for most of the participants. The SVA is an organization controlled by the veteran students, but apparently monitored and recognized by the university. When a large number of students were called to active military duty, the SVA suffered a drain of membership and subsequently failed to be a valid student

organization by university standards. Several participants stated they were actively involved in the attempt to revive the SVA, but noted lack of support by the university administration in their efforts to make the SVA a viable entity. Finally, several participants focused upon the need for a transition program. As in the example above from Kyle, many veterans may come to college with full belief they can handle the transition, but later realize they needed help. A university must have resources available for transition assistance, and make those resources known.

### **Research Question 3**

*What college resources do military veterans find useful in meeting their needs in college?*

Participant responses to questions 5, 6, and 9 informed findings related to this research question to reflect on what the participants feel is useful in meeting his or her needs on campus.

Several themes rose to the top of the scale when I weighed the importance by the number of times I had heard the topic in the interviews. Foremost on the mind of everyone interviewed is the outstanding service provided by the Veterans Liaison at the university. Every participant praised him without prompting. Many participants also appreciated a simple matter of university policy that provides for spring entrance to the university and an application deadline that is later than at many other schools. A third item that proves to be helpful is the matter of course that this university enrolls a large number of adult students. The result is an inherent comfort level for the veterans because the number of students within the same age range is higher than found at many other campuses. Finally, a large resource the participants utilize is his or her own

resourcefulness. Many of the participants described a feeling that the university administration simply treats them as a number and a source of pride for being labeled as a veteran friendly campus, and that they are successful in college because they learned how to survive in the military.

### **The Veterans Liaison**

By far, the most common theme I heard in every single interview was the effectiveness of the veterans liaison, or VA representative on campus. I will name him Dave. Dave is employed in the Office of the Registrar and his duties are to assist a veteran with his or her G.I. Bill benefits paperwork and get him or her established at the university. The liaison's job however is not to remain a constant source of information for the veterans. Yet, most participants viewed Dave as a constant source of information and assistance and did receive that level of service. Most participants also were of the opinion that the liaison was the only person on campus that held any level of concern for them as they journeyed through the college experience and assisted them in navigating many barriers. Dave was given high praise by all participants and I will present quotes from almost all participants in support of the service he provides.

As stated before, Rick was the first participant interviewed. I asked Rick if there was anything special that the university did for the veterans and he immediately spoke about the VA representative. Rick described the relationship as follows:

The VA rep is KEY for us. Umm, and we have a really good one, and it makes life for all of us a lot easier because we know, and it is, it is kind of nice for us that there is a specific person that we can go to who is there to help us, not just . . . you know telling us, you know what our GI Bill benefits are about, but I, when I come back for these two weeks, I have to re-register to go back for my last

semester. And I sort of got a little bit of a runaround from a couple of the admissions people and stuff like that, and I knew that my VA rep would help me navigate this thing. You know cause its sort of became a maze, and I kinda got exasperated and then I was wait, I have this VA rep and he's very good and he's very helpful and he's always accessible, so I think if I had to say anything about what (the university) does, they have a really good VA Rep and they help him help us. So, I think that is a really good thing.

Rick was very appreciative of the level of assistance he obtained from the VA representative and credits him with navigating the readmission red tape.

Nancy discussed the university VA representative when I asked her if there was anything special that she would like to say about university efforts to assist veterans. She said:

The veterans guy, Dave, he's really good. Really good about sending us emails and reminders and other things going around, so he's one of the biggest bright spots this school has. So, I mean outside of him, I don't think the administration could care less other than if I was an out of state tuition they'd still get their money.

Nancy was the third participant I interviewed and the third person I had heard speak highly of Dave, so I realized I had a common theme appearing that I must track. I was careful to not ask the participants about Dave, rather wait for them to broach the subject, which they all did.

When I asked Ethan if there were any expectations he held before attending the university he replied he expected a good VA representative. Ethan went on to discuss the issue. In Ethan's words:

Well, I knew that there was a VA representative here, you know, because every school has to have one basically, but, beyond that, no. I came in here with a blank

slate. I really didn't know what to expect. He's very responsive. Every time I have a question for him, he's back within the hour, or before the close of business. He's awesome. He's really good at what he does.

Ethan is the type of veteran student who comes to campus only for class and promptly leaves to go home to take care of other responsibilities. He had mentioned earlier that his campus experience was alienating for him. Dave and the service he provides is the only facet of the university with which Ethan has any connection.

The work that Dave does was mentioned by Matt when I asked him if there was anything offered by the university that was especially helpful to him. Matt discussed a few items that are designed for the student body as a whole such as study habit and writing assistance. He then mentioned Dave in relation to the items he discussed above by saying:

So yeah, outside of that, there's just not a lot of ways that I guess that you can get plugged in, but not things specifically for vets. The vet administrator, uhh, the VA rep, whatever he is on campus . . ., he's good. Yeah, Dave, he's good about having information and stuff like that. I haven't had cause to have to interact with him for a while. He was very helpful when I was going through things . . ., so. He was Navy, so what can I say?

This was the first that I knew from a participant that Dave was also a veteran and they felt a comfort level with Dave because of that affinity group. A clear theme was emerging that the veterans valued Dave's services, but also Dave was able to relate to the veterans because of his prior military experience.

My interview with Jack affirmed the importance of a university VA representative being a person who can relate to the veterans and is committed to service to the



constituents. We were discussing his concern over the loss of affiliation for the SVA and I asked him about interaction with other parts of campus. Jack began to talk about Dave and the service he provides. As Jack described:

He was awesome. He came while I was gone to Iraq and he totally knew what he was doing. I mean, he would take care of stuff, he'd be like, you know where the previous lady, she was kind of difficult? But, he'd be like, yeah I can just email you this paper and you can sign it, scan it, send it back. He was so laid back compared to the previous person who was here. He really took care of a lot of stuff. I didn't, didn't have any back pay issues, or you know, missing pay and stuff from my GI Bill when he was here. He was a pretty cool guy too.

When I combine the statements from Matt and Jack, it is apparent that a person with prior military experience and the ability to interact with the veterans on a common level of knowledge, empathy, and desire to serve is vital.

I was asking Tom if he had experienced any trouble with obtaining G.I. Bill benefits when first coming to the university. Trouble with G.I. Bill payments is a common occurrence according to some of the literature. Tom responded that his experience was very good because of the work of Dave. In response to my question about G.I. Bill difficulty, Tom said:

No, Dave here at the university . . ., so far I've had limited face to face so far with him, but he's REALLY good. He stays on top of the stuff. And I've heard from other people (at other schools) that is kind of hit or miss, and that's directly due to the VA rep at your school. And, fortunately here at (the university), Dave's done a really really good job. He stays on top of top of it. You know, he'll send you the paperwork.

Kyle is very evocative in his discussion of the issues. I was asking Kyle what he thought should be added to enhance the veteran experience, and he proceeded to speak

about Dave and the service he provides. He was not advocating a change in Dave's job rather he took this opportunity to talk about how helpful Dave is to the veterans. As Kyle explained in response to my question:

You know, I can't say that I can think of anything really. It's been a pretty decent experience. A lot of it I think has been that Dave has been around and he's the go-to guy. If I have any problems with stuff I go to him about it. Even though he just handles the VA paperwork and stuff, he's kinda like your dad in a way. If you have a problem or some sort of issue you can talk to him and he usually knows where to direct you. So, just having an office or a person who is in charge of all that stuff, some kind of liaison, has made a world of difference. Just knowing where to go with the questions.

I followed by asking if there was a need beyond what Dave could provide. Kyle's answer was:

I've found that if it is something that he can't do then he knows where you need to go for it. So, a lot of times I know I have talked to him about stuff, knowing he doesn't have the ability to handle it, but he knows where I need to go with it. Because a lot of times, for example, you have a financial aid issue and there's VA stuff involved, and then there's other things and stuff, you know you take that to the financial aid office but there's 10,000 people going to the financial aid office already and you're dealing with a different person. But if you talk with Dave it will usually help streamline the process. It will be like, well you need to talk to this person and you're going to need to get that paperwork and stuff, and he can't file it but he knows where you have to go and what you need to do to do it. That's an example.

Kyle's answer truly painted a picture of a university staff member who takes his job very seriously and is committed to service to his constituents even when it is beyond the formal job description.

Craig viewed Dave as a way of making his college experience as smooth as possible. We were discussing whether other students and faculty members knew Craig

was a military veteran and Craig said he thought the only person who knew was Dave. I asked about that relationship and Craig said the following:

The only guy I know who knows I was in the military is Dave and he's the VA rep here on campus. He knows my face. To be honest I met him one time and everything has been running smooth since. And that's the only reason why you go to him.

I asked Craig to elaborate on what he had stated, and he said:

Umm, he uhh, I met him one time to get the paperwork going. All you have to do is enroll once and he takes care of everything online. But, I went in, met him and we were both cordial, I was on time, he was in the Navy, I was in the Marines, we bantered about that, and that's it. He sent emails out like the one you sent out. He sends out stuff like that. Hey there's this veterans get together, there's this whatever.

Overall, it did not appear that Craig interacts often with Dave, but the level of service he receives is adequate and appropriate for the situation and does not seem to encroach on his personal space.

As described above, Jimmy was in awe of the fact that he was a college student. In opposition to that awe, Jimmy did not participate in anything offered by the campus and seemed unaware of most offerings. In the middle of the interview I asked him if he had any association with the SVA or other activities on campus. Jimmy responded with: "Unless Dave runs the program, which is the veteran's guy for (the university), I don't know what it is." This statement by Jimmy made me realize that there may be a problem of communication across campus with events and programs for veterans, and unless the veteran hears the information from the trusted source, Dave, they may not know about it.

I asked Paul to describe something provided by the campus that he found particularly helpful to his needs and those of other veterans. He, like the others spoke about Dave. Given that Paul had been to a large State school before, he was knowledgeable about the basics of college, but he said Dave was very helpful when finances are concerned. Paul described Dave's assistance in the following way:

Umm, I talked to Dave a couple of times. He's been helpful as far as trying to help with the paperwork side and making sure you're getting what you need to get. If it's financial, educational, so he's making . . . he's a good point of contact to help out.

I asked Paul if there were other campus offices or organizations to which he sought assistance during his tenure at the university. His reply was:

No. I think he's the only one I ever really dealt with. Because I had some issues at the very beginning. Like, I signed up to go to school here, was accepted and about ready to start and the Army kept messing up paperwork when I was getting out. I ended up missing that semester. So I had to call him (Dave) back again and try to explain why I missed it and get re-accepted the next semester. It was completely out of my control. He helped me with that, but it's something that he brought up at some meetings that if that does happen, and it has happened to quite a few people . . . the Army will tell you that you're getting out in 90 days, but it ends up being 180, 200 days, so you'll miss the semester. And if you're having to pay the fee to apply to school here yourself, that is \$200, and then you miss it because you couldn't come and then you have to pay it again to try to get in the next semester. Dave said he was going to try to fix that. He brought it up at meetings and such. This last semester there has been a lot of focus on the veteran community here and try to come up with some solutions that will help. I know he's working on that. It sounds like it is really high up. They are working on it here at (the university) specific. Trying to gain information and details and make the system a little bit better.

Paul revealed a veterans liaison that was being proactive rather than reactive in pursuing relevant issues for the veterans and trying to affect a positive policy change within the campus.

Finally, Tate, who is working on his second college degree described Dave's contribution as one he hoped for before his arrival to campus since he knew time and resources were valuable. When I asked him what he expected of the campus to serve his needs, Tate described Dave's services in the following way:

I was hoping they would have a strong representative, or whatever, facilitator, for the GI Bill, because I didn't want to have to become an expert on that. I just wanted to be able to use. And I can say that's true. The guy here, Dave, he's great. He answered every question I ever asked of him and things are going really well on that.

Dave is the one campus representative who has apparently made a difference in the lives of the participants and is credited with simplifying the entrance transition to college, providing an ear to listen to problems, and being a champion for the causes of the veterans attending this university. I will elaborate the issue later on, however it appears that many services can be lacking on a college campus in terms of veteran needs, but if there is a sympathetic and proactive person in the position of VA representative, veterans may overlook many shortcomings and find the experience suitable.

### **Flexible Admission and Application Deadlines**

Many of the participants experienced difficulty with their college start time that was caused by the military with delayed release time from active duty, or extended periods of training that encroached into the beginning of the semester. The common

theme was for the participant to expect to begin school with the fall semester like a traditional student. However, many described the unexpected or undesired need to begin school with the spring semester to fit the lag caused by his or her branch of the military.

