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Determining the Specific Transition Needs of Military and Veteran Students (MVS), A Qualitative/Mixed Methods Study

Donald Accamando

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DETERMINING THE SPECIFIC TRANSITION NEEDS OF MILITARY AND
VETERAN STUDENTS (MVS), A QUALITATIVE/MIXED METHODS STUDY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Education

By

Donald M. Accamando

May 2017

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2017

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VETERAN STUDENTS (MVS), A QUALITATIVE/MIXED METHODS STUDY

By

Donald M. Accamando

Approved March 13, 2017

Dr. Connie Moss
Chair, Department of Educational
Leadership,
Duquesne University School of Education
(Committee Chair)

Dr. James Schreiber
Professor,
Duquesne University School of Nursing
(Committee Member)

Dr. Joseph Werlinich
Professor Emeritus,
University of Pittsburgh School of
Education
(Committee Member)

ABSTRACT

DETERMINING THE SPECIFIC TRANSITION NEEDS OF MILITARY AND VETERAN STUDENTS (MVS), A QUALITATIVE/MIXED METHODS STUDY

By

Donald M. Accamando

May 2017

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Connie Moss

A number of challenges await military and veteran students (MVS) as they make their way to college campuses. These non-traditional students will transition to an environment different from the one they experienced while serving. This problem exists because a majority of the post-secondary schools across the country are not prepared to assist with their transition.

An initial review of the literature related to a veteran student's transition to college has shown that very few colleges and universities offer a transition program developed specifically for this non-traditional student group. This has led to the formulation of two research questions:

1. What support services do MVS identify as the most critical to their academic success?

2. What support elements do MVS identify as currently successful or lacking?

There were 214 MVS attending Duquesne University in the spring of 2017. I contend that survey feedback from representative participants will provide key data that highlights the essential services these warriors need and deserve to succeed, and help postsecondary service providers develop an effective transition program for the MVS community.

Helping MVS through the initial phases of the college transition depends on a great start. The individuals who possess the information unlocking those critical first steps are the MVS themselves. Their input is essential in the construction of an orientation program that will elevate their potential to transition successfully.

DEDICATION

I will remain eternally grateful to my parents Tony and Mary Accamando who provided a loving home and the encouragement to do the best I could in every endeavor I participated in. They gave selflessly of themselves for their family and community and the values they instilled in me serve as the foundation from which my inspiration grows.

I would also like to dedicate this work to the brave Americans who sacrificed everything in the service of their country. It is their legacy, those serving today who now benefit from their sacrifice, and what improvements this study might inspire.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

To my family, Les Ann, Marissa and Mallory, thank you for the sacrifices you made so that I might focus on this important work. You have selflessly given your evenings and weekends putting my needs ahead of your own. In spite of our physical separation, you were with me every step of the way. You are veterans of another kind and always have my back.

To my brothers Tony and Tom, their encouragement and steadfast support kept me going. I am grateful to have such outstanding role models in my life. To my sister Barbara who taught me the value of hard work and encouraged me to never give up.

I would like to offer my sincere thanks to Dr. Connie Moss, who enthusiastically agreed to join me on this mission and serve as my dissertation Chair. She embodies the same core values of my comrades in arms, integrity, excellence and the willingness to put the needs of others before herself. She was able to provide the right balance of encouragement, guidance, and advice, with the firmness of the best leaders I have served with. She serves as a guiding example of excellence in teaching and learning.

I must also thank the other committee members who have assisted me on the assignment, Dr. Jim Schreiber and Dr. Joe Werlinich. They gave generously of their time and effort to read extensively, critique constructively, and provide helpful and timely feedback. Your assistance was essential in this challenging and important process.

Thanks also to the military and veteran students who participated in the survey. Their dedication to their studies, their university and their country exemplify their commitment to the concept of service before self.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

World War II (WWII)

Military and Veteran Students (MVS)

Office for Military and Veteran Students (OMVS)

Chapter 1 Introduction

Identifying the transitional needs of college bound military and veteran students.

Most colleges and universities are very good at preparing the traditional college bound student for their transition to school. In fact, many postsecondary institutions staff a freshman development team, with the main objective of ensuring that their new traditional college students transition to campus with much greater success during this critical phase of their young academic career. This student services team provides a variety of programs, including orientations, financial-aid briefings, tips on life in the dorms, social and emotional support, and more. With each geared at helping teenage students begin their academic careers with minimal distractions or stress.

Where postsecondary schools fall short is the way they admit and orient the non-traditional student. This is often the case for veterans and those serving in the military. Many of these non-traditional students apply at different times throughout the year, transfer in from other schools and bring college credit with them, are older, and may be working. Regardless of how they are classified or the conditions they may apply under, many military and veteran non-traditional students are anxious to take advantage of the educational benefits they earned while in the military or those they are currently entitled to while still serving.

More than 50% of the 8,500 participants in a study conducted by the Syracuse University, Institute for Veterans and Military Families, designed specifically to address what they believe is a critical gap in understanding the transition experience of veterans, cited that the primary motivator to join the military was for the education benefits (Zoli, Maury, & Fay, 2015). As the value of a college degree increases, and more of these

military and veteran students arrive on college campuses, postsecondary institutions must be prepared to serve the needs of nearly three quarters of the adult population in the United States.

The Service Members Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly referred to as the GI Bill of Rights, paved the way for millions of military and veteran servicemembers to go to school following World War II (WWII). Since being overhauled in 2008, the more robust, Post 9/11 GI Bill has led to an increase in the number of military and veteran students and their dependents attending college today. The recent spike in the veteran student body has “forced colleges and universities to evolve to meet their unique needs” (Gallup Poll, 2015, p. 1).

Statement of the Problem

Left to function on their own, some military and veteran students do succeed. Far too many, however, are less likely to perform at their best and graduate. Unless they have the critical support that they need, when they need it, to guide them more clearly along a pathway of academic success. Sadly, most postsecondary schools fail to help the non-traditional military and veteran student transition to and succeed at academic life.

Many non-traditional students, including veterans and those still serving in military, may not be academically prepared to succeed in college. In fact, “many students find their campus social as well as academic environments somewhat foreign, even unfriendly, and challenging to navigate” (Kuh, 2011, p. ix). Therefore, it is imperative that postsecondary institutions take a more proactive role in on-boarding and orienting the non-traditional military and veteran student to ensure that they not only survive campus life, but thrive and graduate.

Significance of this study

Since the goal of all colleges and universities is to ensure that students enrolled at their institutions successfully transition and graduate, it is important that the administration and staff ensure that all students receive the necessary support services required to successfully reach that goal. This mission includes the success of the growing number of military and veteran students (MVS) arriving on campuses each year.

A limited amount of research has been conducted to study the MVS transition to college, (Ackerman, 2009; Cook, & Kim, 2009; Hamrick, 2013; Kuh, 2010), but more work must be done, specifically in the area of providing just in time support for these non-traditional students where little organized and focused support exists. Unlike their traditional student classmates, military and veteran students for a number of reasons are considered “adult students” (Knowles 1984) and are non-traditional learners. As such, they require a variety of specialized support services to help with their transition to campus.

The Purpose

This study is designed to identify the key support elements MVS identify as essential for their transition and academic success. Specifically an effort to collect and examine feedback from military and veteran students currently attending school provides key data to inform efforts to develop the services military and veteran students need to remain on a successful academic trajectory. The secondary purpose of the study is to inform the design of an effective transitional support system for the MVS population at Duquesne University.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of military and veteran students regarding the success of their academic and social transition experience at Duquesne University?
2. How does the current status of services for military and veteran students align with national recommendations for quality programs?
3. What can Duquesne University do to improve its military and veteran student services to meet the national criteria for quality programs and address the perceptions of the strengths and weakness reported by current military and veteran students?

Context Review: A History of the Office of Military and Veteran Students

August 8th, 2015 marked a significant milestone for MVS at Duquesne University. On that day, the University created the Office for Military and Veteran Students (OMVS), and for the first time in the University's history, an office was established to pay particular attention to the specific needs of MVS, and focus on the specific support services they would need to succeed and graduate.

Previously, the University employed a Director level position within one of the schools at Duquesne, but that individual's efforts were directed specifically at the military and veteran student body within that specific school. The establishment of a University wide office signaled a philosophical shift of the Administration and an improvement in the way they would care for military and veteran students.

Until this major change in service, many of the support programs offered to the military and veteran student body were disconnected and random. For example, there were a host of small initiatives designed specifically for the online military and veteran student population, and though they proved effective for a virtual and weekend student

body, their impact was effective, but only reached a small percentage of the military and veteran student body. This could be attributed to the fact that more than half of the 220 military and veteran students enrolled at the time were online students, and were difficult to reach. This was exacerbated due to the fact that this virtual student body was spread across many time zones, and located on a variety of continents.

Ushering in a new era

As the person who assumed this new position and mission, the overall challenge of the new Office for Military and Veteran Students was to provide a variety of new and relevant services for MVS. The first and biggest element of that challenge was identifying the university wide military and veteran student body. The U.S. Department of Education, (DoE) in their 8 Keys to Veteran Success on Campus, (2016) recommend the implementation of a key set of data tools to identify and track military and veteran information. Prior to the inception of the office, MVS were not being tracked in the university database.

Compiling a simple data-base of military and veteran students (MVS) involved the combination of three separate spreadsheets, kept by three separate offices that provided critical financial support for the MVS community. A combined list of MVS was established by merging the three spreadsheets and eliminating duplicate records. But that still did not establish a master list because some MVS were not using financial support and many did not self-identify. Many names therefore never made it to the list. This led to the decision and policy that the university would collect information regarding MVS status at the point of application. Then and only then could the office establish a more comprehensive list of military and veteran students.

This is only a small example of the systemic lack of support for the MVS community. A variety of programs were hastily created to assist military and veteran students across the campus. A Student Veterans Association (SVA) was established, but participation was spotty and the organization sputtered to gain strength and viability due to the fact that many of the students participating were online or journeyed to campus on weekends. Converting the SVA to a university-wide social group, though important, is an ongoing effort that will take time to both enlist support and build a firm foundation on which to grow.

In addition to the establishment of a social group for the MVS community, the Office for Military and Veteran Students (OMVS) created a specific MVS orientation that addressed the needs of MVS in much the same way that traditional students were oriented. Though this initiative was long overdue, and a step in the proper direction, it came up short, and resulted in many of the important support services the MVS needed being left out of the presentations. For example, the DoE (2016), recommends that MVS should receive academic, career and financial advice in a proactive manner before challenges develop. Though well meaning, the new orientation program lacked the organization and manpower that the traditional student orientation enjoyed. More work had to be done.

There were even small scale faculty and staff awareness sessions, focusing on the specific needs of the MVS, another recommendation by the DoE, (2016). Panel discussions were scheduled where military and veteran students shared their transition experiences with faculty and staff, but they were poorly attended, and attendance was not tracked. These initiatives however, did serve as a firm foundation on which to build a

more systemic program of support service for the MVS that is clearly necessary and still needed.

The need for a fair and balanced approach in needed

The newly created Office for Military and Veteran Students has taken several steps to address the perceived needs of the MVS at Duquesne University. The initiatives mentioned earlier, though well meaning, were poorly attended, and occurred randomly and without much coherence. It was obvious that important initiatives must be created to provide a variety of services to meet the needs of this non-traditional group of students, but a more deliberate approach is needed. This study is framed by the suggestion that effective support for MVS is only possible when the OMVS is joined by the university strengthened commitment to military and veteran students. This suggestion is echoed in two key recommendations from the “8 Keys to Veterans’ Success on Campus” that focus on the university’s ability to create a culture of trust across campus based on the consistent support from campus leadership (U. S. Department of Education, 2016).

This might include increased staff in the OMVS and an increased budget. It would also be critical to specifically address the needs of MVS in the university’s Strategic Plan. These steps would be examples of top level support that research tells us is needed for effective programs that are taken seriously and succeed (Cook & Kim, 2009).

A deliberate call to action

In his book, *The Warrior’s Return: Restoring the Soul After War*, Ed Tick (2014), sadly proclaims, “many civilians do not think war has touched them until they remember that their grandfather was in World War II, their nephew in Bosnia, or their neighbor’s daughter in Iraq. Or, that the suicide in their neighborhood was by a despairing veteran

for whom life should have been just beginning. Or that the national debt from the war economy squeezed the hope and finances out of their struggling family's meager resources. War touches us all. Our challenge is this: how do we turn wars inevitable wounding and suffering into wisdom and growth that truly brings warriors home and benefits us all?" (Tick, 2014).

Postsecondary schools are uniquely positioned to make historic changes to the way they help military and veteran students thrive on campus. The literature review that follows seeks to inform the actions that colleges and universities can take that will not only ease the transition of the military and veteran student to campus, but will honor the service of these young warriors. It is a challenge, a call to action that will unearth the distinct needs of MVS who are quite different than their traditional student body peers our nation's postsecondary schools are currently organized to assist. The literature review is set in a way that will provide a historical look back, as well as a contemporary comparison of the "about face" MVS are about to make along with the interesting challenges these brave women and men will encounter as they make their way to campus. The review concludes with an examination of research highlighting effective postsecondary programs and initiatives that clearly demonstrate by their actions the potential for success that will establish a clear success path that will honor the sacrifices, and yet to be realized potential of these brave American servicemembers.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

What are the transitional support service needs of military and veteran students?

An introduction

This chapter focuses on the pertinent literature addressing the significant factors related to the transition of military and veteran personnel from their role in the military to that of college or university students. The review is designed to provide a historical and contemporary look at the “about face” they are about to make, along with the various challenges these women and men encounter as they transition to school.

Over seventy years ago, on September 2nd, 1945 the United States marked the official end of World War II (WWII). Nearly half of the 16 million veterans eligible for the new Service Members Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly referred to as the GI Bill, would take advantage of this landmark education bill. Often heralded as the most significant piece of legislation ever passed, the GI Bill helped educate a generation of Americans who before the war would never have had the resources to go to college. This newly educated workforce then went on to rebuild Post-war America, reshaping the American social landscape by helping to create the middle-class (Greenberg).

As colleges and universities witnessed record breaking numbers of energetic adult students flocking to campuses nationwide, key college constituencies – faculty, staff and administration, began to think more deliberately about, and then realign the support systems offered to more effectively meet the wide variety of needs of this new type of student. But what lessons did the custodians of our nation’s postsecondary institutions learn from this experience? What lasting impact did this influx of the veteran, adult, non-traditional student have on our institutions of higher learning? What was it about these

military and veteran students that made them different, and how well did America's university leaders meet their needs? These students were older. Most were probably working while going to school, had families, and were shaped by a life changing military experience that had fundamentally rewired their thinking and beliefs.

It took a few months for our nation's postsecondary schools to reorganize in order to meet this new educational demand, but they did. According to the Veteran's Administration, nearly half of the 16 million veterans who served during WWII, used some form of the GI Bill. Colleges and universities took action to accommodate the large influx of veterans coming to campus (Olson, 1973).