Kyle wanted to go into the officer program for the Marine Corps upon graduation from high school and thought an ROTC scholarship would be the way to accomplish that goal. The Marines encouraged him to enlist in the reserves as a back-up plan. Kyle was sent to boot camp for the summer. He then discovered that the duration would extend into when he was supposed to begin college in the fall at a large state university. The large state university told him he would be required to wait until the next fall semester to begin college and no fees would be refunded. More military training ensued and Kyle found himself attempting to re-apply to colleges in March. The current university was the only school with flexible enough deadlines to still accept his application. Kyle then ended up spending the next year in Iraq and the current university administration refunded his fees and established that he need only call to say when he was returning to attend. He is very complimentary of the school administration for the flexibility to work with him through an extended period of uncertainty when other schools would not. As Kyle described:

Originally I was going to go to (large State University). I had everything all set up to go. I had picked out everything and paid. Once I realized I was going to miss the first semester at least, yeah, I'll say the first year of school . . . they were not being real helpful, the people at State weren't. They wanted like . . ., basically I was going to re-start everything the next year from scratch. They weren't going to refund any fees, no . . . they wouldn't even carry over my acceptance. Like, I would just start all over completely. So, I just kinda let that one go. By the time I finished all my initial training . . . Let's see . . . yeah that was March of '05. And by that point all the deadlines for all the schools had passed except for current university. So, I got in and came here and found out that pretty much immediately, I got to my unit and found out I was going to get deployed

immediately. So, in June I started training to go to Iraq. And they were actually really helpful, I can't really remember who I spoke to but he just said whenever you get back just call me and we'll figure it out. They refunded everything, carried over everything. Basically just call him and say I'm back and they would figure out a schedule for me. So, it was a much different tone here than it was over at State I found. I went, let's see, I left for Iraq in August till the next March in '06. And then I started here in summer school of '06. And then just did the reserve gig one weekend a month, two weeks a year thing until last April.

The current university policies provided for much more flexibility to handle the uncertainties that were caused by the military.

In the earlier section that referenced the VA representative, a quote from Paul spoke to his issue of missing a semester because of a military delay with paperwork. To quote again, Paul said:

Like, I signed up to go to school here, was accepted and about ready to start and the Army kept messing up paperwork when I was getting out. I ended up missing that semester. So I had to call him back again and try to explain why I missed it and get re-accepted the next semester. It was completely out of my control.

Dave had been able to get Paul re-accepted for a subsequent semester, but ultimately it was current university policy that allowed this to happen. The experience of other participants, such as Kyle who had attempted attending other universities proved that the other university administrations did not have an accepting policy as the current university.

I must point out that there is either an inconsistent policy or a lack of information flow or awareness of policy, because as mentioned before, a few of the participants had differing experiences with the current university. Basic admission policy is not to be confused with the transfer credit and military experience policy that has been discussed

earlier. For example, I do not wish the reader to confuse the experience of Rick who was stopping in and out of the current university, or Tanya who attended and left to find work and then decided to come back after military service. Overall, the administration at the current university has been flexible in the setting of application deadlines and deferment of start date to account for variations caused by the military.

### **The Number of Adult Students on Campus**

An inherent attribute of the current university is the large number of adult students who attend. The current university enrolls 1,500 new transfer and adult students every year. The university administration considers a transfer student to be one with at least 30 credit hours of transferable prior college experience, and an adult student to be someone who is age 24 or older and has had a significant break in formal education.

After hearing so many participants speak well of Dave, I met with Dave to hear first-hand how he conducts his duties. I will later go into depth about Dave's duties, but during our conversation, he stated that the current population of veterans attending the university is approximately 400 in number. When I asked the participants how they related to classmates, many stated that they felt satisfied in their relationships because many of the classmates who were not military veterans were also adult students. The primary commonality that assisted the participants in this regard was the age and life experience of his or her classmates. The participants preferred to seek association with the adult classmates.

Nancy was relating her opinion of being in class with traditional students. She began by talking about the traditional students. In Nancy's words:



I'm tired of hearing about the 18-year-olds talk about their weekends. That's about the extent. I'm 30 years old now and what they feel is important is not so quite as important for me. Like, a lot of the classes here it's just regurgitating the same info from 101 class, it seems like.

I then asked Nancy to describe her interaction with the students with whom she can relate. She said: "Most of them that I talk to are the adult students, the 25 to 30 to 40 years old. Umm they have about the same life experiences, minus the military." In my discussion with Matt, I asked him to describe his interaction with other students and how he felt he was different and where they found common ground. Matt's reply was:

Yeah, I mean there's the fact I'm not only a veteran, there's the fact that I'm married and have two kids. Umm, it, it's a little different, but I think (the university) has a pretty good amount of non-traditional students anyway. With all their . . . you know people doing undergrads . . . a lot of post Bac students, uhhh, I've been in a lot of science classes and there are a lot of people getting a post Bac degree. In preparation to get them in like med school or dental school. So, I interact with a lot of people who are my age or older than me in those programs. So, I think it's actually a pretty well rounded campus here as far as the personalities and things like that. There's . . . I mean, yeah you've got the young idiots, but you also have the mature people.

I found it interesting how Matt categorized the traditional students as the "young idiots" and the students his age as "mature." Chronologically, Matt is approximately six years older than the traditional college senior, but his military experience and family obligations make him feel removed from the younger students. The large population of adult students on the campus provides Matt with a cohort with which to belong.

Tom, who is 36 years of age, relayed similar thoughts as Matt regarding the adult student population of the current university. I was discussing his interaction with other students when Tom answered:

It . . . it was good, because typically you have some older students . . . because I work full-time, I'm forced to take classes here and there, which can be a hassle, as far as scheduling. Umm, but typically, evening classes are going to have some older returning students that aren't veterans in the classroom who are easier to bond with than say your, you know, your person right out of high school coming to school initially. But, there's been good peer interaction.

Tom has told me that he purposely sought online classes to be able to fit school around his unpredictable personal schedule. He appreciated having classmates in his age group and possessing a higher level of maturity when he physically attended a classroom setting.

Jack described the difference in comfort level between a classroom environment with adult students and one with traditional students. Jack's comments came at the same point in the interview as the others when I asked him to describe his association with other students. In Jack's words:

I've always been, like I've had some experiences before I went to Iraq that I didn't want to advertise that I was in the military because a lot of students don't like the military and they'll call you out on it. Umm, and a lot of faculty don't like the military. So, it was fortunate that the very first class I was in, the teacher was prior Army Ranger or special forces maybe. He had been in the military before, so he was kind of cool. And being a summer class, it was mostly adult students too, so after hanging out with them . . . you know we were really close in that class because we were there three hours a day being together and hanging out. So, they respected me. But when the fall semester came, I just kept to myself, I didn't advertise I had been in the military, or was still in the military at the time. Umm, by the time I got back in 2008, in that fall semester, I was significantly older than most of the students. So, I think I attribute me not hanging out with them as more of an age thing than a military experience thing.

Jack interestingly tried to remove his military experience as a factor when describing classroom interaction with other students and chose to focus upon age as the primary

factor. This is indicative of many of the participants attempting to construct a non-military identity at school. As mentioned before, military identity could be an entire research project in its own right.

Tate raised the subject of adult students on campus when I asked him if there was anything important to him that we had not discussed. He stated that the university is very receptive to adult students and that receptiveness would make college easier for him whether or not he is a veteran. As Tate stated:

I'm overall satisfied with how I have been received as a veteran and a student as well. And the university, I think the thing I opened up to . . . not only are they receptive to veterans as students in general, but I think they're particularly receptive to adult students. They may look at me more as an adult student than a student/veteran or something like that. Either way, it seems to work well.

Tate's words represented many of the thoughts expressed by the participants. The university presents well as a campus receptive to military veterans, but more as a campus receptive to adult students. As a veteran appears to be attempting to shed his or her military identity, association with the adult student body helps to make the transition more palatable.

### **Participant Ranking of Themes**

As in the prior two research questions above, when I asked the participants to tell me what themes were most important to them, three primary themes emerged. One theme was expected, and two were not. The participants determined the following actions by the current university were most useful in helping to meet his or her needs in college:

1. The Veterans Liaison is critical to his or her success,

2. A veteran relies upon his or her own resources and resilience, and
3. The university was very flexible with the payment schedule from the G.I. Bill.

Table 4 below shows the ranking by the participants of the themes for research question number three. A value of one denotes a theme of highest importance, and a value of 10 is the lowest importance to the participants.

**Table 4**

***Participant Ranking of Research Question 3 Themes***

What college resources do military veterans find useful in meeting their needs in college?	Rick	Tanya	Jimmy	Kyle	Tate	Paul	Craig	Matt	Max	Tom	Jack
The on-campus veterans representative	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		1
On-campus counseling services	10	8	3			9			8		9
Allowance for delayed GI Bill funding	5	1	4		2	7		2	2		10
More flexible application deadline	3	3	5	2	4	6			3		8
Spring semester admission	4	5	6		5	4	2		4		7
The veteran's own resilience	2	4	2	3	7	2	3	4	10		2
Critical mass of adult students	7	6	7	4	6	5	4	3	5		5
Chancellor is committed to veterans	6	9	8		8	3			7		4
Online classes	8	10	10	5	3	8		9	6		3
Student academic success program	9	7	9			10			9		6

The value of Dave, the veteran's liaison and the flexibility of the application and enrollment start terms is expected considering the quotes documented above, and I have gone into detail to describe those themes. The assertion that participants feel they must rely on their own resources caused me to re-examine every interview transcript to determine what I had missed in analysis. This finding is actually a negative, or contradiction to the question that has intent to find what college resources are used by the veterans to meet their needs. The participants rather chose this opportunity to highlight what the university administration is not doing, or where it fails. Another surprise was for the participants to declare the school to be flexible with the timing of payment from the G.I. Bill. One participant had expressed satisfaction that the university administration took it on faith that the payments for tuition and fees would be forthcoming from the Veterans Administration even though the paperwork was in a state of flux. Considering the financial angst presented by several participants in the interviews, I was not expecting this theme to be selected as one of the top three resources they identified as being helpful in meeting veteran needs in college.

### **Personal Resourcefulness and Resilience**

I began to search for the indication that the participants felt they were reliant of their personal resources to navigate through the various barriers to college completion. I only needed re-examination of the very first interview with Rick to identify the trend. I asked Rick which classes, activities, or programs he liked on campus that were particularly helpful to veterans. He quickly responded that there are none. In Rick's words:

Umm, well, hopefully in some of your follow up interviews you can get a little bit more information about it, but to my knowledge there's nothing, there's no transition program or special orientation, or an on campus support group, or I don't know if that is the right word for it. There is uh. I'm sorry, we're assigned faculty members who are assigned to us to help us with any issues we may have. I never engaged him, but I don't know if that has to do with, like feeling lonely, or I'm having trouble registering in this class, what do I do? But I would get emails from him every once in a while, but, I never really took advantage I guess . . .

I had followed his line of response by asking again if there was anything pointedly helpful. Rick responded with:

I can't think of anything because the guys that I know, we don't really want the . . . umm we don't really want to be separated or treated differently or anything to that effect, so I . . . like . . . I can't honestly really think of anything. Sorry.

In re-reading Rick's interview, he revealed a trend where the participants lamented that the university administration does nothing for them, yet in the same line of reasoning, they do not want to be singled out and treated differently. Again, this may be linked to the desire to shed the military identity within which they may be trapped.

During our discussion, Rick identified a university initiative that had intent by administration to connect the military veteran students with a faculty member for mentorship and monitoring. Rick said he did not take advantage of the solicitation and I thought this was a choice. Upon further examination, I realize there is a definite trend. Many participants mentioned the faculty mentorship initiative and pointed out the failure and insincerity that feeds their feeling that they must rely upon their personal shrewdness and resources.

Jack described contact from a faculty or staff members in his senior year. He described an effort that was too late in his college career to make a difference. In Jack's words:

My senior year they started some kind of mentorship program? Where a member of the staff would try to get in contact with the veterans and kind of guide them along, but I never took part in that. I was too focused on my work. I could see the light in the end of the tunnel after so many years. So, I didn't want anything to derail me from that.

I asked Jack to describe how the university administration presented the initiative, and he said:

Email. They sent emails to me. I think it was three or four different people who said they were my sponsor, so I didn't know how many sponsors I had. Umm, it was kind of confusing too, so that's why I never took part in it.

There appeared to be no organization to the effort and Jack decided he was not going to let it become part of his mission to graduate.

Craig had very strong feelings about the email mentorship campaign and other communication to veterans. I asked him to describe his thoughts, and he said:

What's going to happen is they're going to do a half assed job, they're going to send out an email, nobody is going to respond and nothing is going to happen. And that void is still left unfilled. It's got to be more than that. It's got to be like a reaching out. I'll respond to these emails sometimes. A couple of semesters ago I responded to a couple of these emails and I didn't hear back. So I felt like, why even write back when they're not going to write back?

Craig was very frustrated over these points in the interview and expressed that the contact from university personnel held no sincerity or intent for results. Throughout the

conduction of the interviews, I achieved a good sense that the participants had acquired an excellent filter to decipher what was real or contrived.

Tate described the same feeling when he was contacted during the initiative. Tate is the participant who is working on his second bachelor's degree after many years in the Army Special Forces. He has an excellent filter for determining reality. Tate described the mentorship initiate contact as follows:

When I got here they had this program, I can't remember the name of it, where a senior faculty member, in my case a Dr. of Biology, reached out to a veteran over email to make sure everything was going OK and things like that. I didn't particularly find it helpful, or relevant. It was sort of a casual "hey, is everything going ok?" It didn't . . ., impersonal I guess is a good word for it.

I followed by asking if it was indeed a mentorship program and if he was ever contacted more than once or if he followed up. His response was:

I knew what I was getting into and knew what I was doing, it didn't really appeal to me. I think you are automatically signed up for it and you can sort of, after the person has made contact, you can say hey I'm OK and you don't have to make contact again. Umm, but, yeah personally I didn't think that program was great. Now, I can certainly see other people benefiting from it, so I don't know if there is any kind of outcome study with it, so . . .

Tate never heard anything more from the initiative and did not know what was the intent or result.

The email campaign to contact and mentor veterans may have had good intentions, but it appears to be poorly conceived and there was no plan for follow up or next steps. Most of the participants stated they thought they would be contacted again, yet they never heard anything further.



Jimmy was very open in stating he feels totally left to his own resources. He stated that he felt there was no benefit or advantage to being a military veteran in the higher education system other than tuition payments from the G.I. Bill. In Jimmy's words:

I honestly don't see the benefit of actually being a military veteran and being in the education system. I don't understand the, the benefit is the government pays for the education. That is the benefit. No other benefits. I don't understand. People make it seem as if being in the military is, I don't know, some sort of, I don't know, I can't really talk about it, talk about their side . . . They think it's something that it's not basically, and I just don't see the benefit outside of the government paying for your school, being a veteran in the education systems. Sheesh. I mean, you've got a trade, you know it. Some of the stuff I learned was straight boring. But, you had to know it to do the job right, and I really don't see the benefit of being a military veteran in the education system. You still have to do all that stuff yourself.

Jimmy was of the opinion that military benefits were over-exaggerated and he was adamant that everything he accomplished at the university was accomplished without assistance from the administration. As referenced above, Jimmy had one trusted source of information in Dave, the VA representative, but other than that relationship, he felt he was reliant on his own resources.

Tanya became emotional over the issue when she told me she felt "used" by the university as if she was merely a tool in an overall marketing plan. My interview with Tanya was in April, 2011. On September 12, 2011, the university had a press release regarding the institution being selected to the top 15% of schools earning the designation of being military friendly (G.I. Jobs, 2011). In the April interview, Tanya expressed the opinion that the university was trying to gain a reputation as a military friendly school at

the expense of the veterans. I had asked her if she wanted to say something on behalf of herself and other veterans. In Tanya's words:

The only thing extra I can say is, it would be awesome if (the university) would implement some kind of, aside from SVA, some kind of program that shows some kind of appreciation towards the veterans on campus . . . that would be amazing. Umm, I'm about to cry right now . . . (long pause). Sorry. I think it's a little upsetting because, you know we feel like we go out and fight for these people, we fight for our country. Some of us actually go overseas and see crazy stuff, and then to be back here in the states and feel like it's totally not appreciated. Umm. It's a little bit irritating to . . . to get emails and see things on the news.. Oh (the university) is really getting a huge rush of veterans at their school. It just really kinda sucks to be that person that's like yeah I'm a veteran, I'm helping their numbers, like we're giving them something, but they're not giving us back anything. Ummm. Like I mentioned before, I did some research on my own of military friendly colleges around the country. And umm, I was jealous, you know, because there's a college out in San Diego. They have like an entire section, it's like a monument for the veterans there at their school. Past and present. This university doesn't have anything. Period. There's not even like a dinner, a banquet, not even a freaking club. There's not even faculty members who are willing to assist us. You know. It's a little annoying. Like I said . . . almost have a "how dare they" attitude towards it. They get recognition for something we are bringing them, but then we don't get anything back.

Tanya's words and opinion, mixed with the emotion, are very powerful and represent a feeling of despair that must not be overlooked. As referenced in the review of literature, a study by Savage and Smith (2007) that concentrated on Air Force master sergeants of the United States Air Force and their efforts to achieve an associate's degree, focused upon the value of hope. The study determined that achievement of the college degree was directly dependent upon the level of hope or goal orientation of the student. A major part of the result is the institutional effort in maintaining a positive outlook and hope for the student. At the time of the interview, Tanya was only four months into her

first semester at the university, and she had already developed a level of despair with the university with her sense that she was merely a tool for propaganda and publicity.

Finally, Kyle lamented that there was not sufficient resources to help the veterans who did not realize they needed help. This is important in a discussion of analyzed needs, which are needs revealed by a third party through interaction with the constituents being examined. Kyle relayed a feeling that a veteran attending the university was on his or her own when it came to dealing with the lingering effects of military service and war. As Kyle stated:

I know the university is really trying to build the reputation of Veteran friendly and all that, I mean I think it would only help if there was like an office or a few people that ran all that kind of stuff. Because, you know, looking back on this I realize there were a lot more issues than I was . . . like when I got home from Iraq, the first thing everyone was like, hey man, you need to take some time off from work. I'm like fine, it's no big deal, whatever, I'm good. But then, looking back on it I realize I had a lot more issues than I was realizing at the time. You don't really know that until later on down the road. And, in that regard, I think a lot of times there are needs that are met or not met that you don't really realize because you don't think about them until later on. Umm, but I think if there was an office or staff that . . ., basically more people like Dave. If there were like two or three of them and there was an office or something like they have a writing center. If there was something like a VA office of something where they just handled everything. If you had a question, you just talk with them. Everything could run through them as far as the veteran's stuff goes, any issues you've got. I think it could only help where the campus wants to go.

Much of what Kyle stated fits into the transition theory of Nancy Schlossberg, which I will discuss in chapter five. He is referencing what happens when a military veteran leaves a very structured society defined by the military and then quickly comes to a college campus and attempts to conform to the norms of the new society with very little adjustment time or assistance from university administration.

### **University Flexibility for Payment of Military Benefits**

As stated above, I was not expecting the participants to judge collectively the university administration as flexible concerning delaying payment of tuition and fees because of delays from the federal government.

My interview with Ethan was early in the lineup and he started by describing his difficulty with payments from the G.I. Bill and inflexibility by university administration. I asked Ethan to describe his experience in college and he immediately described his trouble with the G.I. Bill and the university payment schedule. In Ethan's words:

I began school here at (the university) in Fall of 2009, and initially I was going for my nursing degree and did not think I could pass chemistry, at least not without a book, because there was so many flaws with the Post-9/11 GI Bill when it first started. Umm . . . , as far as getting the funding going. I guess getting the ball rolling. Whatever gears I had to grind at the VA to get started. I basically paid everything out of pocket the first 6 months.

Ethan went on to say:

I eventually was reimbursed for it, but that first 6 months was really rough. Umm, and you know another thing is, with the military you know, recruiters really try to sell the idea that, yeah you can go to college while you're in, but the reality is, you are too busy either, (a) doing your job, or (b) deploying that you never have time for it. And, it's my opinion that they prefer to keep you dumb so they can keep you in.

Ethan firmly laid the blame on the federal government by indicating the military administration prefers to keep the knowledge level of exit processes to a minimum.

However, there is an underlying tone that the university did not provide assistance in the transition.

After the participants ranked the themes in terms of importance to them, I realized several had stated that the university was very good with working with them to resolve payment problems. As expected, the veterans representative, Dave, was given credit several times. Tom is quoted earlier in this chapter as stating:

No, Dave here at (the university), so far I've had limited face to face so far with him, but he's REALLY good. He stays on top of the stuff. And I've heard from other people (at other schools) that is kind of hit or miss, and that's directly due to the VA rep at your school. And, fortunately here at (the university), Dave's done a really, really good job. He stays on top of top of it. You know, he'll send you the paperwork.

As indicated in the literature review, some veterans enrolled in college are being threatened with eviction, and others are facing tuition bills for an upcoming semester while still waiting for the prior semester to be paid (Nelson, 2009). In addition, a recent poll of students indicates 10% of veterans enrolled at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis will not be returning for the next semester because of financial strain. This problem is not one that veterans at the current university are facing.

### **Summary: Research Question 3**

The findings from research question three reveal five primary themes. First, the participants find great value in the veterans liaison. The existence of this position occupied by a very competent person seems to supplant many other needs that veterans on campus may have. This revelation may be the most important finding of the research since the service provided by Dave appears to ameliorate most concerns the participants may have. Second, military veterans attending this university appreciate the later than normal application deadline and the ability to begin matriculation in the spring semester.

This is not a policy that was designed with veterans in mind, but by default the policy has caused several of the participants to select this university over other offerings. Thirdly, another default that helps veterans feel comfortable is the large population of adult students. The other adult students may not have the experience of the rigors of the military, but they can relate in terms of life obligations and the urgency of degree completion and moving onward with life. Fourth, the participants found the university administration to be willing to work with them to overcome payment problems from the VA that has caused enrollment difficulty at other universities. Finally, the apparent contradiction in this section is what the university does not provide and the opinions the veterans possess about that fact. Many of the participants opined that they relied upon their own resilience and ability to achieve in college. They felt that the university administration desired the school to be labeled as a military friendly institution, but the effort was fundamentally window-dressing at the expense of the veterans. On the day that the press release appeared that announced the university as a member of the top 15% of military-friendly institutions, I received several emails from participants. The emails stated: “Nobody asked me.”

A major point I would like to draw from research question three is the value of a competent veteran’s representative on campus. When this position is covered in the manner performed like Dave, it appears that the lack or shortcoming of many other resources or programs for veterans may be overlooked by the veterans and the college experience is deemed to be satisfactory.

#### **Research Question 4**

*How do military veterans describe unmet needs in college?*

Participant responses to questions 2, 7, 8, and 11 informed findings related to this research question to describe the unmet needs the participants perceived while attending college. Many of the unmet needs have already been described and answered in the above sections. However, I will iterate here and go into more depth.

#### **The Need for the SVA**

A very large need that is currently not met is the need for a viable and active SVA. There is a varied perception or level of need concerning the SVA since the participants span approximately 11 years of attendance at the university and their knowledge base of what used to exist differs greatly. However, research shows students need the ability to find familiarity within a group with which they can relate. Veterans can find assistance and support in non-role dependent and role-dependent environments (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). The non-role dependent support is usually found within the family and friends who see the person not as a soldier or student, but as a person close to them individually. This type of support is outside the scope of on-campus student affairs professionals. The role-dependent support is likely found in student organizations and campus programs. For the participants in this study, the SVA is clearly an organization that is needed to provide support. The failure of the SVA was caused by several circumstances beyond the control of the participants and was exacerbated by the loss of affiliation required by the university.

Several of the participants had first-hand experience in trying to maintain or revive the SVA and indicated a high level of frustration with the lack of leadership from other veterans and support from university administration. There is the need for an initiative from university administration to assist in the re-establishment of the SVA. With the organization in a status of inactivity, it may be overwhelming for many of the veterans to take the time from his or her busy life responsibilities to resurrect the SVA.

There is a level of hope amongst the participants that the SVA can again be a viable organization for his or her assistance. In my discussion with Ethan, he spoke of the organization as a barely surviving entity with meeting times that did not fit his needs. I asked him if he would consider the SVA a non-entity in terms of ability to meet his needs. Ethan's response was:

Yeah . . . I agree with that statement. It seems like it really didn't do much in the spring semester until toward the end of the semester and it seemed like they rushed to throw stuff together. I do know it's there and maybe with the increase in veterans coming here it will become more active hopefully.

I asked Ethan to clarify if he was in need of an organization separate from the rest of the student body, and he replied:

Yes. Because as far as people involved with the university itself, unless they are veterans themselves, it is kinda hard for them to really relate. I realize it's probably kind of an elitist attitude. I mean it's hard for someone who hasn't served to, you know, talk about it, you know. And sometimes it's the best thing for us to be able to talk to each other and work things out.



This statement from Ethan also appeared to underscore the importance of the VA representative at the university having military experience and the ability to relate to veteran's needs with first-hand experience.

When I was inquiring of Matt what he was expecting from the university, he spoke of being surprised there was not an active SVA to assist veterans with transition and adjustment. Matt described his feelings as follows:

I thought there'd be a more active vet population on the campus . . . I've heard about events, like maybe once a year, once a semester I hear about some kind of, umm, meeting or something where vets are getting together, but I haven't been able to get to those, but I thought maybe there would be something where we'd actually have more of a community, have something where we'd be able to hang out.

In my opinion, Matt is a very well-adjusted individual who had adjusted well to the campus, and also had an active family life. He still has the need for social interaction with other veterans with which he has shared experiences and the need for a vehicle for bonding.

Paul had been very active in his attempts to reestablish the SVA. He truly felt the want for a viable SVA organization to assist veterans with basic information needs and to be a type of clearing-house for the sharing of information amongst trusted colleagues. I asked Paul to describe the organization he would like to see, and he stated:

A student veterans association would be a great thing to have to bring people together to talk and share experiences. Plus somebody may know more about this program that is available or that program from the state or the federal government programs . . . to make sure everyone is getting what they earned and deserve. As far as retirement pay, combat . . ., I don't know . . . there are several types of pays you could be getting right now, or grants and stuff . . . Make sure everyone knows

about stuff. Because with the process of getting out of the military, you may miss a bunch of that. It is really overwhelming at the time of getting out. Have a time where you bring people that might have all kinds of different experiences and knowledge to help make sure you're taken care of.

Paul described an organization where the collective experience of the veterans is utilized for the benefit of all and not reliant upon a few university officials to disseminate the information. The SVA is seen by many participants as the self-help group that is greatly needed on campus.