At Duquesne University, where the author currently serves as the Director of the Office for Military and Veteran Students (OMVS), the student population had grown fourfold between the fall of 1945 and the spring of 1946 as a result of this influx, and new policies were developed to maintain order. Individual registration days were established for freshmen through senior students to spread out and organize the registration process, and class schedules had to be picked up rather than mailed. Up and down staircases were put into place, in Canevin Hall. Library books were placed on reserve, where overnight borrowing increased 800% above the normal rate. Duquesne opened a student lounge to relieve the lack of seating in the school dining facility, and the university newspaper added special columns and features to keep veterans up to date on the many rule changes coming out of the Veteran's Administration (Rishel, 1997).

These were minor adjustments compared to the larger, physical changes campuses underwent as more veterans arrived. The bulging student population called for the construction of additional classroom space and on campus living facilities. "Fortunately,

Congress passed two important pieces of legislation: the Mead Bill for the distribution of surplus armed forces equipment to universities and colleges, and the Lanham Act, which covered the expense of moving and erecting surplus military barracks buildings” (Rishel, 1997, p. 91).

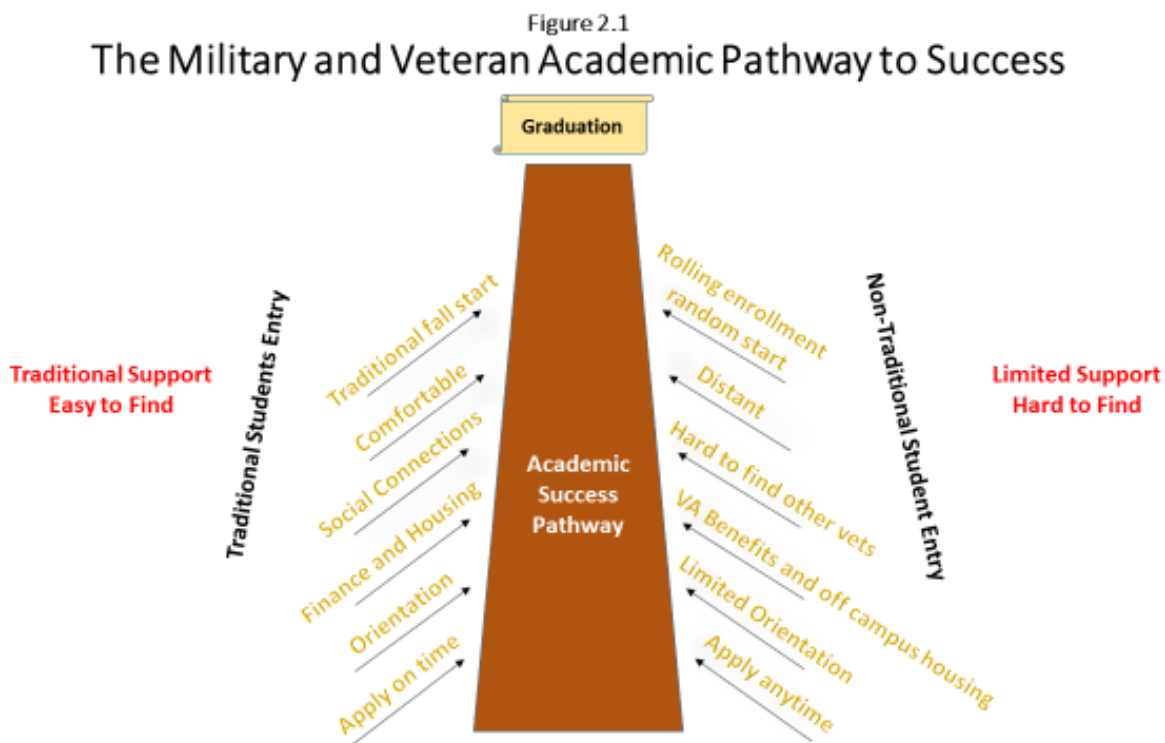
One might expect that this re-engineered college and university system, now well versed at the education of adult students, would have put systems in place to preserve their strategy for educating military and veteran students in perpetuity. But Keith Olsen, leading authority on the GI Bill, declared that, "by 1950, most of the veteran students had matriculated through the education system, and colleges and universities began to fall back on the practice of educating the traditional co-ed student” (Olson, 1973).

Today’s postsecondary schools are great at recruiting, registering, welcoming, and orientating traditional high school graduates. The traditional pathway to college is embraced by their high school staff, parents, the postsecondary schools they apply to, and a well-crafted orientation program has been created to ensure that an incoming freshman student steps firmly onto the pathway of academic success.

One could argue that traditional college students have everything they need to begin their academic journey. Even if they falter along the way, a variety of support systems are in place to help them find their way back to the path. This is not the case for the MVS. They lack the same traditional support system mentioned above. Many of these now separated servicemembers begin their academic quest without all the fanfare the traditional student enjoys. It could be argued that the MVS can be viewed as the “have not”, often left to fend for themselves. The MVS many times is considered a transfer student and may enter the academic process at various times throughout the year. Even if

they if they start with their traditional college student peers in the fall, the traditional student orientation programs currently used by most schools are not geared for the non-traditional MVS.

It can be argued that rather than a mere pathway to success, a clear cavern exists between the services that traditional students, “the haves” receive from those of their non-traditional, MVS, “the have nots”. This vastly different onboarding process creates undue stress for the MVS as they begin their academic journey. In an effort to identify the unique support services MVS need to successfully navigate to and then step firmly on the academic pathway, it is critical that their voices be heard. It is important to seek input from the MVS themselves to accurately identify what has worked well, as well as those services that must be added if they are to enjoy the same transition to the academic pathway (see Figure 2.1) as their traditional counterparts.



The purpose of this literature review is to identify and unpack several key factors that must be considered if 21st Century postsecondary institutions are to provide outstanding educational support for today's MVS. First, the literature review examines the historical catalyst for this dramatic educational opportunity for veterans, *the GI Bill*. Then, it examines how military service reorients military servicemembers and veterans, including what is it like to serve as a member of the United States Armed Forces, and how *the transition from* the military to civilian community occurs. Next it explores *the learning needs specific to* adult, non-traditional MVS, before examining *the transition to the college campus*. And finally, the literature review concludes by investigating *the essential elements* postsecondary institutions must create to meet the needs of military and veteran members of the student body. To shed light on these necessary systems the review examines the concerns and need that MVS report about their transition to college.

1. How did the G.I. Bill Increase Educational Attainment for Returning Veterans?

As WW II ended and record numbers of GI's returned to American soil from their military assignments overseas, enrollment numbers at college campuses were at record lows. A good example of this sagging enrollment could be found at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, PA, where a count of traditional students for the spring semester of 1942 had reached an all-time low of 1,270, of which only 305 were men. By the spring of 1946 however, those numbers had swelled to 4,107, with a majority of the student body (73%) comprised of returning veterans of that Great War (Rishel, 1997). This phenomenon was not exclusive to Pittsburgh. Across the nation veterans accounted for about 70% of male

enrollment on college campuses over a five-year period following the wars end (Olson, 1973).

The original GI Bill, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, provided financial resources to millions of American GI's who before the war might never had considered the notion of attending college. For most returning veterans, the dream of earning a college degree was now a very real possibility. The Bill provided the financial resources needed to go to the school of their choice, and veterans did just that. In fact, "(t)he story of the GI Bill is a recording of success. Under the WWII legislation, 2,232,000 veterans attended college at a cost of 5.5 billion dollars. For half a decade following the war, veterans dominated the nation's campuses by their numbers and their academic superiority over nonveteran classmates (Olson, 1973)."

The History of the GI Bill

Signed into law on June 22, 1944, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly known as the GI Bill of Rights, provided education benefits for returning veterans, and within a few years would change the social and economic landscape of the United States (Greenberg, 2008). But why were political leaders, led by President Franklin D. Roosevelt so intent on providing the GI Bill in the first place?

For many, the legislation was an attempt to make up for a failed promise which led to the dismal treatment of able bodied veterans after to World War (WWI), who in 1918 returned to a sagging U.S. economy with little hope of finding a job. Many veterans of the Great War ended up in bread lines, living in Hooverville's, and quickly found themselves enlisting in the "Bonus Army" (Greenberg). Aptly named, the "Bonus Army" was made up by a group of disgruntled WWI veterans, numbering nearly 15,000 who in

1932 converged on Washington, D.C, to demand an immediate bonus payment for their wartime services due to the increased struggles they were suffering through during the depression (The Library of Congress, 2016).

Though there were a number of supporters for the legislation, the well-known private veteran's advocacy group, the American Legion agreed to sponsor the bill. The Legion, headed by National Commander Harry W. Colmery called for legislation that would guarantee the rights of "GI Joe and GI Jane", and promised that veterans from this era would receive better treatment. The Legion earned the support of the public, still suffering from the painful reminder of the use of arms used to evict the Bonus Army from the nation's Capital (Greenberg, 2008).

Who was eligible for the benefit?

The newly passed GI Bill was awarded equally to all members of the armed forces, with the veteran's length of service being the sole determining factor to calculate the duration of education benefit. But the bill was not favored by all members of Congress. Opposition arose from many southern congressional members who disputed the equal distribution of the benefits to black veterans (Greenberg). Perhaps the most important language of the GI Bill underscored that an education can be and should be available to anyone, regardless of age, sex, race, religion, or family status. That single phrase would open the doors of postsecondary schools for men and women from all races and backgrounds. In fact, it changed the perception of higher education in the public consciousness from the 1950's onward (Greenberg).

Education benefits extended from a minimum of one year, to the maximum of four (forty-eight months), and because a majority of the veterans exceeded the three-year

tour threshold, the maximum benefit use became commonplace. Annual benefits included up to \$500 in tuition and educational expenses paid to the institution and a stipend for the veteran that varied with family size and was adjusted upward over the course of the program. The stipend was a monthly cash allowance of \$65 per month for single veterans and \$90 per month for married veterans. An additional increase in the stipend took effect in April 1948. At the time, the subsidy for tuition and books was sufficient to cover the tuition and fees of traditionally expensive schools like Harvard University (Bound, 2002).

How effective was the GI Bill?

Studies indicate that the combined effect of military service and the widely available funding for college through the GI Bill led to higher postsecondary educational attainment among WW II veterans than among their nonveteran peers. Not only that, there was a particularly large comparative effect on college completion with veteran completion rates exceeding those of their non-veteran peers (Bound, 2002).

The World War II GI Bill laid the foundation for future educational benefits programs for military members serving in the Korean and Vietnam conflicts. For Korean War veterans, the structure of the benefits was somewhat different (and potentially somewhat less generous). Under the law for Korean veterans, the \$500 tuition payment was dropped in favor of higher subsistence payments, with students receiving between \$110 and \$160 per month, depending on the number of dependents. The maximum period of educational benefits was 36 months, rather than the 48 months granted to World War II veterans, and the computation of eligibility provided for a day and one half for each day served rather than the minimum of one year provided to all World War II veterans (Bound, 2002).

The Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944 opened the door for many veterans of WWII, with half of them using the benefit to advance their education, at a cost of nearly 6 billion dollars (Olson, 1973). To help frame the breadth of this landmark legislation, and the impact the GI Bill has made in terms of those eligible for benefits, it may be helpful to highlight the military might for our nation's major conflicts. There were 4.7 million servicemembers committed to the war effort during WWI, 16 million men and women who served in WWII, 5.7 million veterans in Korea, and 8.7 million who served in Vietnam (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998, Table 585).

Post war conclusions

A close look at the numbers will confirm that the Service Members Readjustment Act made a significant impact on educating our nation's workforce and energizing our economy. Before the war only 23% of military veterans had earned a high school diploma and only about 3% had completed college degrees. To place the impact of the GI Bill in the national context, in 1940 approximately 160,000 people in the United States had earned college degrees, but, with the introduction of the GI Bill, the graduating class of 1950 reached nearly 500,000. This impact was due largely to the fact that almost half of the nearly 16 million veterans participating in the war used some form of education benefit (Greenberg).

The GI Bill proved to be a driving force of social change, and exposed a broad segment of young Americans to the liberal dimension of a college education. In fact Sidney A. Burrell, Boston University historian concluded that the GI Bill produced what may have been the most important educational and social transformation in American history (Olson, 1973).

Post 9/11: The new GI Bill

The Post- 9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008, or the “Post 9/11 GI Bill”, took effect on August 1, 2009. This new legislation differed significantly from and was more financially robust than its predecessors, and has the potential to generate greater interest in postsecondary education attendance among current and former military personnel (Radford, 2009).

In addition to supplying a housing allowance based on local housing costs (approximately \$1,600 in Pittsburgh) and a yearly stipend for books and supplies, (\$1,000 annually), the Post 9/11 GI Bill pays the cost of students’ postsecondary tuition and fees directly, up to the total cost of the most expensive program of study at a public university in the student’s state of residence (U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015). Military and veteran students using the Post 9/11 GI Bill who choose to enroll in more expensive programs as graduate students, or students at out-of-state public, or private colleges may also be eligible for the *Yellow Ribbon program*. Under this program, the Veterans Administration (VA) matches what participating institutions contribute for any remaining tuition costs. More simply explained, the VA calculates an annual tuition rate for each military and veteran student. In Pennsylvania the cap totals approximately, \$21,000. If the annual tuition of the specific program the military and veteran student is in exceeds that annual cap, the participating Yellow Ribbon institution then splits the remaining tuition balance with the VA, therefore there is no tuition payment required from the student. (U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015). In the most basic terms, the Post 9/11 GI Bill, coupled with the Yellow Ribbon Program will pay full tuition at most postsecondary institutions while also providing a monthly living allowance along with a modest book stipend (Radford, 2009).

What are the conditions for Military and Veteran students in 2016?

Since the enactment of the new Post 9/11 GI Bill, more than 1,000,000 veterans and actively serving members who have served in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have enrolled in some form of postsecondary education program (Cate, 2014). These GI Bill users represent nearly 12 billion dollars in tuition revenue towards higher education and training annually. Currently, in 2016 more than 1.6 million veterans remain eligible to use their benefits (Zoli, Maury, & Fay, 2015). The important question is will they opt to use them? Will those choosing to exercise their benefits experience a smooth transition from military to student life? To answer these questions, it is important to consider the barriers that prevent many veterans from capitalizing on the rich opportunities available to them through the Post 9/11 GI Bill. While 2016 marks over a decade that the United States has been at war in Iraq and Afghanistan, there is compelling evidence that a majority of the nation's Post-Secondary schools are unprepared to serve military and veteran students who may choose to enroll as their students supported by the Post 9/11 GI benefits (American Council on Education, 2008).

In their study, Cook and Kim (2009) highlight an astounding fact; "Despite the long history of veterans' education benefits and the presence of veteran students on campus, little research has been conducted on effective campus programs and services that successfully aid veterans in the college transition" (2009, p. vii). To reinforce this claim, the Chancellor of California State University, Charlie Reed, challenged campus leaders at the 2008 Conference of the American Council on Education, to assess their readiness to help veterans attend their schools. Chancellor Reed said, "I'm going to give you an assignment. Go back to your institution. Do an assessment of how you're doing

with programs and services for service members and veterans. You won't find a pretty picture. What you will find is that you need to reorganize and reprioritize" (Cook & Kim, 2009, p. iii).