### **A Veterans Center**

A majority of the participants spoke of the want for a veteran's center where they could go to have many needs satisfied at one location without being required to go from office to office. I must be careful to be sure the reader understands that a veteran's center is not actually an unmet need to itself, but rather representative of many unmet needs that it could address. Several veterans spoke of the "military runaround" during the interviews and they expressed dissatisfaction that the trend continued in college where they thought service to the student was part of the university mission. A description of a veteran's center, or one stop shopping location, was a common theme throughout the discussions. This is a place that will handle financial aid and hiatus status, should they be called to active duty, G.I. Bill benefits, and transfer credits from other colleges. It would also handle credit for military experience such as College Level Examination Program (CLEP), DANTES Subject Standardized Tests (DSST), and The American Council on Education's College Credit Recommendation Service, which connects workplace learning with higher education institutions by assisting adults to achieve academic credit

for courses completed outside the degree program. The following are the various facets a veteran's center may serve.

**Veterans Center for Administrative Assistance.** Kyle expressed strongly his personal need for a veteran's center where many issues could be discussed and solved in one location. The topic arose when I was asking him if the services provided by Dave were sufficient. Kyle stated that Dave performed a wonderful job, but there was a need beyond that particular job function. As Kyle stated:

I think if there was an office or staff that . . . , basically more people like Dave. If there were like two or three of them and there was an office or something like they have a writing center. If there was something like a VA office of something where they just handled everything. If you had a question, you just talk with them. Everything could run through them as far as the veteran's stuff goes, any issues you've got. I think it could only help where the campus wants to go.

Jack added to Kyle's description of a university veteran's center when he described a place that would also be staffed by people who cared for the well-being of veterans. The staff he is describing may be considered as fitting into the non-role dependent support category described above. As Jack described his thoughts:

I think there should be some kind of . . . maybe an agency in between the Marine Corp reserves and the school that, uhh, it's like accountability so to speak. Like when you get deployed, while you're going through your training, this agency or whatever, this group would take care of all your withdrawal stuff, all of your school issues, all your payment stuff. And when you're not deploying, when you're just a student here, but you're still in the reserves, your command can call and be like, how are they doing in school this semester? Is there anything we can provide and stuff like that? I mean . . . I always thought that would be kind of cool to have. If it could be implemented.

As I listened to Jack, I was unsure if he was speaking of a campus-based office or a regional office that acted as a go-between the university and the military. His response is that it could be either. In Jack's words:

Anything that can take the stress off that person, they can make it easier for them so they don't have to focus on, you know stuff in the rear, so they can focus on going over there and taking care of stuff. I think that would be helpful.

While Paul was talking about the SVA and his efforts to revive it, he hinted at a campus location veterans could go to for answers and assistance. I asked him to elaborate, and he said:

Make sure everyone knows about stuff. It is really overwhelming at the time of getting out. Have a time where you bring people that might have all kinds of different experiences and knowledge to help make sure you're taken care of. As far as the, if the school had someone to help figure out how to make the education we receive in the military be acceptable to here, you know, get credit for . . . that would be a great something to work on.

I wanted to be sure Paul was speaking of a veteran's center and I prompted for more description. He followed with:

A place or at least a group that meets. I guess if you had a room or something to set up for that it might would help be an anchor point where people know where to go. Just a small something like this room we're in now. Just some literature and some people with the same background.

Paul was not talking about an elaborate operation, but most definitely a place where veterans could go for assistance with many different needs and share information amongst each other.

A veteran's center may assist with admission and readmission issues that are unique to veterans. Several of the participants spoke of experiencing difficult processes and policies when they are forced to leave school to serve active duty per military orders and then return to the university. Primary to this problem was Rick, my first participant interviewed. As discussed in research question one about how military veterans experience college, Rick spoke about being an enrolled student and then serving again because he is a Reservist and was called to active duty. The following quotes are found earlier in this chapter, but they iterate the point. In Rick's words:

This all sort of goes back to my quest for readmission to (the university). I was a student there for three years after got out of the Navy, and I got activated to go abroad, and I had to completely withdraw from the university. And now I have to reapply to the university for readmission, and it isn't as arduous a process as applying as a freshman, but I just feel like . . . I feel like if I'm withdrawing because I got activated to go fight or whatever the word you want to use, . . . it should, uhh it should basically be pushing a button to put me back in the university. Like I just, . . . the whole time I'm doing this, I'm thinking I'm in a stack of a bunch of high school seniors who are applying for the first time, or people who, you know, maybe were students ten years ago and left because they could afford or something . . . to me it seemed like when I go to the readmission or admission page, and I pull up the application, it really should be as simple as, are you a previous (university) student who is returning from active military service. And if I click yes, that application should really be about three questions. What is your name, what is your student identification number, and are you in good academic standing with the university? And if I am. I feel like I should be admitted back to the university without any of the rigmarole that normal readmits have to go through. I didn't leave because I wanted to. I left because I got called back to fight.

The inference drawn from the above quote is that the regular Office of Admission is not equipped to handle situations that may be presented by a population of military veteran students. These students, on individual basis, can have several instances of entering and

leaving school for reasons beyond his or her control. A veteran's center that works with this on a regular basis may greatly enhance the satisfaction of the needs veterans have for admission and readmission when the military is the driving force behind the actions.

Tanya spoke of a similar experience even though she did not leave school the first time because of the military. Tanya first left school because she did not personally feel ready and subsequently joined the military. However, when she attempted to return to school following six years in the Marines, the experience with the school administration was not favorable. Tanya's words support the need for a veteran's center. As Tanya stated:

I didn't expect for the re-admittance portion to be as extreme as it was. You know, like I said, in the first application process they asked what have you been doing since . . . however long since you have been in school, etc. etc., and I filled out that information on the sheet, and then they want to know more. You know. And it's pretty much me repeating what I had filled out on the first uhh couple of sheets of information they want to know. As far as expecting stuff from the school, I think I expected more, I don't know if I want to say help? . . . The school? . . . Considering that now I'm a veteran, now I'm not just some person enrolling off the streets. Yeah, I think I just expected a little bit more from the school.

In my opinion, Tanya's experience is indicative of an administrative office and process that is unfamiliar with how to work with veterans since the veterans do not fit the typical undergraduate admissions situation. A veteran's center manned with personnel who deal exclusively with veterans would be better able to work with these unique situations and provide a higher level of service and satisfaction of the needs. Tanya also spoke of an aggravating experience now that she is re-enrolled in college and serving in the military reserves. She must travel 80 miles each month to perform drills in another city. Tanya

spoke with her professor about her service duties and it would require her to leave class early. She described the repercussions from this requirement as follows:

I'm in the reserves now. And, uh there's been 2 instances, instances already where I've had to leave my last class early to make it to my drill in Raleigh in time. And I know they have the tardy and absence policies and all that stuff set aside, and umm, I went ahead in the very beginning and let my professor know I was in the reserves, and I let him know way ahead of time that I would have to miss his class so I could get to my drill in time. I'm pretty sure he counted that absence towards me. You know, so I didn't think that was pretty cool, because it's a duty thing, you know. I don't have any other choice but to be there for the call to drill, you know.

Tanya was caught between her federal obligation as a military reservist and a university professor who does not give allowance for this required duty. A properly staffed veteran's center can act as a source of negotiation between faculty and the veterans who must fulfill their reservist obligations and create a uniform policy across campus to prevent military service from counting against class attendance. In earlier discussion regarding Tanya, I also hypothesized that she had suffered a communication problem with the Office of Financial Aid regarding her federal forms and eligibility for financial aid. A veteran's center can assist with these communication problems, or have a staff member who is a liaison for financial aid to handle directly the financial aid issues for veterans.

Max spoke about his knowledge of a veteran's task force that had been assembled on campus to examine veteran's issues. He stated that the task force had recognized a need to identify veterans earlier in the application process and the discussion of the development of a veteran's center was in the forefront. The veteran's center concept calls

for a stand-alone place that is strictly for veterans. Max opined that the development of such a center would face difficulty due to growing budget constraints. He also has concerns that it could isolate the veterans or provide traditional students with the idea that the veterans were special and must be segregated. This thought, in a manner, goes back to an opinion Kyle had provided when I had asked for confirmation of his thoughts on veteran's stigma. Kyle had indicated concerns about having special provisions and then to be singled out because of those provisions. Max's comments are very similar. As Max opined:

I know we want to set up a veterans center. A standalone place that is strictly for veterans. And that is obviously a budget and resource kind of issue. But, I think if we could do something like that, and hopefully it would be utilized . . . I don't know. I wouldn't be utilized that much by me. It doesn't seem like a place I would like to go and hang out. But, some people might use it . . . I worry, and Dave and I talked about this. It's great to want to do stuff. But, I also worry about the message it sends to everyone who is not a veteran. Like, you don't want to forget about your veterans, but you don't want to single them out and put them on a pedestal and make them seem they are some select group, because what does that tell everyone else who is a student? Who pays the same bills, you know. Does the same thing, the same coursework. So, I worry about that.

As I listened to Max speak about the veteran's center concept, I kept in mind that he was very connected to the university and had several student employment positions and was very in touch with how the administration was handling veteran's issues. Even though a veteran's center is not a place he personally feels he would utilize, Max realizes the need for a place for veterans to go for assistance and a sense of community.

**Veterans Center for Community and Camaraderie.** From my analysis of the interviews, a veteran's center would assist in satisfying the need for community and



camaraderie. A majority of the participants indicated a lack of community feel and they are left to their own devices to find other veterans with which to associate and obtain information. The need for camaraderie came to the surface and the want of a veteran's center was involved in all conversations.

I was speaking with Jack about how he was informed about services or programs designed to assist the veterans. Jack's response was:

A lot of the stuff that I found out about was through my own research. Umm, a lot of people . . ., they weren't university students, but they were in my unit, I would find myself telling them about stuff. And being like, why don't you call the VA people and ask them about this? Especially when it came to the GI Bill. And, not everyone who takes advantage of the GI Bill went to college. Some of them went to . . . I guess one guy went to the police academy and he found out he could do it that way. But, I don't want to say that, for me there was anything, there was any one place I could go to find out what benefits were available. It was just, if I found out about it, I would try to take advantage of it.

I asked Jack to expound upon what he meant when he spoke of a place he could go to find out what benefits were available, and if that place in his mind was on-campus. I asked him to be sure he was stating his opinion and not an idea derived from the interview. Jack said:

Yes! I'm just telling you what my experiences have were, and that would certainly help. Because we didn't have any central place we could look for this information.

His answer had a tone of excitement to it as if he was never before asked that question.

Matt did not speak directly of a potential veteran's center, but he spoke of broad concepts of needs that would be addressed by a veteran's center such as developing a

sense of community. In response to my question if there were any barriers to success for veterans on campus, Matt replied:

With the fact that this particular school is real commuter heavy and there are comments about the Ninja students that just come on campus to do their thing and leave. . . . I've heard it is not as good for student retention . . . And I feel like without some kind of social aspect, more designed for vets, such as an active Vets group, it's pretty easy for vets to become Ninja students because we're not on campus. We're in a different place in life, so . . . like the other student I was talking about, the other vet that I was in class with, umm, he only knows me and a couple other people on campus basically. Basically he only knows a few people from class, but he doesn't really hang out. He comes on, does his thing, and leaves. . . . I for whatever reason have tended to be a little bit more social, but part of it is also I live only a half mile from campus. So, if I want to come down to the school library to study, it's the way it is. But he lives half an hour away or something like that. So, yeah having a lack of . . . , of directed social interaction, I guess would be the only thing that would come close that I can think of.

Part of Matt's concerns may be addressed by an active SVA. However, the SVA is an organization that met on a periodic basis when it was viable and did not provide a sanctuary on campus for veterans physically to attend. A veteran's center is a physical location to which veterans can go to discuss needs with trained staff and find other veterans with which to converse.

In addition to her discussion of a veteran's center as a place for administrative assistance, Tanya described her vision of a veteran's center as a central meeting place and sanctuary for discussing personal issues with trusted colleagues. The discussion pertained to the lack of the SVA and interaction with the traditional student body. In response to my question of what she would like the university to create for veterans, Tanya answered:

Just somewhere to go. You know. You have a group of friends, a meeting place, every now and then to say, you know, hey I just got back from Iraq, I'm dealing

with this, I'm having a hard time integrating again into this community of students. You know, they don't get me, you know what I'm saying? But (the university) doesn't offer that . . . you know.

Tanya, like many others was describing the need for a place where a veteran could find other members of the university military community and share experiences and feel there were other people with which he or she could relate.

**Veterans Center for Better Marketing of Services.** Over the course of the interviews, I became aware of large differences between the participants in the utilization of campus programs, facilities, and off-campus resources. The difference was in relation to the knowledge level of the participant and the time frame in which they became interested in attending college. This perceived difference in the types of veterans attending the university will be discussed at the end of this chapter. However, it is overall apparent there is a fundamental lack of marketing by the current university of the services for veterans that already exist. Those veterans who could benefit most do not know of some services and programs available for veterans.

Craig relayed this concept through a metaphor to describe needs that are not being fulfilled. His primary focus was things available for all students that veterans do not know are also available to them. Craig told a story as follows:

There's a piece of me that is not being fulfilled that I feel could be fulfilled because I'm a veteran. To give a metaphor. I played intramural sports. I was a really good goalie. And I got picked for this team. The refs . . . this is the metaphor. The refs said you can't slide feet first if you are a goalie. But the charging player on the team that is trying to score can still kick at you. But if I'm sliding in head first, you're taking away an advantage I have, but you're still giving them an advantage. So, from the veteran's aspect. I'm not being afforded, because I did this, because I joined the military right after high school and I'm a

non-traditional, I'm lacking the sense of community, the esprit de corps, the camaraderie, all that kind of stuff. But, the veterans, there is a hole there. I feel I could be getting something like that, from the school, especially with an enrollment of 18,000 people. I don't know what the veteran population is, but, if I know veterans I feel like if there was something going on and it was marketed properly instead of just an email going out. . . . They would appreciate having something like that going on.

Craig described a sense that the veterans are kept in the dark about activities in which they may participate and they are left at an unfair disadvantage. Part of this disadvantage is from primary knowledge level of the way college society works that is unknown to some veterans who later attend college. They do not possess the cultural capital that would provide the fundamental knowledge, and the university does not take the extra step to relay the important message of available services to the veterans.

Kyle expounded upon the theme with his discussion of the variance of knowledge level for how to get things done that exists within the cohort of college going veterans. I had asked him if there was a possible problem with veterans not knowing of the available services. Kyle said:

Oh, I know that is a problem, because that goes all the way into the military and most people who are in don't know half the stuff that is available to them, don't know half the opportunities. A lot of it, a lot of the time it is one of those things where you just don't know what rocks to turn over. And let's say you start turning over rocks, you don't know that you have turned over all the rocks. And so, I think that referring to what the other guys are saying that it is probably right that they're . . . I have had instances where it kind of reaches the limits of what he can do. But, like I said, that is where more times than not he would know where to take the problem to get it rectified. Now that you mention that actually, I think that if there was one-stop-shopping, like the Wal-Mart of all stuff veteran . . . that there could be one office that handled it all, umm, some way of knowing that basically you have turned over all the rocks and you are taking full advantage of what you can, and umm, . . . Because nothing sucks worse than when you're going through stuff and then you realize years down the road that it could have

been an easier time, that it could have been . . . You know, you had a lot of missed opportunities.

Kyle is referring to veterans who simply do not know how to find the services and programs that already exist. They are overwhelmed with the transition and starting a new stage in their lives. There are already established services and programs of which they may take advantage and it is merely a matter of awareness to complete the connection. An on-campus veteran's center may assist the veterans to know, as Kyle stated, when they have turned over all the rocks.

Max is the older Navy veteran student who works as a student worker in close proximity to the on-campus veteran's representative. I asked him if, in his opinion as a veteran, if there were services on campus that go un-noticed by the veterans attending the university. Max responded:

Well, I think we could market things for veterans more. Like some sort of newsletter, which we are working on in my office. I went and looked at web sites for every public university in NC. And looked a bunch of schools that are on the GI Jobs best military friendly schools to see how they publicize themselves. Most have some kind of newsletter which goes out to all veterans. I would love to have something like that, and we're working on it. What the timeline is on that, I don't know. But I think it is helpful. I think to advertise, you know if people don't know about you, you may as well not be doing it. If you're spending money and time and people and resources to do something, and nobody knows about it, what is the point? You've wasted it. So maybe there is some of that. Umm, as far as adult student activities, not veteran oriented, I think we advertise them really well. I think there is always something going on and people just need to take advantage of it. But for veteran specific stuff? Yeah, I think advertising certainly couldn't hurt. And we are getting more veteran oriented stuff going on.

Max seems very well connected to the campus and the pulse of the veteran population and the campus-based initiatives for veterans. He opined that there are programs and

initiatives for veterans that are not relayed properly and may be under-utilized. If veterans are to be helped by campus initiatives, they must know they exist.

### **The Need to be Treated and Respected as an Adult**

The final major unmet need in college I perceived from the participant interviews is the desire to be treated and be respected as an adult. Many of the participants expressed frustration with being treated by faculty, staff, and administration with the same wide-sweeping hand that would attend to a traditional 18-year-old student coming right out of high school. They feel the training, experience, and age must be a factor considered when they attend class and interact with figures in positions of authority. Tom is 36 years old, and has flown very advanced war aircraft for drug eradication in the United States and war missions in Afghanistan. He has experience beyond the average college student.

When I asked Tom of his expectations of the university, he described:

Me being a combat veteran, I think I've done more, seen more, and had matured more than your on-average kid coming to college right out of high school. And now, understand, everything in life probably has a rite of passage. But, I mean . . . . . Respect these people and work with them. Like I said . . . , the transferring in of credits, they're going to take a military veteran who has lived and interacted with native peoples in a foreign land in stressful conditions, and they're going to do them the exact same way they're going to do any college freshman or sophomore. Like foreign language for example. A lot of reason for taking foreign language in school, to me, is the cultural aspect. Why does a combat veteran need to have two years of a foreign language? Just to fulfill a requirement. When you've experienced other cultures, you've seen it firsthand. You've seen the best and the worst of other cultures, if that makes sense?

I told Tom I understood and he continued with:

So, it's almost like regressing or reversing. Stepping back into time where, you know, I'm in my mid 30's, but yet I'm gonna have to take a course with a 20 year

old, which yes, it's a rite of passage, but also I've got the cultural aspect covered. From real world, hands on interaction with native peoples in their land. Soo . . . Uhh . . ., some of it is just, let's check a box, you know, make certain students out of high school to do this just to keep more faculty and staff on . . ., I just don't think that is applicable to military veterans. I'm not saying they're any different people, but they are in a different time and place in their life.

The end of Tom's explanation indicated he did not desire to be separated from the rest of the student body in terms of requirements, but he deserves a level of respect and deference. This may present a difficult problem for a faculty member to determine how to treat differently a military veteran to satisfy the need for respect while also maintaining needed process, control, and respect in the classroom. Perhaps if veterans have a proper sense of community on campus and level of camaraderie, classroom interaction without deference to experience may become more tolerable.

Nancy was very blunt with her opinion. I asked her if there was a particular aspect of the university she did not like. Nancy promptly stated:

I don't like being treated like an 18 year old. I was put on academic probation my first semester here. Part of that had to do with the whole PTSD BS, but, umm, once they put me on academic probation they treated me like a little 18-year-old. I had to go to a contract program, and I just found out they still have me on suspension because I didn't take a survey. Even though I had completed everything and my grades are back up to par. So, I don't enjoy being treated like an 18 year old.

Nancy was revealing that she had initial academic problems, but the university administration was possibly unaware of her condition imposed by military experience, and she was placed into a program designed for traditional students. I asked her if she felt

the faculty treated her differently and she stated it was a problem with administration and policy. As Nancy stated:

No, it's just the administration. A lot of that has to do they think I'm an 18 year old and they're going to treat me like an 18 year old. They don't have separate programs for adults.

I asked her if the university should consider development of different programs for adults and veterans. Nancy replied:

I think so. I think the veterans have a different outlook on how things need to be done, and we have a little bit better accountability, and the school doesn't take that into account when they are dealing with us. They just treat us like another kid.

My interview with Nancy was the shortest of all 13 interviews. She seemed to be on a clear mission to attend class and graduate and remove herself quickly from the campus environment. Nancy's answers were very to-the-point and short. Her interview was only my third and I had not yet developed a mental revision of my protocol nor a sense of how to chase down properly a statement which could reveal more valuable information.

Ultimately, Nancy had a clear message that she was no longer 18 years of age and had a need for adult treatment.

### **Participant Ranking of Themes**

Following in-depth analysis of the interviews, I perceived the predominant themes for unmet needs in college to be:

1. A need for a renewed SVA,
2. An on-campus veteran's center, and



3. To be treated as an adult.

Again, I found the themes to be altered upon member-checking. The participants chose:

1. Military experience and prior college credit must be counted,
2. The readmission process must be easier, and
3. An on-campus veteran's center is necessary.

The ranking of themes by the participants for research question four is displayed in Table 5 below. A rank of one is very important to the veteran, and a rank of 10 holds the least importance.

**Table 5**

***Participant Ranking of Research Question 4 Themes***

<b>How do military veterans describe their unmet needs in college?</b>	<b>Rick</b>	<b>Tanya</b>	<b>Jimmy</b>	<b>Kyle</b>	<b>Tate</b>	<b>Paul</b>	<b>Craig</b>	<b>Matt</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Tom</b>	<b>Jack</b>
A failed mentorship program	5	7	8		4	5			4		9
SVA, community and camaraderie	6	6	7	8	3	9	2	1	5		5
Other students need to be more sensitive	9	9	9	4		7		8	9		10
Better readmission after active duty	1	1	3	5		6			3		1
One stop on-campus veterans center	7	8	4	3		2	3	2	2		2
To be treated as an adult	4	4	2	1		3	4	4	8		8
Credit for experience and prior college	3	2	1	6	1	1		3	6		6
Better marketing of services	2	3	6	7	2	4	5	7	1		7
Veteran friendly housing	10	5	10	8		10		5	10		4
Counseling for personal issues	8	10	5	2	5	8	1	6	7		3

The common theme is the need for a veteran's center, which as I have explained, is not an unmet need to itself, but rather a representation of many unmet needs. I chose my themes based upon the number of times it was broached in an interview. I presented the participants with ten themes that arose, and they identified two I had not branded as primary unmet needs; the readmission process and credit for prior experience. It seems apparent that themes derived from some participants may become important to other participants when the overall themes are presented to the group. I do not know if this represents genuine opinion or a migration to themes from others once they are presented to the group.

The need for military experience and prior college credit to be counted was discussed in detail above for research question two and will not be repeated here. It is important to note that the participants ranked experience and class credits as a top-three theme. I give credence to the issue in discussion of research question two, but my judgment of the interviews did not place it as a primary need. As discussed above in this section for research question four, an on campus center may assist with credit for military experience and prior college attendance.

An easier readmission process was an unexpected top-three need chosen by the participants. In the first two interviews, both participants spoke greatly about difficulty in being readmitted to the university and working with various administrative offices. It seemed that a major theme was emerging; however the remaining 11 interviews did not produce discussion of the problem. Therefore, I determined that the readmission process merited discussion above in the research question one section where I discussed campus

interaction and classroom experience, but I did not weigh it heavily as an unmet need for the participants. Additional data gathering outside the scope of this project would be required to determine why participants who did not indicate they ever experienced withdrawal and readmission would find a better readmission process to be a prominent need.

#### **Summary: Research Question 4**

The findings from research question four reveal five primary themes. First, the participants described a need for an active Student Veterans Association, or SVA. Several had been attempting actively to reactivate the SVA, but experienced little success and lack of assistance from university administration. Other participants described his or her knowledge of the SVA and how it had been helpful to veterans in the past and indicated they would find true value in its existence. Secondly, participants described the need for an on-campus veteran's center. As I indicated earlier, the lack of a veterans center is not a need itself, rather indicative of a need for the services a veterans center would provide, such as administrative assistance, camaraderie and sense of community and marketing of services. Thirdly, the participants describe a need to be treated as an adult by school faculty and administration to lend credence to his or her experience and sacrifice. They express dissatisfaction with policies and procedures that require them to take certain actions that may be designed for traditional students as a rite of passage from high school to college. Fourth, the veterans desire college credit for military experience. Many participants had received extensive technical and cultural training and were dissatisfied that the effort held no value. Finally, the participants indicated a need for a better process

for readmission to the university when they are called to active military duty and subsequently released to return back to college. They described the need for a streamlined process that does not require them to reinvent their qualifications and history to resume academics.

## **Conclusion**

### **Three Types of Veterans in College**

Reference is made several times to different typologies of veterans who attend college. The first indication came with my interview with Matt. I had asked him about useful campus programs for veterans and he proceeded to categorize veterans by how they would find value in various services. As Matt stated:

There are things on study habits and stuff like that. Though I've never personally felt I needed that as much . . . , and . . . and . . . then there's the vets that are the sharp ones that are pursuing some higher . . . yeah . . . there's the guys who barely made it out of high school, and . . . or didn't make it out of high school and then went in and got out and thought, oh I've got this money and I should go to school. I don't typically interact with them. Then there are they guys who went, "Oh I want to pay for college, so I'm going to go in (military) and then I get to do this other thing afterwards." And those guys typically, I think, don't need some of the same help as the adult student group is offering with, "Oh here, this is how you can read, this is how you can study, this is how you can take notes." It's like well, we pretty much got that. Umm. So yeah, outside of that, there's just not a lot of ways that I guess that you can get plugged in, but not things specifically for vets.

In a subsequent interview, I asked Kyle to comment on what I had heard in an earlier interview, and he said:

. . . the guy you are talking about is absolutely right. You can tell there are people who did that where they realize there is no other way of getting to college and this is a good way to do it. Most of the people that I've had contact with though I guess have fallen into the second category where they probably were going to go

to school of some sort eventually and like “oh hey, free money yeah, I might as well do it” sort of thing.

The interview with Kyle confirmed two types of veterans in college. My second to last interview was with Paul. His experience and words added a third dimension to military veterans in college. As Paul described:

People just have a general idea that military people aren't as smart and maybe that is why they went into the military instead of college first. Or stereotypes that economically that is why they went in to the military. That it was the best economic option to go in. Which, for at least where I was, that wasn't the case for most people. The reason they went into the military wasn't because that was what everybody else was doing. They had real reasons why they were doing it. Not stereotypical reasons for doing it. Umm, people are really smart there. Not necessarily going in because they are dumb and they have to go into the military.