Similarly, Allison A Hickey, Under Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) for Benefits, in her December 2012 letter to higher education administrators, extended her note of gratitude for the work already being done. But she challenged them to do more and pleaded for their help. Under Secretary Hickey highlighted the number of Servicemembers and Veterans taking advantage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill. She mentioned that in the past three years, the Veterans Administration has paid out more than \$24.4 billion in tuition and benefits to over 870,000 Veterans Servicemembers, and their families, and the universities, colleges, and the trade schools they attend. But, she cautioned, the efficiency with which both the VA and the schools are working must be improved. To help with these needed improvements, she provided instructions on how the School Certifying Official (SCO) could help both the students and the department of Veterans Affairs for Benefits by providing timely enrollment certifications, communicating more with students, remaining up to date on current VA policies, and providing timely feedback to students awaiting payments from the VA (Hickey, 2012).

Currently, just over one third of those eligible to use their entitlements provided by the Post 9/11 GI Bill are enrolled in postsecondary programs. Should more veterans take advantage of their benefit, the impact this legislation could have on their futures and the fate of the nation is barely identifiable. Clearly, with more than sixty percent of the eligible veterans still not exercising their right to use their benefits, it is essential that the more than 2,850 regionally accredited community, technical and 4-year colleges in the

United States assess their ability to effectively recruit, ease the transition of, provide support to, and ensure the academic success of all veterans who wish to attend school (Cook & Kim, 2009).

To assist with this task, 2,647 college and university presidents were invited to participate in an online survey to determine the level of veteran services at a cross section of the nation's schools. Only 723 schools accepted the invitation, a mere 28 percent. This poor response rate sheds little light on the ability of the remaining 72 percent of the invited schools to offer services for military students. It does, however, cast a bright light on the perceived lack of commitment or interest in helping military and veteran students (Cook & Kim, 2009).

As more researchers continue to examine and identify best practices related to transitioning veterans to their new lives as college students, one thing is clear: the new post 9/11 GI Bill is an attractive benefit for servicemembers and their families. For that reason alone, colleges and universities should anticipate that the numbers of student veterans will increase on their campuses for several years (O'Herrin, 2011).

2. From one life to the next: The transition into and out of military service

In their report, *From Soldier to Student: Easing the Transition of Service Members on Campus*, Cook and Kim (2009) point out that the enactment of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 (also known as the Post-9/11 GI Bill or the new GI Bill) was one of the most significant events for active-duty and veteran students since the creation of the original GI Bill. The Post 9/11 GI Bill offers more than 2.5 million service members who served in the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan the resources needed to

transition from their service in the military into the ranks of higher education (Cook & Kim, 2009).

With so many of our nation's warriors making their way to college campuses, the administration and staff at our nation's postsecondary schools must consider how the military experiences, allegiance to their units and the changes in their identities will impact their transition and success on campus (DiRamio D. &, 2011). But before we discuss the actual college transition process, it is essential to investigate the role that military life might play in an eventual transition to a college campus.

Different types of service

Before we begin to categorize servicemembers as students, it is important to distinguish the differences that exist between the ranks of the different military branches as well as the many different statuses in which members of the military serve. There are two distinct statuses: Active Duty and a reserve status as a member of the Reserves or National Guard. Each status is briefly overviewed below following the definitions currently used by the Department of Defense (U. S. Department of Defense, 2016)

Active Duty: Considered the most time-intensive service commitment, Active Duty is the civilian equivalent of a full-time job. This full-time military occupation affords members and their families the opportunity to live within the confines of their installation. On base facilities are similar to small, private cities, and are equipped to provide all the necessary amenities needed to live a normal life. (Commissary – grocery store, Base Exchange – department store, Hospital, Recreation facilities, Security, Religious services, etc.) Once new recruits successfully complete their basic training, or “boot camp”, they are assigned duty at a base stateside or overseas. An active-duty

enlistment typically last two to six years. Their main occupation is the national defense, and along with that comes the probability of a deployment. These deployments can last up to a year, but the length may vary based on the specialization of the servicemembers unit and mission.

Reserve Status: The Reserve component was created in the twentieth century to provide and maintain well equipped and trained units to maintain peace during active duty deployments. There is a Reserve component for each active-duty branch and they are commanded by their parent active-duty commander. Reserve forces are available for active-duty deployment in times of war or national emergency.

Unlike their active duty counterparts, Reservists serve part-time, affording them the opportunity to pursue a civilian career or college education while at the same time the privilege of serving their country. Members of the Reserve attend the same basic training as recruits on active duty. Their part-time status involves their participation in training drills one weekend a month along with a two-week program each year. Active-duty servicemembers may opt to transition to the Reserves to finish out their service commitment.

National Guard: There are two branches affiliated with the National Guard, the Army National Guard and the Air National Guard. It is a commonly held perception that their main focus is homeland security and humanitarian relief. They, much like their counterparts in the Reserve serve one weekend a month and two full weeks per year, but National Guard units under the authority of their state's Governor, assist communities in their state during emergencies like storms, floods, fires and other natural disasters.

During peacetime, they fall under the military authority of the Governor and State Adjutant General. There are Guard units in all 50 states, and four U. S. Territories. Unlike the relatively new Reserve force, the notion of a National Guard dates back to the state muster of colonial fighting forces of the Revolutionary era.

As tensions in the world arise, the President of the United States can federalize the National Guard, calling them to active duty, deploying them as needed. Deployed National Guard service members train at the same level of readiness as their Reserve and Active-Duty counterparts, and are expected to perform alongside their deployed units as assigned (U. S. Department of Defense, 2016).

In addition to the various differences in service status, the military is broken down into five branches that combine to form the United States military: Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard. Each branch is staffed by a designated number of officers and enlisted servicemembers determined annually by Congress. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016 granted subsidies to field a total American fighting force totaling 2,523,200 (The Library of Congress, 2016).

Understanding the various service commitments and how they differ is important for those supporting military and veteran students who are transitioning to college life for many reasons. "Some student servicemembers are active duty personnel who are returning to campus after recent deployments in the Middle East and elsewhere. Others are National Guard and Reserve personnel who may be activated to full-time military status at any time. This wide variety of personnel also suggests a wide variety of transitions" (Hamrick F. A., 2013, p. 43). Some servicemembers have cut their ties with

the military, most of them from active duty, while others in the Guard and Reserve may still be serving and are prone to additional activations and call-ups to active duty.

Ensuring the academic success of today's military and veteran student will hinge directly on the ability of postsecondary faculty, staff and administration to fully understand the variety of statuses of the students on their campuses. They must also be prepared for frequent transitions out of and reenrollment back in to school (Hamrick F. A., 2013).

The initiation into military life: The importance of the unit

As members of a military unit, service men and women are expected to support their new group by sacrificing their own self-interest for the benefit of the team. The basic daily rituals of donning the uniform, eating chow together, enduring long runs and training exercises, and in fact, belonging to a male dominated group helps to shape the individual and group identity (DiRamio D. &, 2011). Donna Winslow (1998) described this cultural phenomenon this way: "The group is newly formed and offers little defense to the assault of initial socialization. Then, as recruits begin to rely on each other, strong bonds build, strong enough, that they will go into battle for each other. A little private out in the trenches doesn't know beans all about why he is there, except he is there with his buddies and they will die for one another. It's as simple as that" (p. 4).

This change of identity and the establishment of the bond of trust with a military group is commonly referred to as "unit cohesion", and the bonding process begins at the start of basic training. Siebold (2007) stated that "the essence of strong primary group cohesion, which I believe to be generally agreed on, is trust among group members (e.g.,

to watch each other's back) together with the capacity for teamwork (e.g., pulling together to get the task or job done) (Siebold, 2007, p. 288).

In a much larger sense, however it is not simply the relationship these warriors develop with their primary group, the platoon sized unit, but a broader connection to the institution that is the military. Though each service branch differs slightly, membership in the military provides for a wide variety of needs offering an additional layer of security and belonging for its members. Pay and benefits, training progression, career patterns, and standards of behavior are some of the more common services provided to military members. In exchange for these services, new recruits promise effort, loyalty, and continuous performance (Siebold, 2007).

This belonging for many service members may be the first time these young women and men have formed a true bond--a love for others outside their own family members. Once they form these relationships with their new friends, they become part of a unique, close knit military unit which is like a family to them (Cantrell & Dean, 2007).

Military Education: There is a big difference in the way servicemembers are taught.

The formulation of unit cohesion and a willingness to watch each other's back is the first test for young servicemembers. But a larger transformation is occurring during basic training. The goal of basic training is the cultivation of a military frame of mind.

For more than 300 years, the military has recognized the importance of training in the accomplishment of its missions. This training has changed over time, with the arrival of new tactics and technology, but has always centered on each individual acquiring specifically designed skills needed to attain maximum efficiency on the battlefield (Chambers, 2015).

Though there have been many subtle changes to the military training philosophy over three centuries, Chambers (2015) contends that “basic training, the preparation of individuals from civilian life for the demands of military life, provides physical conditioning and military fundamentals and imbues recruits with their particular service’s point of view. Since military service requires fitness, discipline, and the ability to live and work in a highly structured organization, recruit training emphasizes military rules, discipline, social conduct, physical conditioning, self-confidence, and pride in being a member of the military” (Training and Indoctrination, para. 2).

There is definite fall-out from the intensity of military training and the distinct changes military servicemembers undergo during the process. While faced with the danger associated with war, the ability to block out the trauma of combat becomes a natural defense mechanism that works well in the thick of the action. The problem, however, emerges when the battle ends and the danger is no longer present. The servicemembers ingrained defense system still reacts to civilian circumstances, and the soldier turned civilian has difficulty determining if a threat is real or imagined. As a result, the veteran may put up a shield or emotional barrier that may force people away and cause detachment and strained relationships (Cantrell & Dean, 2007).

So how well the constituents on college campuses understand the intricacies of military training, life and at times intense service will determine how effectively they help military servicemembers and veteran’s transition to college. A recent study states that “returning veterans often face myriad challenges when it comes to higher education, including reacquainting themselves with academic work, navigating complex campus administrative systems, finding support services to meet their needs, encountering

negative reactions from the campus community based on their participation in military conflicts, and having difficulty connecting with classmates and faculty. Many institutions are ill prepared to deal with these challenges and are often confused about where to begin determining what services student veterans need and how to provide them” (Griffin, 2012, p. 2).

3. From servicemember to student: The transition to college campus

Understanding the reliance military servicemembers and veterans place on their comrades is critical if we are to help them make a successful transition from their units to college campuses, and to mitigate the social and cultural barriers that affect the transition experience. In their report, *Missing Perspectives: Servicemembers’ Transition From Service to Civilian Life*, Zoli, et al., reported that 53% of the 8,500 military servicemembers and veterans responding to a 2015 survey claimed that education benefits was the primary motivator for their joining the service, and of that number, 92% agreed, or agreed strongly that higher education was important if they were to make a successful transition to civilian life (Zoli, Maury, & Fay, 2015).

As mentioned earlier, the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill currently provides the financial resources needed for separating military servicemembers and veterans to attend college. The looming question however still remains; will they attend? As one veteran put it, “I joined the military to get money to go to college. I didn’t know that I was ready for college before, so I decided to earn the money to pay for it first. I didn’t realize how hard it was going to be, but I’m almost done, so of course I’m going to use it” (McNealy, 2004, p. 95).

A similar qualitative study examined the influencing factors that led to veterans choosing college pointed out that 80% of the 30 study participants, stated in their

response to a survey that they would be heading to some form of education program after separating from the Army. They indicated that their reasons for doing so included the need to prepare for a new career, their hope to utilize their earned education benefits, and their need to earn a higher education credential (McNealy, 2004).

Their responses and justifications echoed the remarks of this retiring master sergeant referring to his Military Occupational Specialty (MOS). “I’ve devoted my entire adult life to serving my country. Now that I’m transitioning, it’s time to focus on how I can take care of myself, my wife, and four kids. My MOS in the Army doesn’t really translate to the civilian world, so I see college as the way to land a better position and hopefully earn a lot of money” (McNealy, 2004, p. 92).

Yet some choose not go to school?

In spite of the fact that servicemembers have a number of robust options to help fund their education, many decide not to apply to school. McNealy (2004) suggests that three clear factors may influence non-attendance and uses quotes from military personnel to illustrate each factor.

1. A lack of interest: “I don’t really look at ever taking college courses. I’ve had a lot of great mentors who were fantastic with no education who did very well and that’s something that I really admire” (McNealy, 2004, p. 97).

2. Self-efficacy concerns: “I wasn’t any good at school in high school and I didn’t like it much either. I’m not sure that I want to go through that frustration again trying to learn all that new stuff” (McNealy, 2004, p. 99).

3. A perceived lack of financial resources and competing responsibilities: “I’ve done all right without college so far. Hard work is what matters and I just can’t see spending a

lot of money to go to school when it don't need to. There are just so many other things I need to be concentrating on like getting a good job and banking some money instead of putting out money" (McNealy, 2004, p. 100).

Not every servicemember is interested in attending college, but for those who do decide to follow time in the military with an education, the reasons they give for attending college and the choices they make are very revealing.

Ensuring a smooth transition: The feeling of being alone

After separating from the service, veterans will experience a feeling they have not dealt with for several years; the isolation of no longer being part of a team. Many veterans in a recent study shared feelings of isolation (Branker, 2009). Here is how one veteran put it when asked how their transition from the military to campus life was going: "It was really nice to be able to talk to other veterans that maybe know what it is like to also be a student veteran. Because while I did find that going to college generally as far as the coursework seemed easier, the social life seemed more difficult because you don't have anyone to talk to or hang out with...you don't have anything in common with people who are 18, 19, 20, 21 years old who pretty much haven't been anywhere or done anything. So the social aspect seemed more difficult than the academic aspect" (Griffin, 2012, p. 12).

Being older is one dimension of the differences between a traditional college students and a MVS, but veterans because of their age, bring a variety of other concerns while attending school. In her study of matured aged students, Megan Tones, states, "students older than 25 years of age, are more likely to be living away from home with a partner, and to have dependent children. These circumstances impose additional

economic and time demands, both of which might hinder mature-aged students from completing their studies” (Tones, Fraser, & Elder, 2009 58(4), p. 506)

The structured training and lifestyle in which Servicemembers were previously immersed creates a certain conservative nature in them. The community that exists on military installations is quite different from life in a typical hometown community. Life on bases and posts has a self-sustaining quality. Everything that you need to survive is found within the fence line. The transition from this structured and supported existence is often difficult for GI’s preparing to reconnect with independent civilian life, especially when, for the first time in years, they will be functioning in a community that does not follow the rules and structures of military life. A four-year Air Force veteran summed up how life would be as he made the transition from the strictly defined structure of the military to a loosely configured campus where there was no chain of command from which to get answers in this way; “It was like going from something that is so structured and so routine, and on task...then just to be released and you have to make your own schedule, some people find that hard” (Ackerman & DiRamio, 2009, p. 12).