Paul had personally entered the military out of a sense of patriotism and the love of freedom that the United States represents. Paul had left a major university upon completion of his third year for pure desire to serve. As Paul stated:

The thing that was motivating me to go in was my desire of . . . love of freedom. I wasn't one of those guys who went in just for the flag, or just for America. Whereas, I loved the idea of freedom. And that is one of the greatest gifts we have. And that is what motivated me to leave college and go into the military and go to special forces, which their motto is “Free the Oppressed.”

Based upon the words of Matt, Kyle, and Paul, the three types of veterans in college I identified are:

1. Veterans who graduated from high school without a plan. They joined the military as a means to make a living or change in his or her life and subsequently found there is available money for college.

2. Veterans who joined the military with the goal of attending college in mind. They know the military provides college funding and the military is the vehicle to achieve the goal.
3. Veterans who joined the military out of sense of duty and patriotism. These veterans may already be attending college and place his or her education on hold to serve, or they serve with the knowledge that college is attainable, but not the primary purpose for joining the military.

It is indeed unwise to attempt to type-cast all veterans in college as there purely because the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill provides money for tuition.

### **Summary of Findings**

Many of the findings that answer the research questions have crossover between the questions and some themes are repeated. This is resultant of a military veteran's experience in college being driven by his or her quest to have needs met, the resources made available by the school administration and the government to meet those needs, and the revealing of what needs remain unmet after failed attempts or lack of adequate recourses.

The findings from research question one reveal several overarching themes in how military veterans experience college to be the following. Veterans often may have a before and after the military college experience. Several participants had commenced college as a traditional student to subsequently withdraw for various reasons and join the military. The result is he or she has a stronger opinion of his or her academic ability after military service than before and he or she is very focused on degree achievement.

Veterans without prior college experience still believe themselves to be better students after military service than if they had attempted college earlier. A large proponent of increased academic ability is the maturity level the participants state was instilled within them by the training, responsibilities, rigor, and regimentation found in military service. The desire to blend in and not call attention to themselves as prior military is a large part of the college experience described by the participants. They have concern about being singled out or identified as a person with potential social deviations or inadequacies, and thus, they tend to associate mostly amongst other veterans when they find each other and avoid the mainstream college life. The advanced age and life experiences of military veterans often result in a student with family and occupational responsibilities that coincide with college attendance and prevent campus interaction other than appearing in class. The lack of socialization and integration results in constructed communication barriers and, as a few participants described, a feeling of alienation.

The findings for research question two reveal four themes. Veterans at the university endeavor to seek anonymity on campus and not be identified as a prior or current member of the military. There is the desire to attend class and to perform well academically, and not be singled out from the rest of the student body. The participants expressed attempts to obtain credit for his or her prior college experience and military training. Some were successful, while most were not. This reveals an inconsistency in university policy or an unawareness of the proper way to achieve satisfaction of this need. Several of the participants spoke of attempts to revive the Student Veteran's Association or SVA. There is indication of lack of institutional support to assist the

veterans, which appears rooted in affiliation policies geared toward traditional student body organizations that do not suffer mass withdrawal of members at the hand of federal mandate. Finally, as indicated by the participants, veterans at the university look for transition assistance and do not find help. All but one interview revealed a person who came to the university immediately upon discharge from the military. They come to college with the assistance of the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, but they may not give themselves adequate adjustment time between military service and campus life.

The findings for research question three provided five main themes. The participants truly value Dave, the veteran's liaison. The service provided by the Dave was highly praised and garnered the absolute top ranking by the participants of all themes for all four research questions. It seems apparent that a very competent person in this position may ameliorate the campus experience of a military veteran even when accompanied by the lack of many other services. Second, military veterans attending this university appreciate the application deadline and the policy for spring admission. Several of the participants were released from military obligation in the fall of the year and the ability to begin school in the spring is most helpful. Thirdly, this university enrolls a large number of adult students. Most adult students may not have military experience, but they do have expanded life obligations, maturity, and a more established sense of urgency for degree completion with which veterans can relate. Fourth, the participants found the university administration willing to factor payment delays from the G.I. Bill and demonstrate leniency with enrollment policies. The literature showed this not to be the case at some other universities. Finally, the participants responded with



opinions of what services the university does not provide, or about which they are unaware. When indicating resources used to meet needs in college, many participants stated they relied upon his or her own resilience and ability to achieve in college. They opined that the university administration has more interest in the school being labeled as a military friendly institution than it is at actually providing services.

The findings for research question four provide five prominent themes. As stated before, several themes are in common across research questions. The participants described a need for an active SVA. Some veterans had attempted actively to reactivate the SVA, but encountered little success and lack of assistance from university administration. Other participants knew of the SVA and that it had been helpful to veterans in the past and stated it would be a useful entity to them. Secondly, participants described the need for an on-campus veteran's center. A veteran's center is itself not a need, but rather an indication of the need for the services a veteran's center may provide. Participants indicated the need for administrative assistance, camaraderie and sense of community and better marketing of available services. Third, the veterans voiced a need for treatment as an adult by school faculty and administration. They greatly dislike policies and procedures that group them with traditional students who most likely do not possess the same maturity and life experience. Fourth, the veterans seek college credit for military experience. Most participants had received extensive technical and cultural training and displayed frustration that his or her efforts often must be repeated to obtain college credit at the expense of the taxpayer. Finally, the participants described a need for

a better readmission process to the university when they are forced to leave college at the bequest of the military to serve a term of active duty.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter will review the purpose of the study and methods of research. It will also include a summary of the findings and a discussion of how conversation with the participants found them to conform to current theories, yet confound general conventional thought about military veterans in college. Also included is a discussion of implications for practice in higher education and future research.

The purpose of this study was to examine the needs of military veterans in higher education and determine how they experience college and attempt to have needs met, and what needs remain unsatisfied. The research questions are as follows:

1. How do military veterans experience college?
2. How do military veterans describe their attempts to have their needs met in college?
3. What college resources do military veterans find useful in meeting their needs in college?
4. How do military veterans describe unmet needs in college?

The methodology of the study is from the qualitative paradigm because I did not believe a quantitative approach would fully reveal the personal needs and feelings about those needs that are individual to each veteran that a qualitative approach allows. Many

studies of military veterans in college have used a quantitative approach with surveys to determine opinions, but a survey is not capable of asking further questions to greater define issues as they arise during the course of discussion.

The findings of this study include a number of significant points. First, veterans perceive themselves to be much more mature and goal focused compared to the traditional student body. They have a unique world view and foundation of experience that causes them to look at everyday college situations in a more serious light. Secondly, veterans request their experience and prior training to be given serious consideration for college credit when they attend or resume college. Many of the participants had endured extensive training and cultural experience and found that experience is not recognized upon entering college. More than a few pointed out that society pays twice for his or her education as a result. Third, veterans on this campus do not have a fulfilled sense of community. They enter college primarily as “loners” in an otherwise traditional student society. Veterans attend classes and associate with the traditional student body in the best manner allowable, but they tend to leave campus after class and continue their private lives without mixing or experiencing the full campus culture. Max is an anomaly in the participant group, in that he outwardly desired to experience college as best he could, but the remainder of the participants experience a level of alienation. Fourth, the veterans do not feel the university assists the population adequately in development and maintenance of a student veteran’s organization that may help them maintain a sense of community and camaraderie. Fifth, the participants expressed a need for the consolidated services that may be provided by an on-campus veterans center to assist them with the various

administrative facets of college. Lastly, the participants indicated that many programs and initiatives to assist veterans may be missing on campus, but the existence of a campus veteran's representative who understands the population and is a true champion and advocate may fill the gaps and compensate for the other university shortcomings.

Direct conversation with veterans who are attending or attended this university has revealed significant findings. A summary of these findings by research question may be found below.

### **Summary of Findings**

#### **Research Question 1**

*How do military veterans experience college?*

In this study, I examined how military veterans described his or her experience in college. The participants were all recipients of the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill and had experienced action in Iraq or Afghanistan, except for one who spent 23 years of service in submarine watercraft.

An unexpected finding was that many veterans in college who had enlisted in the military had prior college experience. Some entered the military after just a few months of college, and some joined as late as the senior year and postponed their college education. There is a wide variety of motivational factors that range from having nothing better to do than join the military, to not feeling college was a proper fit and the military would help with a sense of direction to joining for the honor of serving his or her nation and promoting freedom in the world.

Due to the rigors of the military and the sense of discipline, time management, and work ethic, all participants expressed belief that they are much more capable college students now than in their prior collegiate experience, or would have been if they had attended college before the military. The participants also claim a level of maturity beyond that of traditional students. The military implants a high level of responsibility given the life or death nature of the occupation and participants believe they view college more seriously than traditional students do. Second, coupled with better performance is the new level of maturity the participants claimed. Linked with the maturity level, however comes a degree of alienation because the veterans no longer fit with the traditional student body in terms of life priorities and needs. With the differences comes the need to blend in and attempt to be seen as a traditional student. This internal conflict of identity often causes veterans to avoid a perceived stigma when they are identified as a military veteran. Most take actions to avoid being identified as a veteran and facing the subsequent identity that accompanies veteran status. Finally, the interaction with other students, faculty and staff is mixed and may be attributed to the motivation to enter the military and either enter or return to college.

### **Research Question 2**

*How do military veterans describe their attempts to have their needs met in college?*

Veterans in this study sought anonymity on campus. They came to college with a wide variety of experiences and advanced level of maturity and expanded world-view that may be disseminated to other students. Yet, they mostly wish to remain anonymous and attend class as if they are traditional students. There is a desire to be left alone. But,

given the level of anonymity they seek, many of the participants want prior experience and world knowledge to count toward their degree, and many made active attempts to have that experience count, and failed.

Several of the participants worked actively to re-establish the student veterans association, or SVA, and expressed dissatisfaction in the results of the efforts. There is a general feeling that the university does not provide active support for the SVA and that little credence is given to efforts by veterans to establish organizations to assist in community and camaraderie. There is a great challenge presented with these findings to student services professionals and faculty to provide a proper mix of anonymity and special services for veterans. This is evident in the admission by Kyle that many veterans come to campus with the opinion that they are able to handle the challenges presented by college and reject assistance only to later discover that they truly need help and guidance. College student educators must make resources available and market them properly, yet be gentle in how these resources are delivered.

### **Research Question 3**

*What college resources do military veterans find useful in meeting their needs in college?*

The analysis of the participant interviews revealed five overarching themes to answer this question. The first theme is obvious. Each participant held glowing praise for the campus veterans representative who is the person responsible for assistance with G.I. Bill administrative business, although it became obvious that this person performs at a higher level than the job requires. Second, institutional policy that sets admission deadlines and start terms did fit well by default into the schedule of some of the

participants. Several participants indicated that they would have attended other institutions if the admission policy had been more favorable to their time frame of release from the military. The current university is the recipient of a number of veterans who attend simply because they were admitted while other universities would not admit them at the time or on the schedule they wanted to attend. The university also enrolls a large number of adult students, which helps a veteran to feel more at home with his or her environment and raises the comfort level. Fourth, the current university seems willing to take government delays for funding into account and give veterans the benefit of the doubt when enrolling without a definitive funding schedule from the Veteran's Administration. An example from the literature shows this lack of cooperation to be a source of withdrawal of veterans at some other universities (Nelson, 2009).

The surprise finding for research question three was the assertion by participants that one of their best resources for meeting needs in college was their own resourcefulness. There is indication that the university administration is seeking recognition as a military veteran friendly school at the expense of the experience of the veterans. Several participants expressed surprise when the university garnered a top 15% rating of veteran friendly schools by G.I. Jobs magazine. The comments I received were that my research interviews have been the only time anyone has been asked veterans' opinions about their experiences and needs.



**Research Question 4**

*How do military veterans describe their unmet needs in college?*

There are five primary themes for research question four. First, the participants described a need for an active student veterans association, or SVA. Tanya, Jack and Paul had been attempting to reactivate the SVA, but experienced little success and lack of assistance from university faculty and student services administration. Secondly, many participants expressed the need for an on-campus veteran's center, or rather the services that can be provided by such a center. As mentioned earlier, a veterans' center is not itself a need but rather indicative of a need for the services a veterans' center may provide, such as administrative assistance, camaraderie and sense of community and marketing of services. Thirdly, the participants desire treatment as adults by school faculty and administration to validate their experience and sacrifice. They simply do not like being viewed the same as an 18-year-old student directly out of high school when vying for services or consideration in classes. Fourth, the veterans desire college credit for military experience. The participants had endured extensive training and expressed satisfaction that those efforts afforded them little to no value. Finally, the participants have a want for better readmission processes to the university when they are called to active military duty and then attempt to return to college upon completion of service. They need updated processes that do not require them to reinvent their credentials and college record to continue their academic pursuits.

## **General Discussion and Overview**

### **The Veteran's Representative**

Upon completion of the participant interviews, I spoke with Dave, the on-campus veteran representative to obtain his view of veteran needs on campus. My first inquiry was if the university truly takes care of the veterans who are students. His response was that the intent is there and efforts are being made, but that the current stage could not be described as stellar. Dave described an initiative designed to make large improvements in the effort and make a noticeable change. The campus leadership has assembled a task force to study the issue of veterans on campus and has reached out to various offices that have a stake in the success of student veterans. The task force was divided into four subgroups to examine, (a) access, (b) outreach, (c) support services, and (d) academic services. At the time I spoke with Dave, a survey was being developed to inquire of the veterans about the success or failure of current services.

According to Dave, the veterans on campus numbered 250 in 2008 and grew to 400 in less than two years. Growth of veterans on campus is beginning to surge. I asked Dave about credit for experience when a veteran enrolls. He stated that the university awards six credit hours for any military veteran who has completed basic training, but that state policy requires a surcharge for transfer credits, which hurts veterans. Dave spoke of other initiatives such as special honor cords to be worn at graduation, a one-stop center for assistance to veterans, better social avenues to meet other veterans, and enhanced assistance with financial aid. The participants in this study indicated each of the aforementioned initiatives as an unmet need.

Dave stated that a large amount of feedback from veterans is the lack of information flow and an enhanced vehicle for disseminating information. He said the veterans must currently search the web site for the university to find him. The marketing of available services must be better. Dave does send mass emails, but he stated there is a need for a centralized comprehensive information resource and a better web site. He also spoke about the need for better education of the faculty about veteran issues and the value they bring to the classroom. According to Dave, the university administration is considering the establishment of training with each department to make veteran issues better known.

Lastly, Dave agreed with my analysis of three different types of veterans who attend the university. To repeat, the three types of veterans in college are:

1. Veterans who graduated from high school without a plan. They joined the military as a means to make a living or change in his or her life and subsequently found there is available money for college.
2. Veterans who joined the military with the goal of attending college in mind. They know the military provides college funding and the military is the vehicle to achieve the goal.
3. Veterans who joined the military out of sense of duty and patriotism. These veterans may already be attending college and place his or her education on hold to serve, or they serve with the knowledge that college is attainable, but not the primary purpose for joining the military.

Dave stated that a one size fits all approach to veterans on campus is not appropriate and the revised web site and information made available must cater to the diverse demand.

### **Knowles and Andragogy**

Andragogy refers to the study of the adult education process or the science of adult education (Knowles, 1984; Smith, 1996/1999). Malcolm Knowles promotes the concept of andragogy and builds it around four important assumptions about adult learners that separate them from child learners upon which traditional education is based.

The assumptions are:

1. **Self-Concept:** As a person matures, his or her concept of self moves from one of dependent personality to that of a self-directed human being.
2. **Experience:** As people mature, they accumulate experiences that become an aid to learning.
3. **Readiness to Learn:** As a person matures, his or her inclination to learn becomes more aligned with developmental tasks of social roles.
4. **Orientation to Learning:** As people mature, perspective of time changes from one of postponed application of the learned knowledge to immediate usage, and thus, the orientation toward learning moves from being subject-centered to problem-centered.

An emergent theme from the participant interviews is the self-perceived maturity level and desire for treatment as an adult. By virtue of the military experience, veterans are at a different stage in life than the traditional student body. When I read the transcripts of the interviews with my research participants, I see an aspect of each of the

assumptions of Andragogy proposed by Knowles. Each participant is very self-directed, which is evident in the frustration some expressed with being required to conform to the same processes and rules as traditional 18-year-old students.

When analyzed in terms of life experience as an aid to learning, most participants spoke of extensive training and discipline that has assisted them to be better students with greater focus. In several cases, this life experience placed the veteran in a position of conflict with a professor when it was apparent the veteran was very knowledgeable of the subject matter. In another case, such as Matt, his experience resulted in him being respected as a peer by professors and led to leading his own course in first aid. All participants declared they were ready to learn. The outward need for the veterans to find diversion in extracurricular activities or campus parties had been mostly left in the past even though some lamented the lack. The seriousness and readiness to learn at times created feelings of alienation, as expressed by Ethan. The overt urgency or participant's need to complete the college degree and move on with life may stand in the way of enjoyment of what college can offer outside the classroom. In terms of time perspective and application of knowledge, the participants were, as a group, problem and solution oriented with their degree attainment. There was much more focus on the collective value of the education rather than viewing college as individual classes through which to step, such as the example of Jack who grew up wanting to study computer science. When Jack realized he was not going to get adequate assistance from his faculty advisor in computer science, he switched to a Business curriculum, since his ultimate goal was a college degree and the ability to move forward in life.

The literature states that veterans in college are unique from traditional students, and the participant group proved to uphold the findings of a majority of study findings. In terms of andragogy, the participants fit the theory of Malcolm Knowles.

### **Tinto and Veteran Persistence**

Tinto (1990) determined that if an institution is to have a successful retention program, students must be sufficiently involved in the college campus. According to Tinto, successful retention programs, regardless of school type, student gender and race, are dependent upon the existence of a conscious effort to reach out and make contact with students to form personal bonds between students and the faculty. It is also vital for faculty-student contact to exist in various settings outside of the classroom. Tinto also states that the first year of college is critical in the integration of the student into the college campus to aid retention. This signifies that blending military veterans into the college culture and forming proper faculty-student bonds should, in theory, be valuable for successful retention and graduation.

All participants to this study, who had not already graduated, spoke adamantly of their intent to graduate regardless of the challenges before them. Granted, this self-selected group volunteered to assist my study because they see value in higher education for veterans. However, it is apparent from the interviews that there is persistence in the face of inadequate resources, lack of camaraderie, and failure of treatment as adults with great experience. The university administration made an attempt to connect student veterans with faculty and staff with a mentor program that was described by several participants as a feeble or failed attempt. Most of the participants spoke of abortive

attempts to have military experience or prior college credit transfer to the university. In spite of the above shortcomings, the veterans I interviewed appear to be successful at this university. I propose that the maturity level and problem centered viewpoint theorized by Malcolm Knowles and discussed above make a significant difference in the success of veterans on this campus. A large part of the success may be the level of hope instilled in the veterans through the service provided by the veterans representative, Dave. As stated earlier, many initiatives may be missing or inadequate, but if veterans perceive a sympathetic ear from their primary contact, many problems are moot.

### **Padilla's College as a Black Box**

Padilla (1999) described college as a black box with only two possible outcomes for each student. They graduate successfully or they leave the institution without achieving a degree. The black box is full of barriers or obstacles that a student must overcome. Those students who graduated figured out the way around the barriers and successfully navigated through the box to the point of graduation, and those who did not graduate were frustrated and blocked by the barriers. As stated earlier in chapter two, Padilla breaks the barriers to college completion into four segments:

1. Discontinuity—The difference between where a person came from and where they are.
2. Lack of nurturing—The lack of family support, lack of role models, and the lack of expectation.
3. Lack of presence on campus—Being socially isolated and a lack of important issues in the curriculum.

#### 4. Resources—The lack of money and financial aid.

When I examine the data, there are examples of all four barriers to success as described by Padilla. In terms of discontinuity, the veterans described a before-and-after military service view of college, and how best to accomplish the task. Many chose the military as a means to make a positive change in their lives. One participant, Jimmy, repeatedly expressed dismay that he was actually a college student given his life track before the military. For lack of nurturing, there is evidence of the lack of expectation. The military provides what many participants described as the “runaround,” and many did not expect college to be different. In a way, this may be an advantage for the university since some effort may be perceived as much more than it really is. Lack of presence on campus is the predominant theme. The lack of the Student Veterans Association and a physical location that veterans may view as their own haven on campus is a large concern and need expressed by the participants. Social isolation, as described by the participants, is occurring due to differences in maturity level, family commitments, and physical age difference with much of the student body. In terms of resources, there is a difference of opinion amongst the participants as to the effectiveness of the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill to satisfy their financial needs. A few displayed frustrations with living at a level of poverty, and other participants spoke of having, or not having, adequate funding and being able to enjoy a good level of life while attending college. However, this problem did not rank high when the participants were asked to rank the themes.

Overall, the university the participants in this study attend or attended, is assisting the participants enough to navigate successfully the barriers to success. Obviously more



initiatives and effort may be made to enhance the experience, but none of the participants indicated that the university purposely placed any barriers in the way or made it impossible to circumnavigate the barriers that exist.

### **Schlossberg's 4S's for Transition to College**

Entering the military is a large transition phase. Leaving the military and entering college is also a very large transition in the life of a veteran. According to DiRamio and Jarvis (2011), many veterans should consider a neutral period of up to six months between leaving the military and entering college. A majority of the participants in this study entered college immediately upon discharge from the military, and a few were repeatedly interchanging college attendance and military service. The transition may be harsh and the adjustment period was very short. Nancy Schlossberg (1984) developed the 4S model that details four factors that persuade a person's ability to cope with transition and succeed. The 4S's are, situation, self, support, and strategies.

**Situation.** The study participants endured a significant transition from leaving the military to entering college, and that experience is unique from the traditional student body. *Situation* may be defined in terms of the influence from, (a) what triggered the transitions, (b) the timing and if it is good or bad, (c) the amount of control one has over the transitions, (d) the duration of the change and whether it is permanent or temporary, (e) the role change required by the transition, (f) the familiarity with the type of change, (g) concurrent events in the life of the person experiencing change, and (h) if the person views the change as positive or negative.

If we compare a military veteran to a traditional college student, the definition of situation is very different. For the most part, a traditional student attending college was expecting the change and the timing is a natural rite of passage from high school to higher education. The duration of the change is expected fully to be four traditional years of college, there are relatively few concurrent changes, and the experience is planned to be positive. A military veteran however must deal with a wide variety of unknown factors. As evidenced by the interviews, many participants endured unexpected changes in timeline and delayed entrance to college. Several were in and out of college at the bequest of the military and had unknown completion dates due to the uncertainty. Primarily, the role change required by the transition is large. The participants left an extremely structured society with rules intended to preserve life, and then transitioned to a college atmosphere where many students possess no concept of the life or death conundrum that may exist in the military.

**Self.** All college students bring personal experiences that affect understanding and performance. Military veterans tend to possess added experiences that their traditional student classmates did not endure nor would be able to imagine. The participants in this study have all served actively in the military during a time of war, and most were witness to events that the average college student will never encounter in his or her lifetime. When discussing *self*, Schlossberg (1984) describes personal and demographic characteristics and psychological resources. The personal and demographic characteristics of veterans tend to mirror that of non-traditional students. As described in chapter two, non-traditional students usually possess four or more of the following high-

risk traits: first generation status, delayed entry, part-time attendance, off-campus employment, financial independence, dependents/single parenthood, and absence of high school diploma. Military veterans attempting to achieve a four-year college degree have a good chance of demonstrating four or more of the aforementioned traits. When those traits are coupled with the experience of war, there is a greater risk of collegiate failure.

Psychological resources come into play when the participants make the transition from a structured and depersonalizing experience and then become part of a college campus where individuality is stressed. Throughout the interviews, it was clear that the participants were prior members of an organization that is considered collectively more important than is each individual person. The classroom environment thrust veterans into the mode of acting and thinking about his or her personal goals and needs. Coping with traditional students who were never required to relinquish selfish thought may be a challenge. The coping mechanism is to combine blending in with isolationism, which may cause the veterans to seek support and camaraderie from each other. Therefore, there is a desire for the Student Veterans Association and the services that may be provided by a veteran's center.

**Support.** Schlossberg (1984) explains that the support an individual receives during a period of transition is often the key to success. The support may be found in friends, loved ones, or affinity groups to which a person belongs. As evidenced above, the participants are looking for support on campus. A few of the veterans with whom I spoke have made a concerted effort to become a part of the traditional student body and shed the military lifestyle, and they appear to be successful. A majority however, has not

mixed and leaves campus immediately after class to their lives because there is not a perceived system of support at the university. A large part of this perception may be tied to inadequate marketing of available services. There are programs and initiative available that some participants utilized and of which others had no awareness.

**Strategies.** Strategies pertain to each person's ability to recognize and change his or her relevant processes and coping responses (Schlossberg, 1984). The military veterans who participated in this study are all highly trained and adaptive individuals. These men and women have the innate ability to create strategies to have a successful college career. The resources that are currently made available by the university administration enhance the success of the efforts. The research findings in Chapter IV reveal a number of resources that the participants feel they require to assist them in their success strategies. Resources that will most likely assist military veterans who attend this university are (a) institutional support for the SVA, (b) an on-campus veteran's center, (c) better recognition of maturity, and (d) an enhanced readmission process when they are required to leave school to serve a tour of active military duty.

### **Program Planning**

A large part of the solution for providing proper services, experience, and programs for veterans may lie in program planning. At the time of the writing of this dissertation, the university administration is establishing itself as "veteran friendly." The evidence of success is in the university garnering a top 15% ranking in the United States by G.I. Jobs Magazine (2011). As I mentioned before, the day the rankings were released, several of the participants to this study contacted me to say they were never asked for

their opinion and do not know how such ranking could have been earned. My analysis of this issue leads to the need for the military veterans attending this university to be better included in the planning process as administrative programs and educational experiences are designed.