This same situation repeats itself on the college campus, where veterans comprise such small numbers of the total student body. It is natural, therefore, that veteran students might feel isolated in an environment that is quite different in so many ways from their previous environment in the military. One veteran put it this way: “Most student’s kind of whine over nothing. They don’t really know what it is to have a hard time...They don’t have people screaming at them to get things done at three in the morning. They sit in a sheltered dorm room and do homework. You hear people complaining and you’re just like, why are you complaining?” (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008, p. 87)

An array of cultural and life experiences, differing ages, and additional responsibilities are just a few of the differences that exist between the traditional college student and their MVS classmates. Veteran students comprise less of the student body and their values are vastly different. The simple fact that so few veterans are found on each college campus should force colleges and universities to consider them as a minority group and seek ways to include them. As one veteran student put it, “In the military we get institutionalized right out of high school. If I were to leave right now, I have no idea what to do. I would be lost” (Cook, B. J., & Kim, Y., 2009, p. 22).

Schlossberg’s Transition Theory as it applies to veterans.

Nancy Schlossberg, a former psychology professor and her colleagues define transition as “any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions and roles” (Schlossberg, Goodman, & Anderson, 2006, p. 33). As mentioned earlier, veterans transitioning from life in the military to that of a college student, will experience a variety of changes as they leave the structured life found in the military and assume their new life on the college campus (Branker, 2009).

Schlossberg’s Transition Theory offers an additional conceptual framework for faculty and staff members at postsecondary institutions serving adult learners because of its focus on dealing with factors that drive a successful transition. According to Schlossberg and her associates (Schlossberg, 2006), any individual who wishes to cope successfully with transition must deal with four specific factors. Schlossberg et al. (2006) refer to the four “S’s” as: situation, self, support, and strategies. What follows is an executive summary of each “S” category to highlight its value in assisting military and veteran students to understand, identify and work with the specific strengths they possess.

In terms of the first “S”, the situation, there are a number of factors to consider including understanding what triggered the transition, the timing involved, the amount of control the individual had in it, and the notion of what will come next. Along with previous experiences, mentioned factors play important roles in the success or failure of the transition.

The second “S”, the self, relates to the personal and demographic characteristics and psychological resources of the student in transition. Each will play a significant role in how an individual views life and socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity/culture, age, stage of life, and health. Psychological resources like ego development, outlook, personal values, spirituality and resiliency, all play prominent roles in the transition.

What support the individual receives derived from trusted relationships constitutes the third “S”. The type of affirmation, aid, and honest feedback each individual receives from family, friends, and partners in community play a key role in the transition.

The last “S” deals with the strategies the student will employ to make the transition. How well he copes with the transition by making significant meaning of the movement from one situation to the next, and the significant way the student is able to deal with the stress associated with the new lifestyle (Schlossberg, Goodman, & Anderson, 2006).

By applying Schlossberg’s Transition Theory and understanding the experiences of military and veteran students it is clear that there are a number of mitigating circumstances impacting their transition to college. These circumstances are further exacerbated by the previously mentioned lack of support found on most college

campuses. If university faculty and staff invest the time needed to understand the strengths, needs and challenges of student veterans in transition using the Schlossberg model, they will be postured in a more effective way to facilitate their transition by better advocating for them. Only through a foundation built on this level of understanding and trust will colleges and universities grow more adept at helping veterans succeed with their transition and academic performance (Ryan, Carlstrom, & Hughey, 2011).

4. Military and Veteran Students as Adult Learners

As the value of a college degree increases, postsecondary institutions must be prepared to serve the needs of nearly three quarters of the adult population in the United States. The glaring problem here, however, is that many adult students are not academically prepared to succeed in college. “Many students find their campus social as well as academic environments somewhat foreign, even unfriendly, and challenging to navigate” (Kuh, 2011, p. ix). Because the stakes are so high, it is important that new adult, non-traditional students get off to a sound start, academically and socially.

After separating from the service, veterans will experience a feeling they have not dealt with for several years; the isolation that comes when you are no longer part of a team. Cheryl Branker (2009) in her study of the new generation of veteran students at North Carolina State noted that these veteran students shared common feelings of isolation. When asked how their transition from the military to campus life was going one respondent quipped, “The major problem here is there is such a difference between me and my 17- and 18-year old classmates. Plus I know absolutely nobody here and that difference between us makes it hard to make friends. Younger classmates tend to look at you a little differently” (p. 61).

Being older is an obvious and noticeable difference, but veterans, because of their age, bring a variety of additional concerns while attending school. In her study of mature-aged students, Megan Tones (2009) found, “students older than 25 years of age, are more likely to be living away from home with a partner, and to have dependent children. These circumstances impose additional economic and time demands, both of which might hinder mature-aged students from completing their studies” (Tones, Fraser, & Elder, 2009 58(4), p. 506)

A closer look at adult students

At the advent of the twenty-first century, adult learners can be categorized into three main groups: (a) workers who have lost their jobs because of the recession of 2008, (b) veterans returning from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and (c) adults who have recently completed their General Education Development (GED) tests. These adult learners bring a host of life experiences and personal approaches to learning that could help, or hinder their learning outcomes. These differing perspectives on learning may represent an array of challenges and benefits for the staffs of colleges and universities that will clearly set these non-traditional learners apart from their younger and more traditional college classmates (Kenner, 2011).

In a report for the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Laura Horn and Dennis Carroll (1996) define the non-traditional student as one identified by the presence of one or more of the following seven characteristics: 1) delayed enrollment into postsecondary education; 2) attending part time; 3) financially independent; 4) working full time while enrolled; 5) have dependents other than a spouse; 6) is a single parent; or, 7) did not obtain a standard high school diploma. These students tend to be older, (25

years or older) and, if they juggle more than four of these characteristics, they run a high risk of not completing their degree (Horn, 1996).

What's more, the number of adult learners has grown over the last few decades. In fact the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data indicate that 40 percent of the 2013 enrollment of more than twenty million college students were twenty-five years of age or older (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). If you consider that many non-traditional learners are juggling at least one of the seven previously mentioned characteristics, then the number of adult learners grows to nearly 73 percent (Ross-Gordon, 2011).

Malcolm Knowles and the Andragogic Model of Learning

Military and veteran students tend to share many of the seven non-traditional characteristics highlighted by the NCES report, and when linked to their ages, (many are 25 or older) are considered by Malcolm Knowles (1974) to be adult learners. Knowles believed that these students fell outside the traditional learning parameters of standard college pedagogy, and into what Knowles referred to as the *Andragogical Model of learning* (Knowles M. S., 1974).

Understanding the key elements of the organizational development model in education, Knowles (1974) identified four principles that characterize adult learning.

(a) They are self-directed, take responsibility for their own actions, and resist having information arbitrarily imposed on them.

(b) They have an extensive depth of experience, which serves as a critical component in the foundation of their self-identity.

(c) They are ready to learn. As most adult learners return to college voluntarily, they are likely to actively engage in the learning process.

(d) They are task motivated. Adult students returning to college attend for a specific goal and the primary component of their motivational drive tends to be internal (Knowles M. S., *Andragogy in action* , 1984).

As previously mentioned, adult learners now comprise 73% of the students on campuses. Members of this adult learner group are 25 years of age or older and military and veteran students constitute a majority of this group. Clearly, colleges and universities have an obligation to consider their unique characteristics and needs. Malcolm Knowles (1974) proposed that adults learners profit from a different approach to learning and that could be understood in terms of a philosophy for adult learning that he termed “andragogy”, a term Knowles brought from Europe to the United States in 1968, to help identify a philosophy of education specific to adult learners (Navarre-Cleary, (Fall) 2013). Knowles six principles of andragogy clearly distinguish it from “pedagogy” – a philosophy for educating children and adolescents (Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2012 p. 63-67).

Knowles six principles of andragogy include:

1. Need to know - adults prefer to know what, how, and why they are learning.
2. Readiness to learn – adults return to school because they have specific knowledge and skills they want or need to learn to solve problems, address challenge or otherwise make things happen in their lives.
3. Orientation to learning – adults are focused on learning for doing much more than learning for knowing.

4. Motivated – adults are generally more internally than externally motivated.
5. Self-direction – adults see themselves as and desire to be self-directing.
6. Experienced – the many life experiences of adults are a resource for and sometimes a potential barrier to learning.

Knowles principles provide a framework that allows the veteran student and teacher to work together to better understand the influence of the veteran's numerous personal and professional experiences (Navarre-Cleary, (Fall) 2013). Successful programs for military and veteran students, then, should align with these principles in order to provide effective learning experiences for this distinct student population. Unpacking each of Knowles principles and providing an example of how each principle could be applied to a university context is important if we are to more fully understand how they apply to a more comprehensive learning experience for the veteran student (Navarre-Cleary, (Fall) 2013).

Unpacking Knowles six principles of andragogy

Need to Know: Adult learners unlike their younger student counterparts are more likely to opt out of the learning experience if they do not have a clear understanding, or know why their particular courses are important. For instance, explaining why academic writing is different than the writing style most veterans use becomes an effective way to shape that understanding. As one veteran explained it, "In the military you are used to writing just straight, blunt, short and concise, like to the point...and you might get a prompt and you'll answer it in like a half page...but the essay will require that you make like a five-page paper and you feel like you answered it in a page, so it's what are all the filler, like what else am I supposed to be writing? I got to my point already, so how do I

elaborate?” (Navarre-Cleary, (Fall) 2013, p. 3). Explaining how to elaborate on a writing assignment helps veteran students understand why they need to learn to write differently than they used to write in the military.

Readiness to Learn: As military and veteran students shift from life in the military to life as a college student their level of readiness to learn is higher. This readiness is strengthened by their current or previous status of employee or veteran, husband or father, wife or mother. This sense of readiness to learn is tied to a developmental task associated with moving from one stage to the next. The realization that the student now must get a civilian job to support a family provides both motivation and increased readiness to learn (Navarre-Cleary, (Fall) 2013). One veteran describes herself as on a mission to “finish my bachelor’s degree and get a master’s in social work so that I can specifically work with veterans, military members, and their families” (Navarre-Cleary, (Fall) 2013, p. 4).

Orientation to Learning: Knowles noted that adults are more task or problem oriented learners rather than subject-centered learners. Therefore he argues that learning for adults must be achieved by attaching the learning process to some form of meaning making relevant to the work they are used to performing. To better serve the veteran student, university instructors must learn to relate assignment to the rich life experiences that veteran students bring with them to campus in order to help orient them to the learning process (Navarre-Cleary, (Fall) 2013).

Motivated: Knowles argues that while adults do respond to the external motivators like better jobs or promotions for increased wages, adults are also motivated by internal drivers like, self-satisfaction and self-esteem. Veterans, as a product of their

military training, like to stay busy. Their urge to find another mission or to continue to serve, albeit themselves, can serve as powerful extrinsic and intrinsic motivators once they separate from military service. Caution, however, must be exercised here, since some veterans may be over motivated and try to do too many things at once as they attempt to deal with work, school, and family issues (Navarre-Cleary, (Fall) 2013).

Self-direction: Knowles declares that self-direction is similar to individual autonomy, where the adult student takes a more active role in the education process. They in fact become, co-creators of the academic experience. For instance, a veteran student may want to choose which topic to write about on a term paper, but would need some model or framework to follow along with. Thus co-creating the assignment as an instructional team (Navarre-Cleary, (Fall) 2013).

Experience: Military and veteran students bring a variety of life experiences. Knowles (1974) noted that the experiences adults bring with them to the learning experience carry with them certain benefits and detriments. From an instructional perspective, the varied experiences of adult learners can create a multitude of individual learning preferences. Knowles points out that these varied experiences provide a rich resource for learning and that instructors should learn about their adult students in order to help them use their past experience to support and enhance their present learning goals. Knowles cautions, however, that experiences may also become sources of individual biases that adult students have against certain projects, assignments, and teaching styles for example, that can impede their learning process.

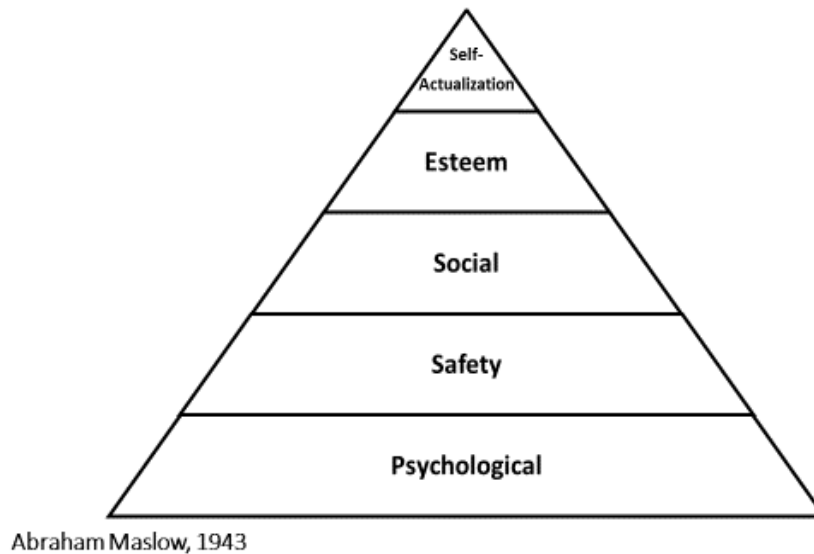
Adopting a Hierarchy of Needs for Student Veterans

In order to identify and then provide the key services non-traditional military and veteran students need to succeed, and to bridge a gap in the support that is offered to their traditional student counterparts, we must seriously consider *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*. Maslow's critical building block approach to self-actualization and success mirrors the ground up training philosophy that new recruits undergo when they enter boot camp.

This evolution begins when new recruits commence basic training, lose their independent way of thinking, and they begin to learn the value of the team. Having shed their needs as an individual, young enlistees begin to embody the security that the platoon or squad provides. Satisfaction of this key need, gives way or builds upon their readiness to take the next step in the training process and so on. Much the same way as Maslow intended his hierarchy to provide a path to self-actualization, this reliance on newly formed bonds that will lead to increased effort, loyalty and the continuous performance required for success on the battlefield (Siebold, 2007).