**Recommended program planning model.** Cervero and Wilson (1994) offer up three viewpoints on planning practice consisting of classical, naturalistic, and critical. The classical viewpoint is much centered upon the learner as if nothing else in the process mattered. Adult educators are merely the facilitators of the learning process since the learner actually must be the one to accomplish the learning. The educator purely helps the learner along in the process and the process begins when planners attempt to comprehend the needs of the learner and then design a program intended to meet those needs. The naturalistic viewpoint is one that views program planning as taking place in an organizational context in which things can at times get messy and chaotic. Politics play an important role since there is recognition that organizational leaders will have visions and agendas that can impede a program. The naturalistic viewpoint also recognizes context as valuable to the process. Each situation is different, and the planning process must be able to adapt to the varied contexts. The critical viewpoint requires the planner to have knowledge of social theory and the use of power to either support or suppress various groups. Education is used as a way to pass down knowledge to the next generation and it helps group members to find their voice in society and work toward a more just and fair society. It is with these three viewpoints in mind that I recommend the

following planning model that is primarily naturalistic with a small amount of critical viewpoint added to the mixture should be used at this university.

As I have mentioned in Chapter II, I find the program planning model of Brookfield (1986) to be the best representation of how a program should be assembled, carried out, and assessed. Brookfield prescribes the following general principles:

1. The public must be made aware of the training or program and the criteria that govern success and the needs deemed to be important.
2. Staff should be involved at all stages including needs assessment, evaluation of developmental needs, design of training exercises, and evaluation of progress.
3. Always be flexible and adaptable.
4. Use whatever best fits the needs and circumstances and do not attempt automatically to adapt another institution's model.
5. Do not expect perfection, but do expect to be criticized and to make mistakes along the way.
6. Do not let anyone other than direct stakeholders define the critical needs.

We must view program planning models in regard to how they would fit a person trying to assist military veterans navigate around the barriers to success when attending college. The above list by Brookfield places the needs, as determined by the veterans, to be most important and allows the planning group the opportunity to adapt and make changes to decisions as implementation occurs. Caffarella (2002) states that most former participants of a program will spread word of the successes to the public if a program is well

presented and useful to them. Even though I subscribe to Brookfield's model, there however are segments of other program planning models that I would incorporate into his model, or use to replace certain components. As mentioned earlier, Freire (1970) presents a model that is contextualized in the community and the larger political arena and focuses upon the oppressed. Brookfield tacitly allows the needs of the public to come through due to the highly collaborative process, but Freire focuses strongly upon researching the public's completely and close observations of the moments in life that may affect them. Freire is a proponent of becoming a part of the target learner public to understand better the needs.

Cervero and Wilson (1994) have much to add in the planning stage with their recommendations for negotiation with power holders and other stakeholders within the institutional context. They foment the understanding of the political process and ethical judgment making. This aspect may be critical in planning education and support programs for military veterans because of the mix of power shared by the veterans, school administrators, and the Veterans Administration at the federal level. The final ingredient in the program planning model involves aspects from Houle (1996). Houle looks at programming through the learner's eyes and he recognizes that education is based on the realities of human experience, and planned education is a complex of interacting elements and not merely a sequence of events. This gives the planner extreme latitude for adjustment when necessary.

In summary, the program planning at this university must be adaptive, and the veterans must be made aware of the intent and progress of the planning process. The

veterans who participated in this study have proven to be a very self-directed group of individuals who have definite needs on campus, but also want to be part of the solution.

### **Implications for Practice**

Even though qualitative research does not lend itself to generalizability to an entire population, the findings of this study may inform theory and practice. This study provides insight on the college experience of military veterans at a particular university. The study also reveals participant attempts to have his or her needs met, the actions taken by school administration to meet needs, and the needs that remain unmet. School administrators are vying for their colleges and universities to be viewed as a favorable environment for military veterans. A very large number of military veterans are being released from active duty. According to McBain (2008), nine out of every 10 enlisted service members entered the military without a bachelor's degree. When we couple that figure with the education benefits from the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, the scope of the potential number of veterans who will attend college becomes much clearer.

College and University administrators must be most vigilant to the number of qualified students who may be coming from the military and the level of service the school may be able to provide to this special population. The participants in this research indicated an overall satisfaction with the university experience, but there are unmet needs and factors that create pockets of isolation and alienation. The interviews revealed very strong opinions about what actions should be accomplished and marketed to assist them on the journey to a college diploma. The reader is again reminded that this is a self-



selected group of participants and there may be many more needs yet to be revealed by military veterans who do not choose to participate in research projects.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

There are several possibilities for future research that were exposed that are beyond the scope of this project. The interviews revealed a wealth of information and questions about personal identity, whether expressed, perceived, or assigned. The subject of “blending in” opened an entire layer to the participants that is beyond the scope of this research. An entire study may be conducted with the theories of Gee (2000) concerning the various identities to which a person may be subject. The matter of needing treatment as an adult and the elevated level of maturity that veterans possess may fit well into a research project that utilizes a theoretical lens based on Malcolm Knowles’ (1984) discussion of Andragogy. A majority of the participants spoke of being much more mature than the rest of the student body and resentment over treatment as if they were an 18-year-old student fresh out of high school. Both themes of identity and Andragogy in military veterans have high potential and merit.

### **Conclusion**

Veterans of the United States military are coming to college at an increasing rate, and college and university administrators are positioning the schools to be favorable to those veterans. The veterans come to college with an expanded repertoire of experiences and needs that go beyond those of traditional students.

Through in-depth interviews with 13 men and women who have served in four branches of the United States military, I derived an understanding of the college

experience of military veterans and the group's met and unmet needs. As indicated earlier, almost all prior research regarding veterans in college has focused upon injuries, psychological maladies, and failure to adjust to society. Since I began writing this paper 18 months ago, a growing number of publications and research papers have become focused upon veterans and the college experience. Veterans in college as a topic of research is gaining wide interest and this particular paper should add to the mounting information available to inform college and university administrators who seek for their institution to be a better experience for veterans. Regardless of my preconceptions at the beginning of this project and adjustments made along the way, the theories of Knowles (1984), Tinto (1993), Padilla (1999), and Schlossberg (1984), provided a solid foundation for this researcher to examine the needs of military veterans in college.

The participants in this study graciously revealed much about their internal feeling about college and the way the current university serves or did not serve them. The knowledge gained from this research is from the experience of veterans at one university and may or may not be applicable to all other situations. However, I purport that the discussions contained within reveal valuable information for how a college or university can align itself to be a satisfying experience for a military veteran.

Veterans in college, for the most part, do not desire to be identified as veterans. However, they desire special consideration. This provides a delicate tipping point for administrators for how to develop curriculum and programs that meet both needs of anonymity and special consideration. The university in this study does provide a wealth of programs and opportunities for veterans. The veterans are largely unaware of those

opportunities. Programs and initiatives have no value if the conduit for messaging is clogged or non-existent. When school administrators make special efforts to serve veterans, they need to make it known to the veterans directly and not rely upon outside publications to spread the news.

Veterans need a place on campus to meet other veterans. Many participants spoke of the need for camaraderie and familiarity with an affinity group. Again, this is a delicate task of balance for school administration between isolation and integration on campus of veterans. I contend that a place to associate with other veterans for a sense of community will promote a level of cross community interaction on campus. A veteran may venture beyond his or her boundaries when he or she feels comfortable on campus.

Ultimately, I must give credence to the campus veteran's representative I have identified as Dave. Dave is the bond who has kept the military veterans on this university campus informed and aware, and has provided a sympathetic ear when needed. He has gone well beyond the boundaries of his job description and the veterans I spoke with told me he cares. Dave is an example that if a college or university has very little resources to serve veterans, hire a veteran's representative who has military experience, has the ability to converse, and truly cares about his or her compatriots.

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**APPENDIX A****EMAIL SENT TO PARTICIPANTS**

Dear (University) Student,

My name is Patrick Murphy and I am a PhD in Higher Education student at UNC Greensboro. I also serve as the financial aid director at Elon University. My dissertation interest is to study the college experience of military veterans who have completed their time in the military and subsequently enrolled at UNCG as a full-time student. The goal of my research is to provide college and university administrators at institutions across the United States with insight into veteran's needs, and how better to serve military veterans who seek a quality college education with a satisfying experience. The Office of Veteran Services at UNCG provided me the names and email address of students who are attending or attended UNCG with G.I. Bill benefits. *Provided you are actually a military veteran and not the dependent or spouse of a veteran*, my project is designed to ask you, through a one-on-one interview, to discuss specifically your experience as a student at UNCG, your interaction with faculty and other students, programs that are planned to assist veterans, and possible changes you would recommend and/or desire. The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at UNC Greensboro has reviewed and approved this project. I am attaching the informed consent materials for you to have and I will bring a copy for you to sign at the time of the interview should you agree to participate.

Thank you for considering participation in this study. As I stated, I wish to collect my data through direct interview with you that will be approximately 30 - 40 minutes in length. The pool of study participants are all military veterans who are attending, have attended, or graduated from UNC Greensboro. All information that you may provide will be used only for the purposes of this study and you will not be identified by name at any time. You will receive a written transcript of the interview and will be given the opportunity to correct or clarify anything that you feel is not correct, or were misunderstood. Again, please accept my thanks for your consideration and participation in this project. If you agree to participate, please respond to this email. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at (336) 278-7637 or at [murphyp@elon.edu](mailto:murphyp@elon.edu).

Sincerely,

M. Patrick Murphy  
UNCG PhD Student



**APPENDIX B**

**INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

Interviewer: Patrick Murphy

Interviewee: “Jerry,” a military veteran who is attending, or attended, or graduated from UNC Greensboro.

Interview Structure: This interview will be semi-structured with a set list of questions which can be omitted or revised as the interview progresses.

Pre-Interview Issues: “Let’s meet in a quiet, neutral place of your choosing.”  
 “Do you voluntarily agree to participate in this interview?”  
 “Do you agree to have this interview recorded for clarity and accuracy?”  
 “Are there any questions I can answer before we begin?”

At Time of Interview: Place digital recording device on table between interviewer and participant. The recording device will be pre-tested and extra batteries will be present.

Script: Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today. I am interviewing you today as part of my PhD research on military veterans and higher education. Your identity will not be revealed in the transcription. The audio recording of this interview is for my use only and will be kept in a secure place during the period of analysis. It will be erased upon completion of the project. I have chosen to study how colleges and universities are prepared to serve military veterans who are entering college following completion of their military service. I wish for you to feel free to tell me exactly what you think and feel and not what you may think that I want to hear just for the purposes of my project.

Interview:

1. Please tell me about yourself and what lead you to enter the military and then being enrolled in college? (prompt for family background and education experience)
2. Please tell me about what you expected of your school before you enrolled.
3. Please tell me about your experience(s) in the classroom.
4. Please tell me about your interaction with other students.
5. Were any programs or classes offered by UNCG especially helpful to you?

6. Which programs and classes did you like, and why?
7. Which programs and classes did you not like, and why?
8. Are there any programs or classes or planned experiences that you would like to see created?
9. In what out of class activities do you/ did you participate in on campus?
10. What experiences did you have on campus that you feel were a direct result of you being a military veteran?
11. Are there any barriers for military veterans at your school that caused any of your needs to remain unmet?

Closing: Is there anything about your college experience that I have not asked you about that you feel is important for others to know?

Thank you very much for your time and openness.

## APPENDIX C

### RESEARCH MATRIX

<b>My Research Questions</b>	<b>Why I want to know this</b>	<b>Needed Data</b>	<b>Where do I find the Data</b>	<b>How do I get Access</b>	<b>Interview Questions</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
1. How do military veterans experience college?	I want to know directly what veterans think about their college experience. Go beyond what “experts” say they feel.	Semi-structured Interview	Veterans attending, or who have graduated from college and also took advantage of VA benefits.	Approval from UNCG IRB Board to conduct interviews. A contact at UNCG knows a significant number of veterans and can provide me with contact information for snowball effect to acquire participants.	1,2,3,4,6,7,10	April 2011 to July 2011
2. How do military veterans describe their attempts to have their needs met?	I want to know what available tools and/or personal traits veterans used to make college work for them.	Semi-structured Interview	Veterans attending, or who have graduated from college and also took advantage of VA benefits.	Approval from UNCG IRB Board to conduct interviews. A contact at UNCG knows a significant number of veterans and can provide me with contact information for snowball effect to acquire participants.	2,8,9,11	April 2011 to July 2011
3. What college resources do military veterans find useful in meeting their needs?	This should be the keys to a roadmap for developing a veteran friendly campus.	Semi-structured Interview	Veterans attending, or who have graduated from college and also took advantage of VA benefits.	Approval from UNCG IRB Board to conduct interviews. A contact at UNCG knows a significant number of veterans and can provide me with contact information for snowball effect to acquire participants.	5,6,9	April 2011 to July 2011

<b>My Research Questions</b>	<b>Why I want to know this</b>	<b>Needed Data</b>	<b>Where do I find the Data</b>	<b>How do I get Access</b>	<b>Interview Questions</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
4. How do military veterans describe any unmet needs?	This should inform what actions colleges and universities need to immediately consider in creating a veteran friendly campus.	Semi-structured Interview	Veterans attending, or who have graduated from college and also took advantage of VA benefits.	Approval from UNCG IRB Board to conduct interviews. A contact at UNCG knows a significant number of veterans and can provide me with contact information for snowball effect to acquire participants.	2,7,8,11	April 2011 - July 2011