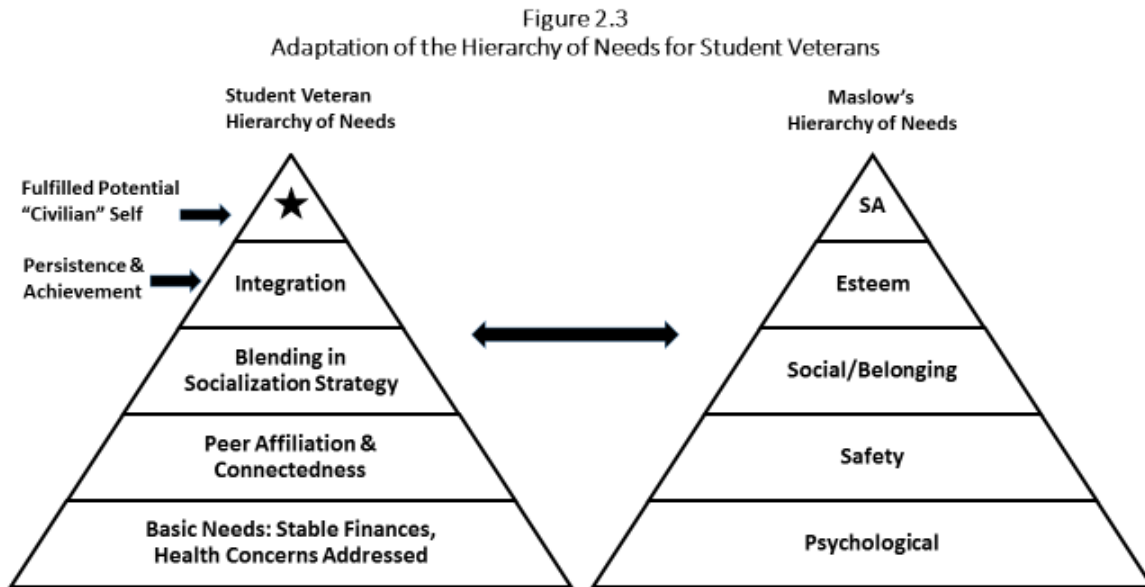
Maslow insisted that individuals are motivated to behave as they do while seeking to satisfy a variety of needs. His hierarchy, illustrated in Figure 2.2, is broken down into five distinct levels, Physiological, Safety, Love and Belonging, and Esteem needs, which if satisfied would lead to the fifth level of the hierarchy, Self-Actualization. Whether they are survival needs found in the physiological level or basic safety needs, these lowest level cravings must be met prior to an individual moving forward to satisfy any form of higher need (McLeod, 2007)

Figure 2.2
Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Maslow also contended that human motivation is based on an individual's need to change through personal growth and that growth centered on a more positive account of life, or, what was going right. He also applied the needs hierarchy to success in the classroom. He insisted that students must feel safe emotionally and physically before they could perform at their best. Maslow continued to apply his theory in terms of the student's craved respect, and a supportive environment (McLeod, 2007).

DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell (2008) relied heavily on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as they developed their own framework (Figure 2.3) to understand the transitional needs of military and veteran students on a college campus, and stated that military and veteran students will experience a variety of needs in stages.



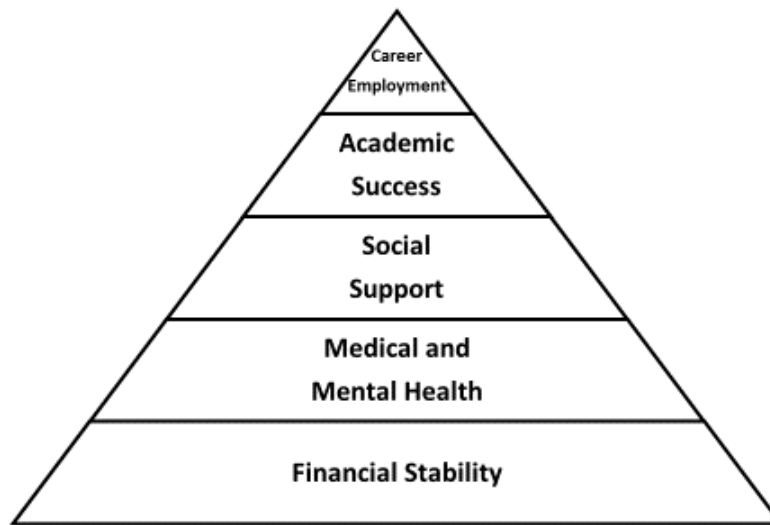
Source: DiRamio, D., & Jarvis, K. 2011

DiRamio, et.al (2008), contend that military and veteran students are stripped of their support system upon separation from active-duty. This phenomena affects Guard and Reserve members as well when their deployments end. This separation may lead to increased worry about a variety of needs, including, finances, a place to live, friends and a sense of belonging that will be hard to connect with on the college campus. There are interesting parallels between Maslow's hierarchy, and those of transitioning military and veteran students (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008)

These struggles may lead to a failure to integrate socially and academically, two critical steps in the matriculation process. "For a student veteran to persist and move into the role of a fulfilled civilian self, he or she must experience this belonging and connectedness in the college environment" (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008, p. 26) The goal of the DiRamio, et.al (2008) is the fulfilled potential "civilian" self, which will they contend only occur if all previous needs are satisfied (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008).

In similar fashion, Janine Wert, Director of Veterans Services at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, presented at the 2016 Conference for the Council of Colleges and Military Educators (Wert, 2016, February). Wert shared a similar framework to assist veterans with their transition to college. Her five step hierarchy, illustrated in Figure 2.4, supports the work of DiRamio, et al. (2008)

Figure 2.4
Veteran's Transition Success Model



Source: Wert, 2016

Wert, like DiRamio, et.al (2008) adheres to a Maslow-like hierarchy. The top level under the Wert (2016) model however frames success as post-graduation when the military and veteran student accepts a job. As is the case with previously mentioned hierarchies, fundamental needs must be met before advancing to the next level. Wert contends that a variety of special services designed specifically for military and veterans students, must be put in place to satisfy the needs found on each level. For instance too successfully transition from the Financial Stability level, programs to help understand the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), grants and loans must be provided. Referrals to the VA Hospitals or on-campus peer support groups must be available. And

to move from what Wert insists is the most critical level of the hierarchy, the Social Support level, student organizations, a veterans lounge, alumni events and other critical socialization venues must be made available if military and veteran students have any chance of moving forward with their education. (Wert, 2016)

These models offer key recommendations, and affirm that college staff and administration must provide for the various needs of military and veteran students such as their health and financial well-being, connection with peers, and the opportunity to socialize and integrate. Only with these supports can military and veteran students persist, to reach their own level of self-fulfillment (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell; 2008, Wert, 2016).

Common to both frameworks (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell; 2008, Wert, 2016) is the call for support systems that are critical to meeting the core needs of veteran students that will enable them to then focus on issues related to school or work. The two frameworks highlighted here (Figures 2.3 and 2.4) were specifically designed to emphasize the fact that these support systems must be provided by a central office at the University since they are critical to ensuring that military and veteran students both survive and thrive on campus (DiRamio, et al. 2008; Wert, 2016).

5. Essential Support Elements

Research continues to underscore that key constituencies – faculty, staff and administration at postsecondary institutions are not well versed in the details of veterans' education benefits, which may cause additional problems for military students (Branker, 2009, Cook and Kim, 2009, DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008, O'Herrin, 2011, Radford, 2009). Veterans have validated this concern and have repeatedly called for a

well versed single point of contact, preferably a veteran, who functions as an important resource supporting their successful transition to college. One current member of the armed services noted: “Unfortunately, my experience has been the colleges and universities don’t know anything about the GI benefits. I am the one that has to tell them what it is. That has been my experience lately. That’s very frustrating because instead of going . . . to school to ask them questions, I have to find other resources like the education center and, of course, the Internet. So I have to educate myself to educate them” (Radford, 2009, p. 19).

In *The New Generation of Veteran*, Branker (2009) recommended that any university entertaining the notion of rolling out new programs for veterans should give their initiative serious consideration and planning. Branker bases this recommendation on the feedback received from actual veterans. “It’s not quite what I thought it was going to be, it’s two totally different worlds. I really didn’t realize how different I was from the majority of my class until I got here.” Based on her findings, Branker suggests that to mitigate the effects of this isolation, administrators at postsecondary schools should take steps to create a Veteran’s Center specifically designed to cater to the special needs of veteran students.

Establishing a central Veterans Center, staffed by individuals who understand the benefit options as well as the issues confronting incoming veteran students will ease the burden. This centralized office, demonstrates the institutions commitment to veterans. Cook and Kim (2009) contend that once veterans become students if they experience reassurance and expertise demonstrated by the organization, a relationship built on trust will be established facilitating access and academic success (Cook, B. J., & Kim, Y.,

2009, p. 17). A Veteran's Center lead by a well-versed former military person would be an important step in this direction.

Governmental recommendations to ease the transition

Though postsecondary schools have demonstrated a willingness to help ease the veteran student transition to civilian and university life, these same colleges and universities remain uncertain about how to meet the distinctly different needs of this type of student (O'Herrin, 2011). In their study, Cook and Kim highlight an astounding fact; "Despite the long history of veterans' education benefits and the presence of veteran students on campus, little research has been conducted on effective campus programs and services that successfully aid veterans in the college transition" (Cook & Kim, 2009, p. 1). In fact, of the 700 schools participating in their study a.) Only 22% provide transition services for veteran students, b.) Fewer than 50% employ an individual trained to assist with the transition, c.) 57% do not train faculty and staff on their transitional needs, d.) and less than 37% train faculty and staff to cope with veteran students struggling with disabilities. One factor that may contribute to this lack of planning and support for the veteran population may center around the notion that few staff or faculty on today's campuses have served in the military. Regardless of the reason, many veterans suggested that having a single point of contact on campus would help them navigate their way upon arriving at college (Cook & Kim, 2009).

Veterans have validated this concern, and agree that a well versed single point of contact, preferably a veteran, is an important resource supporting their successful transition to college. O'Herrin (2011) notes, "One of the biggest frustrations voiced by veterans is the daunting and unfamiliar bureaucracy of higher education. While the military is also an enormously complex bureaucracy, information about how to navigate

it is ingrained in troops through specific training from the beginning of their military careers. Many veterans have spoken to the sense of alienation they feel upon beginning class and often allude to feeling confused and overwhelmed during their first terms because they aren't sure where to turn for assistance" (p. 16).

Establishing a central Veterans Center, staffed by individuals who understand the benefit options as well as the issues confronting incoming veteran students would potentially ease this burden. This centralized office would demonstrate the institutions commitment to veterans. Cook and Kim contend that once veterans becoming students experience reassurance and expertise demonstrated by the organization, a relationship built on trust can be established that will facilitate access and academic success (Cook & Kim, 2009).

To address this situation, in 2013 the Departments of Labor, Defense, Education and Veterans Affairs collaborated with the White House to develop concrete strategies to help veterans attain their educational goals. Through their collaborative efforts they developed an 8-Step process designed to help Veterans succeed on campus and more easily transition servicemembers to the rigors of academic life. The resulting program, *VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC)* (U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012) was designed to help military and veteran students adjust to their new academic setting. Key stakeholders from the four previously mentioned Departments, worked diligently with representatives from non-profit organizations, as well as veterans who had recently graduated from college. The eight key steps of the program are illustrated in Figure 2.5 below.

Figure 2.5

Keys to Facilitate Veterans' Success on Campus



Keys to Facilitate Veterans Success on Campus (Source: VA Website:

www.benefits.va.gov/vow/docs/08-30-13_email.pdf)

Unpacking the Eight Step Process

As Figure 2.5 illustrates, there are eight steps that are crucial to Veterans' success on campus. Each step will be briefly described in turn.

Step One: Develop a culture of trust and connectedness across the campus community that will promote well-being and success for Veterans: Veterans have unique needs, respond to them. Use veterans as resources for each other to provide mentors and team leaders. Give them choices, they are diverse and require some variety. Communicate with them in the style they communicate with you.

Step Two: Ensure Consistent and sustained support from campus

leadership: Enlighten leadership of the various support veterans have available to them.

Encourage veterans to participate in decisions concerning them with leadership.

Highlight the importance of a smooth transition. Sponsor meetings between Student Veteran leadership and campus administration.

Step Three: Employ an early warning system to mitigate academic, career

and financial issues. Establish an all veterans transition seminar. Develop safeguards to highlight fading academic performance. Spread those same safeguards across other campus support entities.

Step Four: Centralize Veteran support by creating a designated space for

them. Create an easy to find website, highlighting all services for veterans. Connect them with essential life needs, housing, food, childcare and financial support. Most important, give them their own space to congregate.

Step Five: Get the community involved. Bring the VA and other support

agencies on campus. Provide internships and other career broadening opportunities.

Recruit, help ease the transition, support, and educate.

Step Six: Track their demographics, retention and success. Create metrics that

will illustrate success.

Step Seven: Provide enriching events to increase faculty and staff awareness.

Highlight veteran's specific needs, and send the staff to developmental conferences.

Step Eight: Evaluate and sustain your program. Evaluate what you are doing

for veterans. Seek grants and conduct fundraising to support your initiatives (U. S.

Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012).

Brian Thompson, head of the Military Affairs Team for the U. S. Department of Education explains that the 8 Keys (U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012), “highlight specific ways that colleges, universities and other institutions of higher education can voluntarily support veterans and servicemembers in transitioning to higher education, completing their college programs, obtaining career-ready skills and achieving success” (Military Advanced Education and Transition, 2015). As of the spring of 2016, 2,005 academic institutions have committed to supporting veterans as they pursue their education and employment goals. Though it is too soon to determine the long-term impact of the Eight Step process, preliminary feedback shows that some headway is being made on campuses that have instituted them (U. S. Department of Education, 2016).

Addressing the special needs of veteran students

Currently, large numbers of veterans are returning from their tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. These veterans seek ways to connect with colleges and universities around the country, and they routinely experience transitions that are jarring. Many returning veterans struggle with a variety of academic and clinical hurdles because of their military service. Adam Fisher, a freshman at the University of Toledo, deals with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and copes with it by participating in group therapy. “It’s hard for me to be around so many people,” he said (King, 2013). Adam is not atypical. Universities and colleges must be prepared to deal with an influx of challenging clinical concerns as well as unique human concerns that characterize this non-traditional, veteran student.

For many of today's veterans who have experienced multiple deployments to Southwest Asia, their rate of exposure to traumatic situations is much more significant. Preliminary reports indicate that nearly 20% of all Servicemembers who served in Iraq and Afghanistan are reporting symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or Major Depression (Rand Corporation, 2008). The symptoms of these disorders include, increased depression, and anxiety, and when coupled with compounded stress, may result in a higher incidence rate of suicide. Sadly, veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan are 35% more likely to complete suicide compared to the general population. In fact, the U.S. Army recently announced that 2008 marked the highest rate of completed suicides by veterans since 1980 (Carden 2009).

A close examination of the frameworks of DiRamio, et al (2008) and Wert (2016), underscores the importance of a well-defined support system, and in the earliest phases of their transition, the fact that some veterans will require clinical support to heal from the invisible wounds that some may be struggling with. These basic clinical needs must be addressed before military and veteran students are capable of focusing any attention on the social or academic requirements. Further complicating this struggle is the fact that challenges like, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, (PTSD) and major depression are not fixed in a one-shot, simple approach to supporting veteran's needs.

What is more, veterans are juggling a host of other concerns. More than 40 percent of the servicemembers deployed to Operation Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom have children. Again, the work of DiRamio, et al (2008) and Wert (2016), help us realize that without veterans securing their need for stable family life both

economically and socially, they will be hard pressed to concentrate on their studies and to succeed academically.

Clinical concerns and the added stress of juggling school work and the rigors of raising a family are not the only issues postsecondary staffs will have to consider as they begin to help military and veterans students on campus. Today's military has high percentage of minority groups (i.e., Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and "other races"). To put this in perspective only 66% of the current military population is white compared to nearly 90% during the Vietnam War. Additionally, there are more women serving in the military now. For instance, of the 2,709,918 Americans serving in Vietnam, 7,484 were women, or roughly 3%. Today's fighting force has witnessed a growth in the population of women, which now numbers, 89% men, and 11% women. (Institute of Medicine of the National Academies, 2010). This diversity demands the added organizational effort and layered services. If we are to consider the work of DiRamio, et al (2008) and Wert (2016), and draw similar support parallels to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, students from diverse groups often struggle to feel a sense of belonging that exceeds the expectations and needs of non-traditional military and veteran students who are white.

6. Evaluating University Based Support Systems for Military and Veteran Students

As the previously reviewed research illustrates, the unique needs of MVS are complex, multi-dimensional and strongly embedded in their psyche in terms of their ability to adapt to new environments. These needs are exacerbated by the sheer numbers of MVS who are currently entering colleges and universities because of the vastly expanded benefit package afforded eligible veterans and their dependents in 2008. In fact, the Veterans Administration (2015) reported that it assisted, 1,069,034 eligible veterans and servicemembers with their education benefits, and contributed more than 12 billion

benefit dollars to postsecondary institutions in 2015 (U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016).

This increase in the number of non-traditional veteran students has “forced colleges and universities to evolve to meet their unique needs” (Gallup Poll, 2015, p. 1). Some universities show early signs of addressing these needs better than others. Veterans participating in the Gallup Poll (2015) reported that private schools are better at understanding their specific needs by 10 percentage points, (25% for public vs 35% for private schools), and the comfort level is even better when the student population is below 10,000 (Gallup Poll, 2015).

Yet, regardless of the size of the school, or the number of MVS in attendance, the clinical, financial, social and academic success of the military and veteran student must become a priority for every college and university. Several governmental agencies recommend that postsecondary administrators and their staffs take aggressive steps to provide key support services for these non-traditional learners (U. S. Department of Education, 2016).

This critical process will require an authentic and dedicated effort on the part of all postsecondary schools. This initiative, however, must start by each college or university closely examining the ways they currently serve their military and veteran student body, and then adapt their existing support services to meet the unique needs of the military and veteran student (Branker, 2009; Cook & Kim, 2009; O’Herrin, 2011). Elizabeth O’Herrin (2011) noted that “because veterans are a diverse population with an incredibly wide range of experiences, it is impossible to take a one-size-fits-all approach to serving them. Therefore, one of the most important steps that campus leadership can

take is to gauge the specific needs of veterans at their institution before devoting resources to new initiatives” (p. 2).

Providing 360 degree support for military and veteran students

Clearly, military servicemembers and veterans are, by definition, nontraditional students (Kenner, 2011). They are typically older and because they may transfer the technical training they receive in the military for college credit, are normally considered transfer students. They may view college as a logical next step after separating from the military, and a necessary hurdle prior to earning gainful employment. Though many institutions of higher learning have tried to help the MVS transition to college, most are not exactly sure how to go about doing it and are currently ineffective. (O'Herrin, 2011).

Ensuring a proper introduction to school

According to Elizabeth O'Herrin, “Many veterans do not transition out of the military in time to attend traditional orientation sessions, which often take place several weeks before a term begins. They may miss the basic introduction to the campus and resources that other incoming students receive, and this can result in feelings of disorientation from the outset. Veterans also require specific information on benefits and other resources, which is not typically included in the orientation for incoming students. In order to meet this need, some institutions have created short break-out sessions for veterans, in addition to the regular transfer and freshman orientation program” (O'Herrin, 2011).

Colleges and Universities are quite good at providing the essential support systems to ensure their traditional students step firmly on to the academic pathway to

success. It is imperative that they adopt specific support systems for their non-traditional MVS as depicted below. (Figure 2.6)

Figure 2.6
The Military and Veteran Student 360 degree – 24/7 Wrap-Around Support System
Providing Just in time support, just for them



Adapting the 8 Keys to Veterans Success on Campus

Cook and Kim (2009) reported that “veterans are not necessarily looking to be isolated or have special programs created on their behalf. More than anything, they are looking for an educational environment that provides the tools and resources that allow them to succeed” (p. 29). For this reason, Ackerman and DiRamio ((2009) suggest “establishing proactive and working partnerships to help create a more seamless environment for students who need to successfully navigate multiple agencies, organizations and bureaucracies to help create or find supportive individuals and environments to facilitate the transitions of student veterans” (p. 32).

Meeting the specific needs of the MVS with tailored supports is critical. As previously mentioned, a one-size-fits-all-approach is impossible and ineffective. Kelley, Smith and Fox (2012) put it this way, “if postsecondary institutions can begin to understand the many types of transitional challenges that student veterans face as they

return to college, higher education can then begin to provide relevant signposts to help them navigate the bureaucratic labyrinth. In the military, transitions come with specific labels, training, and support called standard operating procedures (SOP). The transition to higher education is far less directed. Student veterans must negotiate the complexities of their benefits, apply and be accepted to the institution of their choice, and register for courses in an environment that is highly unstandardized. Student veterans, facing all the challenges listed previously, often feel as though they are in a bureaucratic maze and have difficulty understanding the unspoken (or hard to find) rules and regulations governing college life. As newcomers, they have trouble fitting in – they have lost the role clarity that they experienced in the military, they may have lost their social support, and they keenly feel the cultural differences of traditionally aged students and higher education in general” (p. 35).

This bureaucratic maze adds an additional burden to the shoulders of brave men and women who have already shouldered more than their share. To truly honor the service of our nation’s veteran and military men and women who choose colleges as a transition to a new life, we owe them a clear path to success that includes “just in time, just for me” wrap around support. In other words, it is crucial that each college or university develop a 360 degree support system approach that is specifically designed for the military and veteran student different but parallel to the systems currently in place for traditional students. Figure 2.6 illustrates this point by adapting the work created by the Departments of Defense, Labor and Education.

What follows is a study designed to help inform how this type of 360 degree wrap around support system might be implemented at Duquesne University.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

The original GI Bill, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, provided financial resources to millions of American GI's who before the war might never had considered the idea of attending college. This landmark legislation has been credited with singlehandedly retooling veterans who a newly educated workforce took their place as members of the "Greatest Generation" to help rebuild America.

Currently, the Post 9/11 GI Bill offers more than 2.5 million service members who served in the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan the resources needed to transition into the ranks of higher education. Are colleges and universities embracing this next generation of veterans as openly as they embraced those who entered the classroom under the GI Bill of 1944? The limited amount of research on the current state of Veteran and Military students at the university does not support that notion.

The methods used in the study grew from the literature review and specifically address the following three research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of military and veteran students regarding the success of their academic and social transition experience at Duquesne University?
2. How does the current status of services for military and veteran students align with national recommendations for quality programs?
3. What can Duquesne University do to improve its military and veteran student services to meet the national criteria for quality programs and address the perceptions of the strengths and weakness reported by current military and veteran students?

The data collected have the potential to inform those charged with ensuring that military and veteran students registering and matriculating into the University graduate from college. The goal is to use the data from veterans who are currently enrolled at Duquesne University to provide insight into the factors that impact the personal and academic success of the MVS population to establish a stronger transition program as well as wrap around support services that will provide a well-balanced start for MVS academic careers and help the MVS maintain a level of success.

Methodology

A mixed methods research design was used during three phases of the study. Each phase designed to address one of the research questions.

The first phase involved collecting and analyzing response data from a survey of current Military and Veteran students to gather their perceptions regarding their treatment, support, social interaction and instruction as current students at the University. The survey employed both a 4-point Likert Scale and several open-ended questions. The survey questions were designed to address research question one: *What are the perceptions of Military and Veteran Students regarding their academic and social transition experience at Duquesne University?*

Quantitative data from the responses to the Likert-scale questions consisted of mostly nominal level variables that were subjected to basic descriptive analyses (i.e., frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulation). Responses to the open-ended questions were analyzed using a general interpretive process of close reading that involved identifying patterns of thinking and acting, in order to discover regularities and uncover anomalies (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

The second phase of the study addressed the second research question: *How does the current status of services for Military and Veteran Students align with national recommendations for quality programs?* In this phase of the study the summary of the perceptions of the MVS who completed the survey were compared to the hallmarks of a quality program as established under the 8 Keys to Veterans' Success (U. S. Department of Education, 2016), commissioned by the Departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs and Education. This phase helped to determine areas of strengths and gaps in the current campus programs.

Finally, the findings from phases one and two of the study were used to address research question three: *What can Duquesne University do to improve its Military and Veteran services to meet the national criteria for quality programs and address the perceptions of the strengths and weakness reported by current Military and Veteran Students?* This phase of the study was geared to promote an actionable design for improvement based on both the standards set forth in the 8 Keys to Veterans' Success (U. S. Department of Education, 2016) and the needs of Duquesne University Military and Veteran Students.

Procedures

The research is being conducted at Duquesne University, a mid-sized, private Catholic institution in Pittsburgh, PA. There are approximately 10,000 students attending Duquesne, for both baccalaureate, graduate and post-graduate degrees. There are just over 300 military and veteran students (306/spring semester 2016) who have openly confirmed their military affiliation. Of this group, 49 are the spouse or dependent of a

veteran who are using their dependent veterans Chapter 33, Post 9/11 GI Bill, which is transferrable to dependents. This number represents 3% of the student population.

Duquesne University was chosen for the study because the researcher is the current Director of Duquesne's Office of Military and Veteran Students at the institution. This role affords me direct access to the population required for the study and current practices in place to support MVS transition and ongoing success. Both factors will help the study evaluate the effectiveness of Duquesne's service and design a program of improvements that aligns with the recommendations of the U.S. Department of Education (2016),

Selection and Recruitment of Participants.

There are approximately 300 military and veteran students (MVS) attending Duquesne University. The Office of Military and Veteran Students receives an updated list of current students that includes university email address. Each MVS on the most current list received an invitation to participate in the survey via their university email that provided a link to the survey on the Survey Monkey platform. The invitation emails were sent from the Director of the Center for Adult Learners to minimize the pressure participants might experience if the request came directly from the Director of Military and Veteran Students. In the invitation email, potential participants were informed of their rights to participate or refuse to participate. Participants were informed that completing the survey indicated their informed consent. They were also informed that since their responses were anonymous, they would not be able to withdraw their data once it was submitted.

The invitation emails were sent in two waves. The first wave was sent to all MVS in the fall semester of 2016. The students were informed that the survey would remain open for two weeks. At the end of the first week of the survey, a reminder email was sent to all MVS students included to remind them of the survey, invite them to participate if they had not done so and to make an effort to increase the response rate.

Instruments:

A 28 question online survey (Appendix A) was used to collect participant responses. The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete.

The first portion of the survey included questions designed to collect demographic information (age, gender, military service, etc.) The second portion of the survey focused on specific services offered by the university, and asked each participant to render an opinion regarding the effectiveness and or importance of each service described. Participants were asked to weigh in on their first impression of the university, the admissions process, their familiarity with and frequency with which they used a variety of on campus services, as well as the university “veteran friendliness”, to cite a few examples.

The second instrument used was the “8 Keys to Veterans’ Success” (U. S. Department of Education, 2016). The elements of successful MVS programs revealed in the 8 Keys resulted from a collaborative initiative of the Departments of Education, Defense and Veterans Administration, and outlined the key elements necessary to ensure MVS success on campus. During the second phase the researcher compare the perceptions of the MVS from the surveys, to the descriptions of the 8 key factors for

success to determine which areas of the Duquesne program offer strengths on which to build and which areas of the program show a definite gap in effectiveness.

Methods of Data Analyses

During the first phase, the demographic data from the survey as well as responses to Likert scale items were subjected to descriptive analysis and reported as frequency counts and/or percentages. A simple matrix was developed to perform basic descriptive analyses of the data from the open-ended questions. The responses to those questions provided a number of overlapping categories and patterns that were interpreted in general terms leading to the development of patterns in the way MVS perceived the usefulness of services and/or participated in certain social settings. Basic descriptive analyses were used to track and identify variables found within the quantitative data from the responses to the Likert-scale questions. A number of passes through the data provided a level of trustworthiness of the information provided by the respondents.

During the second phase of the analysis the researcher used descriptors of the 8 key factors of an effective program for MVS in colleges and universities as reported by the (U. S. Department of Education, 2016). Those descriptive criteria were used to analyze the areas of strength and the areas of need of the current services offered by Duquesne University. Frequency counts were used to draw conclusions about the MVS' overall satisfaction with different aspects of the current Duquesne MVS program.

Following both phases of the analyses the researcher drew conclusions from the survey responses and compared them through constant comparative analysis to the criteria of the 8 Keys. This revealed areas where the Duquesne Program currently meets

MVS' expectations and where highlighted areas that the MVS perceived that the University can do better for the MVS as a whole and with specific groups of MVS.

Finally, the researcher employed the conclusions drawn from the survey and the comparison to the 8 Keys to design a plan of action and a suggested timeline for improving the Duquesne MVS program in order to more strongly connect to the expressed needs of current students and set forth a plan of action to set a course for the Duquesne Program to work toward the level of excellence described in the 8 Keys.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

This study was designed to examine the perceptions of current Military and Veteran Students (MVS) at Duquesne University regarding specific support services currently offered to them and the kinds of support services that might be offered in the future. The findings are being sought to substantiate the argument that “Students with military experience present a special challenge for colleges and universities, not only because of their increasing numbers but also because of their differences from traditionally aged students and their unique characteristics associated with military experiences.” (DiRamio D. &., 2011, p. 7). Too often, campuses conceptualize MVS who served in Iraq and Afghanistan and military members still serving, as non-traditional or adult learners, even though they are fundamentally different in specific and important ways.

What follows are the results and analyses of the responses to an online survey focused on supportive services tailored for MVS. The survey was distributed to 227 current MVS via email message to their Duquesne University account during the fall, 2016 semester. MVS were asked to respond to the survey and informed that their responses were completely voluntary and would remain anonymous. Forty-six students responded to survey questions for a 20.2% participation rate. The presentation of the findings is organized by survey question. Each question is accompanied by a graph of the responses, noting the number of respondents to the question compared to the total participants, an interpretation of the findings, support from the literature related to the question and the implication of the responses.

The first section of the presentation of the findings investigates the demographics of Duquesne University's MVS population. Following the presentation and discussion of the demographics, the second section focuses on services currently provided by the University for the MVS population. The presentation concludes with an exploration of services that are currently missing from the researcher's point of view along with an analysis of services suggested by the respondents.

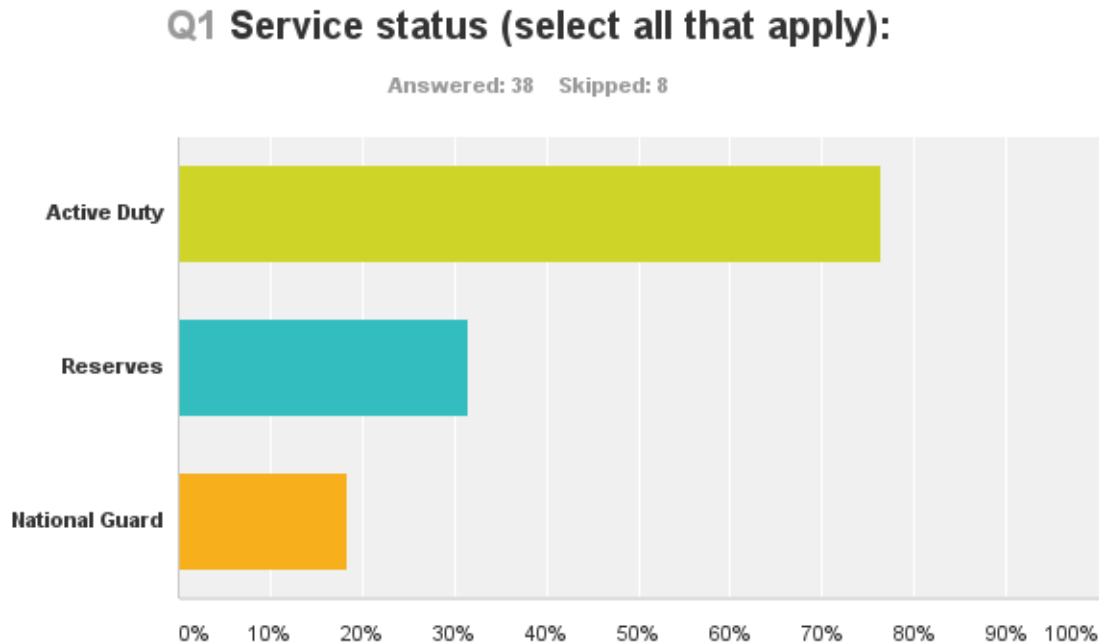
Introduction to Section One Demographics: The type of service status matters

Identifying the specific service status of the MVS population is essential if we hope to provide the services MVS need to succeed in the postsecondary setting. Unlike their Reserve component counterparts, servicemembers committed to active duty are accustomed to a wide variety of services within the confines of their installations. These essential services have a self-sustaining, built-in quality that directly impacts the lives of those serving on bases and posts. Everything that persons serving in the military need to survive can be found within the fence line. The transition from this structured and supported existence is often difficult for GI's preparing to reconnect with independent civilian life, especially when, for the first time in years, they will be transitioning to various civilian communities that do not follow the rules and structures of military life (Ackerman & DiRamio, 2009).

Survey Question 1: Type of Service Status

The first survey question asked respondents to identify their current service status. As Figure 4.1 illustrates, 38 of the 46 MVS responded to this survey question. Of those who responded, 75% reported that they served on Active Duty. This finding is particularly interesting since Duquesne University is not located near an active duty

facility and the presumption could be made that there would therefore be a higher number of MVS whose service status is affiliated with the National Guard or Reserves.

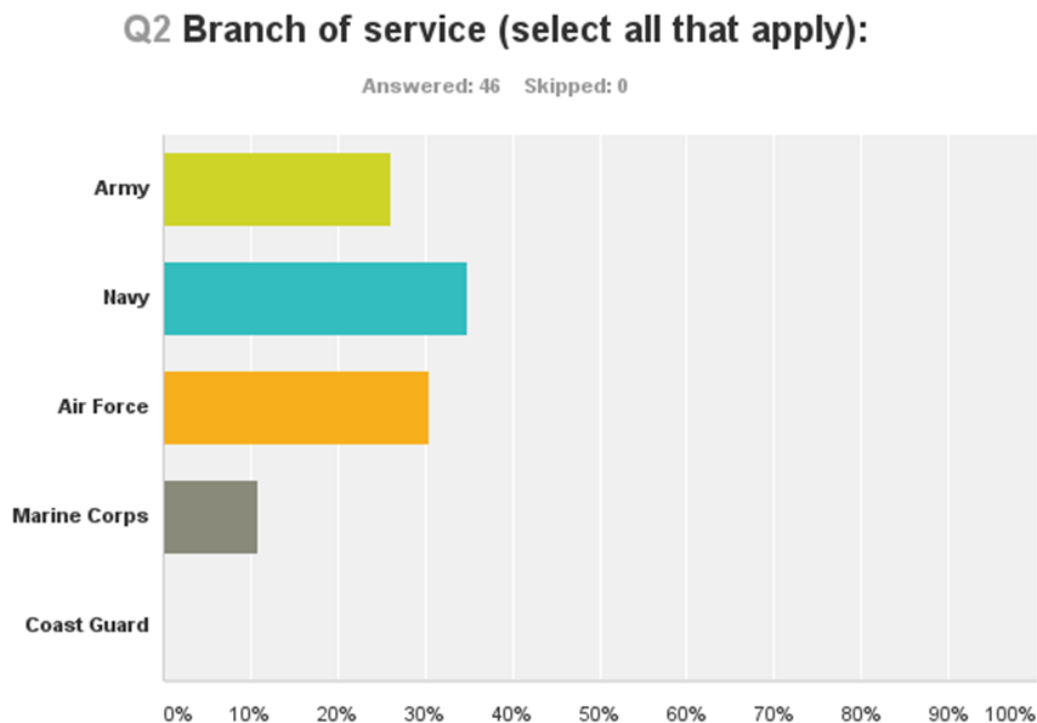


This finding of a large percentage of active duty in the current MVS population at Duquesne provides several opportunities for improving and creating initiatives to support their success. As Ackerman and DiRamio (2009) state, when on active duty the military ensures that all needs, both personal and professional are met. It is logical to assume, then, that MVS students who were on active duty are more prone to expect that services provided by a university would be highly organized and individualized. Clearly, there is an opportunity to tailor deliberate levels of support services for MVS during the early stages of their transition from the military in order to increase their success (DiRamio D. &, 2011). This finding suggests the development of a continuum of services that begins with intense and intentional supports across a variety of needs and gradually releases the MVS to become more self-regulated and self-directed. Eventually the MVS becomes

more aware of how to seek supports beyond the Office of Military and Veteran Students (OMVS) and more capable of seeking the services specific to their individual needs.

Analysis of Findings from Survey Question 2: Branch of service

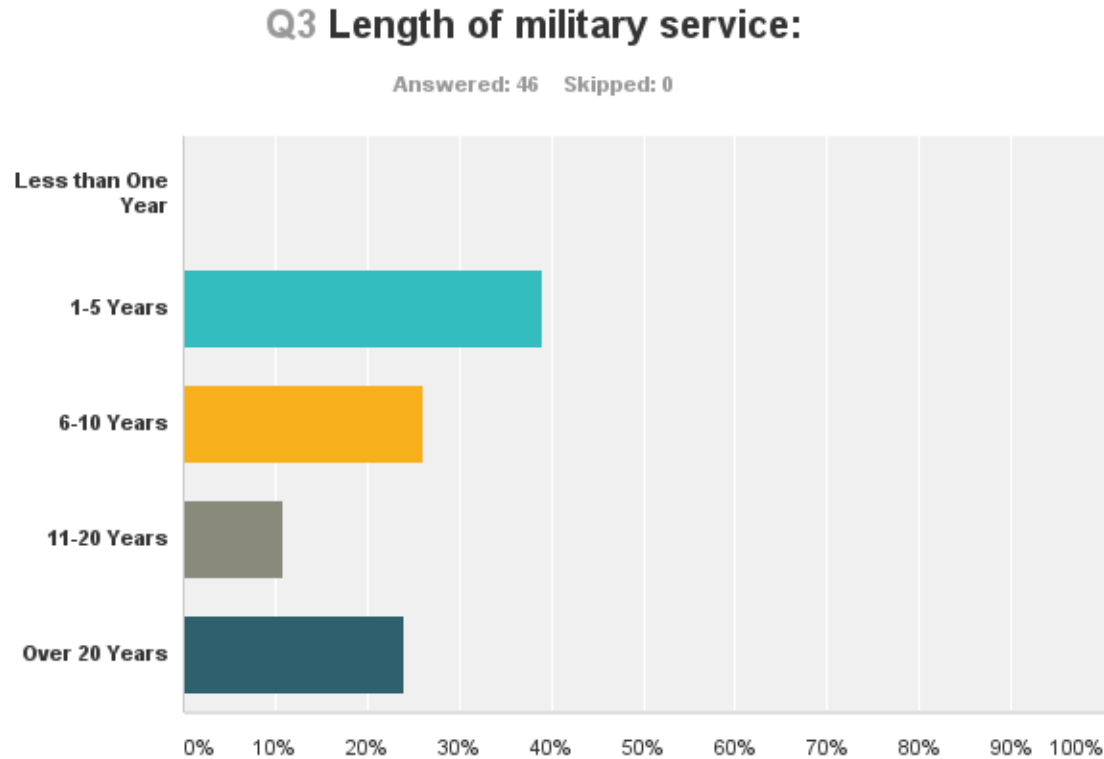
The second question asked respondents to identify their military service branch, and their responses are displayed in Figure 4.2. Four of the five branches that comprise the Department of Defense service structure were represented in the responses to this question. Of the 45 respondents who answered this question, 16 or 35% indicated that they were in the Navy. The Air Force ranked second with 13 respondents or 29% sharing that affiliation. The Army ranked third with 12 respondents or 26%, and the Marine Corps was represented by 5 respondents or 11%. Interestingly enough, the Coast Guard was not represented by respondents to the survey.



The findings must be considered in the context of the distribution of military across the branches of services. Currently, the Army comprises the largest branch of the United States military with an end strength of just over 1 million soldiers (combined Active Duty and the Reserve Forces). The Air Force ranks second, the Navy third followed by the Marine Corps (Department of Defense, 2016). In addition, in terms of military presence in the Pittsburgh region, Army and Air Force personnel represent the largest footprint due to the volume of Reserve Forces stationed here. This context might lead to a possible assumption that there would be more respondents from the Army and Air Force making the number of Navy personnel (the largest group of respondents) somewhat unexpected. This finding indicates that the OMVS must be prepared to provide tailored services to support all branches of the United States military and would profit from keeping current data on the distribution of it MVS by military branch.

Analysis of Findings from Survey Question 3: Length of military service

Regardless of the degree that MVS rely on the university to provide supplemental support, they may face a more basic challenge. The amount of time MVS have spent away from a formal learning environment may render many of them “academically rusty”. Even though every servicemember attends rigorous formal military training, that training environment and the learning experiences it offers is highly structured and normally devoted to technical training, firing weapons, flying airplanes, physical conditioning and life-saving skills to name a few. Attending class for the first time in years on a college campus may present a new set of challenges for the MVS. To explore this factor, survey question three asked respondents to provide the length of time they spent in the service.



As Figure 4.3 depicts, all 46 participants responded to the question. Eighteen or 39% of the participants served between one to five years and comprised the largest group. Twelve respondents, or 26% served for 6-10 years; five respondents, or 11% served between 11-20 years; and interestingly enough, 11 respondents or 24% served for more than 20 years. Figure 4.3 shows in rather dramatic fashion the span of time that these young women and men were away from school. To add context to this finding, the literature reminds us that, 53% of the young people who currently join the service do so to earn the robust education benefits that the GI Bill provides (Zoli, Maury, & Fay, 2015). The responses to Question 3 seem to substantiate that factor, since those serving from one to five years constituted the largest single group of respondents. The findings, however, point to an equally important factor. Twenty-eight of the respondents (61%) reported that they served for more than five years; and of those reporting longer years of

service, 16 or 35% indicated that they had served at least 11 years in the military with most (24%) serving over 20 years.

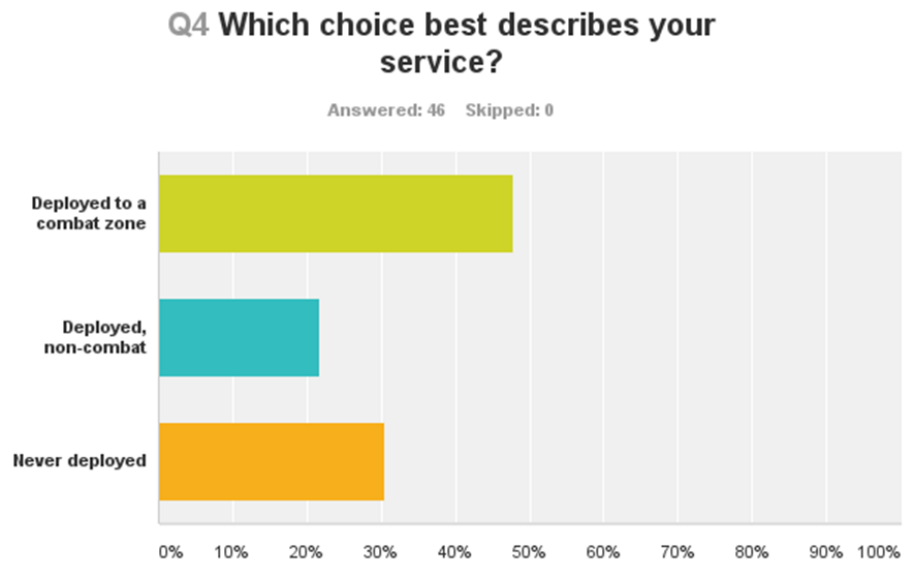
That significant length of service is reported by current Duquesne MVS is tightly correlated with increased challenges. The length of time servicemembers are removed from an academic environment exaggerates the challenges with academic work, navigating the administrative system, finding support services and have difficulty connecting with classmates and faculty that MVS will experience (Griffin, 2012). Based on this finding, the OMVS must be better prepared to ensure that additional academic support, administrative assistance and student mentors are available to assist all incoming military and veteran students so that they may overcome the challenges they may face due to their length of military service.

Analysis of Findings from Survey Question 4: Service Description

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have raged on for more than 13 years creating the not uncommon expectation that both active duty servicemembers as well as those serving in the Guard and Reserve have deployed to these conflicts on numerous occasions. In spite of political intentions to end the wars in both countries, regardless of which war MVS have served in, they are entitled to use their Post 9-11 GI Bill to help finance their education. Because our nation has been at war for so long, it is a safe assumption that a high proportion of the MVS choosing to attend college will have been deployed to a combat zone.

Figure 4.4 displays the type of service experienced by the survey 46 respondents. Despite the fact that there is no active duty facility near Duquesne University, the number respondents indicating they had served in a combat zone was surprisingly high. Of the 46

participants responding to this question four, 22 (48%) had deployed to a combat zone. Ten of the respondents (22%) reported being deployed to non-combat locations, and, 14 respondents or 30% indicated that they have never deployed.



A considerable percentage, almost half, of the respondents have deployed to a combat zone, and another 22% have experienced the anxiety of preparing to deploy during a time of hostilities. In other words almost 70%, or 32 of 46 respondents, were engaged with some form of service to a war effort. It is logical to assume, therefore, that this service will have an impact on MVS at some point in their lives. According to a Rand Corporation study (2009) nearly 20% of the servicemembers serving in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan will suffer from some form of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). DiRamio (2009) and Wert (2016) both contend that due to these factors MVS will require and deserve a well-defined support system, beginning with tailored early intervention efforts during the first few weeks of their academic transition.

Analysis of Findings from Survey Question 5: Are you still serving?

The first four survey questions examined various service commitments, noted active duty versus reserves, explore the branch and length of service, as well as the type of service involvement experienced by our participants. Question 5, however, looks to the future, seeking to identify whether or not respondents still serve in some military capacity. Responses to this question are essential to inform OMVS efforts to provide relevant service for MVS who might still deploy to a hostile environment, or be asked to leave school in the middle of classes.

Q5 Are you still serving in some capacity?

Answered: 46 Skipped: 0

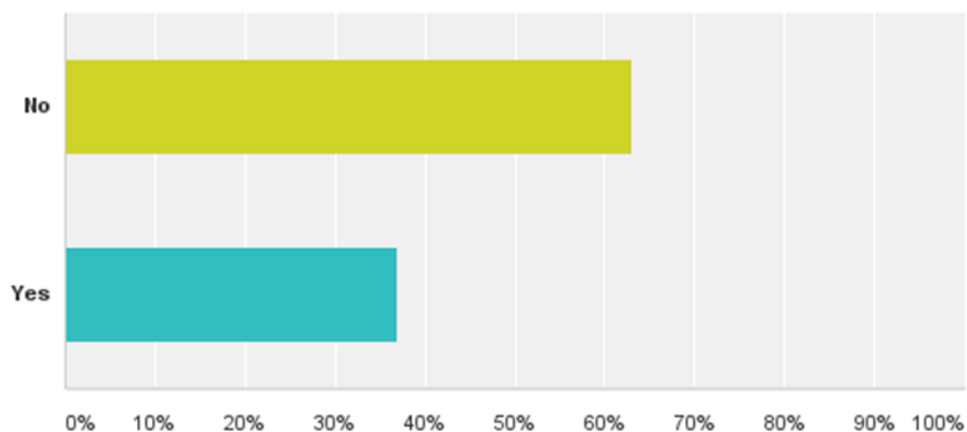


Figure 4.5 illustrates that 29 (63%) of the 46 respondents are no longer serving. But the graph also shows in stark fashion that over one-third of the respondents (17 or 37%) are still serving, and face the real possibility of call-ups and additional activations to active duty.

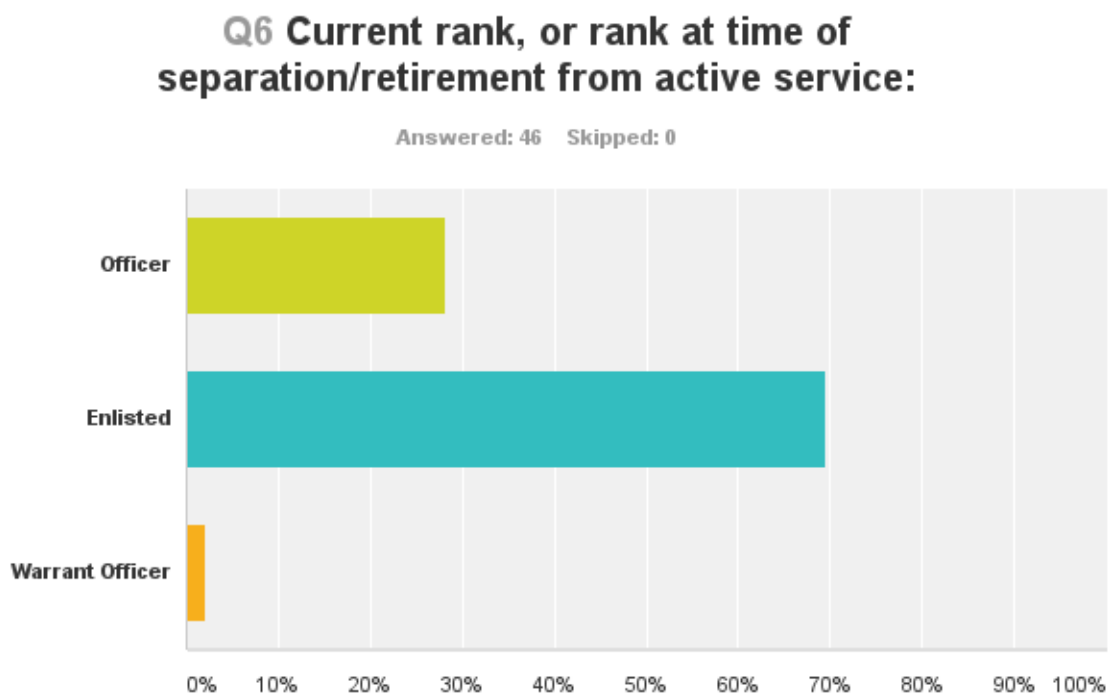
Hamrick (2013) reminds us that some student servicemembers are active duty and come to campus for the first time after deployments or the conclusion of their service commitment. Others in the Guard or Reserve may be activated to full-time military status at any time. The MVS service status reminds us that although two thirds of the respondents will not be returning to military service and the OMVS will be tending to their immediate needs, a full one-third of the respondents could be heading for time overseas. This will require a nimble response from the OMVS to help them quickly transition from their current academic commitment, to free them to prepare for their military duty, regardless of the peril or length. What is more the OMVS must be ready to assist these same MVS as they return to campus for a second transition with different and potentially more need than their first transition back to academic life.

Analysis of Findings from Survey Question 6: What is your rank or rank at separation?

There are two basic types of military careers in today's Armed Forces, those serving in the enlisted ranks, and those serving as officers. Enlisted personnel comprise approximately 82 percent of the Armed Forces and carry out military operations. The remaining 18 percent are officers—military leaders who manage operations and enlisted personnel. Approximately 8 percent of the officers are considered warrant officers, technical and tactical experts in a specific area; for example, Army helicopter pilots make up one group of warrant officers. (U. S. Department of Labor, 2015)

The results of the survey verify the fact that both career fields are represented at Duquesne University. Figure 4.6 illustrates that a higher rate of officers responded to the survey compared to the national average of 18%. Ten survey respondents were from the officer corps, comprising 30% of our survey participants, a 12% increase over the

national average reported by the U. S. Department of Labor. (13 Officers and one Warrant Officer, 30%). The responses also show that 32 (70%) of the 46 respondents were members of the enlisted ranks. Knowing the composition of our cohort of MVS students can inform our approach to supporting them and clearly point out the differences between the MVS student and the traditional student at Duquesne. Those MVS who were officers, for example, are used to overseeing systems and being treated with deference according to rank. Those who come to the campus from the enlisted ranks are used to their superiors being fully prepared to answer their specific questions and suggest specific strategies for success.



Though the survey did not ask respondents to indicate if this was their first time attending college, an assumption can be made that many of the 32 enlisted respondents are attending school for the first time. This assertion can be made based on fact that the

minimum education requirement for entering the military enlisted ranks is a high school diploma or equivalent (such as a GED) (Sun Key Publishing, 2017).

The results send a clear signal that university service providers working with the MVS community must be prepared to provide a continuum of services commensurate with level of service the MVS are accustomed to receiving while in the military.

Additionally, we cannot assume that just because 30% of the respondents are officers who may be attending college for a second time, that they will not have specific needs regarding their academic success. Universities, programs of study, and degree demands vary and we can safely assume that the MVS who are in an advanced degree programs will require differing levels of support.

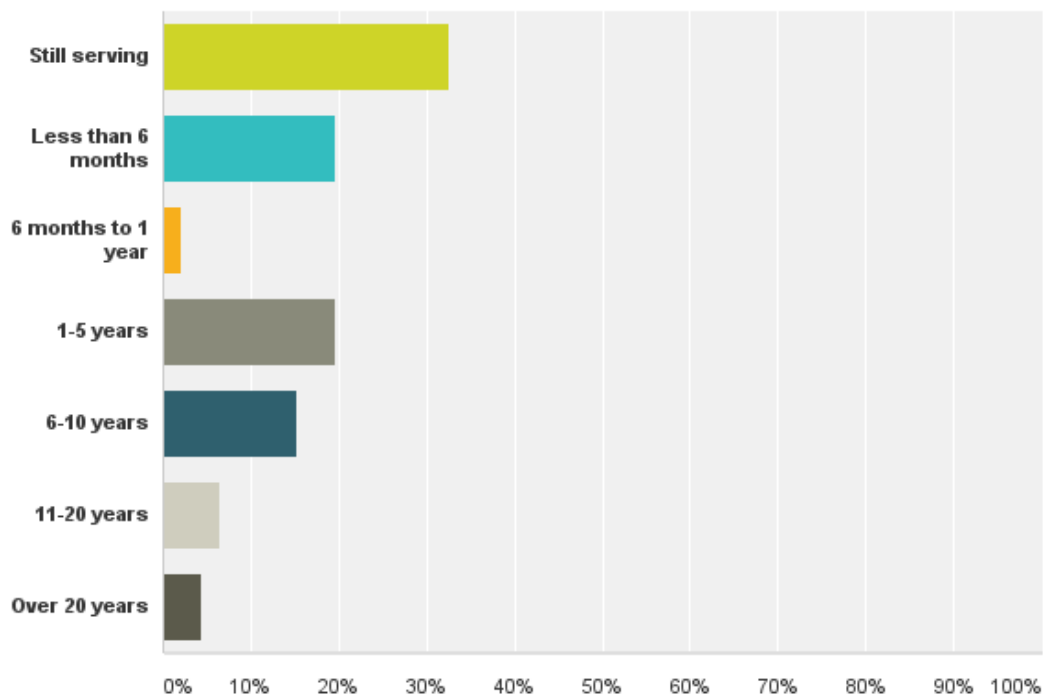
Analysis of Findings from Survey Question 7: Time since separation and enrollment

As identified in question one, some MVS will come directly from active duty service, while others are still serving on Active Duty or in the Guard or Reserves. Regardless of the service commitment or length, not all MVS will report to a college campus immediately after they separate from the military. Identifying the specific services the University should provide the MVS will be a difficult task especially since many begin their college experience at different times throughout the year. Figure 4.7 illustrates that 15 of the survey respondents or 36% are still serving in some capacity. The results also show that many students postponed the start of their education for some time. Interestingly, 9 respondents or 20% chose to start school within six months of separating from their military commitment. One respondent (2%) waited between six months and one year to begin college. Nine others, or 20% waited between one and five years, seven

others, 15%, waited between six and ten years, and 3 respondents (6%) waited between 11 and 15 years. Finally 2 MVS, nearly 5% waited almost 20 years to go to college.

Q7 How much time has passed between your separation/retirement from military service, and your enrollment at Duquesne University?

Answered: 46 Skipped: 0

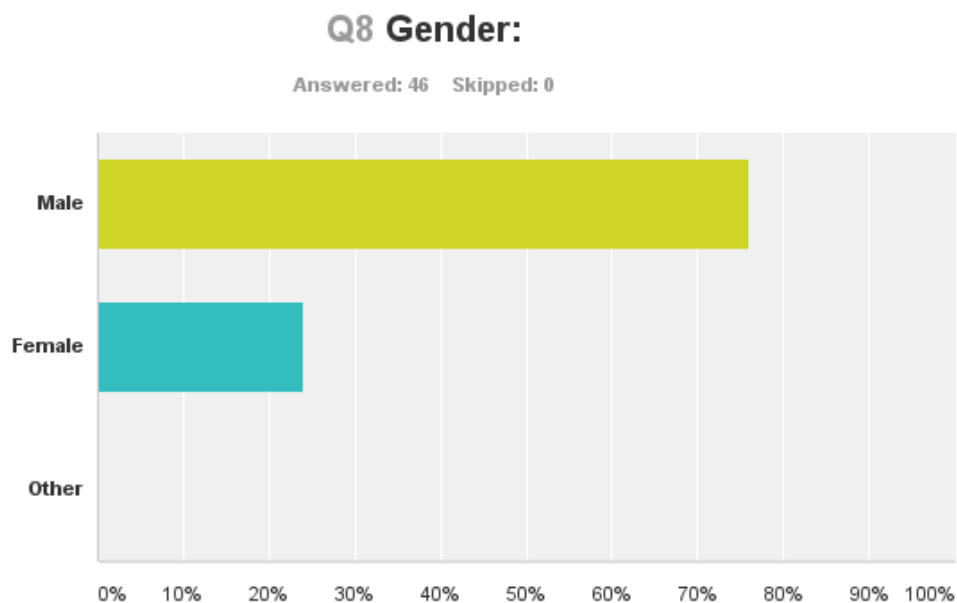


Little has been written in the literature regarding the success or failure of MVS as it relates to the time they have been out of school. One might assume that the longer the time span, the greater the challenge. Schlossberg, et al, 2006, reminds us that the specific support and type of strategies the MVS requires, and the type of support colleges or universities provide them will determine the effectiveness of the transition, and the level of academic success they will realize.

It will be essential for everyone working with the MVS to effectively identify and recognize the impact that the time gap between military and academic careers can have on educational success. Identifying this time span is critical a critical first step if we hope to communicate key services that specific MVS may need, based on their time gap, to ensure a smooth transition and increase potential for academic success. Advisors will play a key role and must be prepared to ask pointed questions to reveal this time gap, communicate that information with the Office for Military and Veteran Students, and provide levels of support tailored to individual needs.

Analysis of Findings from Survey Question 8: Gender

Question eight asked respondents to identify their gender. As figure 4.8 shows, males outnumbered the female respondents three to one. Thirty-five of the 46 respondents or 76% identified as males, compared to the 11 respondents or 24% of the overall group reporting to be female. The national average shows approximately 11% of the armed forces are female (Institute of Medicine of the National Academies, 2010).



Compared to the national average, the composition of the respondents who identified as female is nearly double that ratio.

In fact, the gender breakdown of the respondents is more consistent with the number of female undergraduates who took part in a study conducted by the American Council on Education in 2015. Their findings showed that females responding as either active duty or veterans, comprised approximately 22% of their respondents, while females serving in the Guard or Reserve comprised nearly 32% of the group (American Council on Education, 2015).

While we cannot draw conclusions on the ratio of female to male MVS at Duquesne from this survey, what we do know is the stereotype of a predominately all-male military and veteran student body does not do justice to our population. As administrators we must remain sensitive to the specific needs and concerns female MVS may experience as students. For example, many of them might have had to leave small children in order to serve their country, bringing up issues of motherhood and deployment (Lowry, 2015).

The impact that Age, marital status, employment and child rearing has on academic success

It is important to weigh the impact that starting age, marital status, raising a family and holding down a job while attending school have on the MVS transition, and their academic performance and success. As documented in the literature review, more than 70% of the students on college campuses are juggling a variety of additional characteristics in their lives (Ross-Gordon, 2011). These characteristics include, delayed enrollment, part-time attendance, financial independence, working while in school,

married with children, and those who are single parenting. Additionally, the literature tells us that many service members may not have obtained a high school diploma.

The literature also supports the notion that MVS fold a variety of perspectives and life experiences into their learning outcomes, and bring with them a variety of specific needs that could impact dramatically their progress. Therefore it is important to examine each of these four categories a bit more closely.

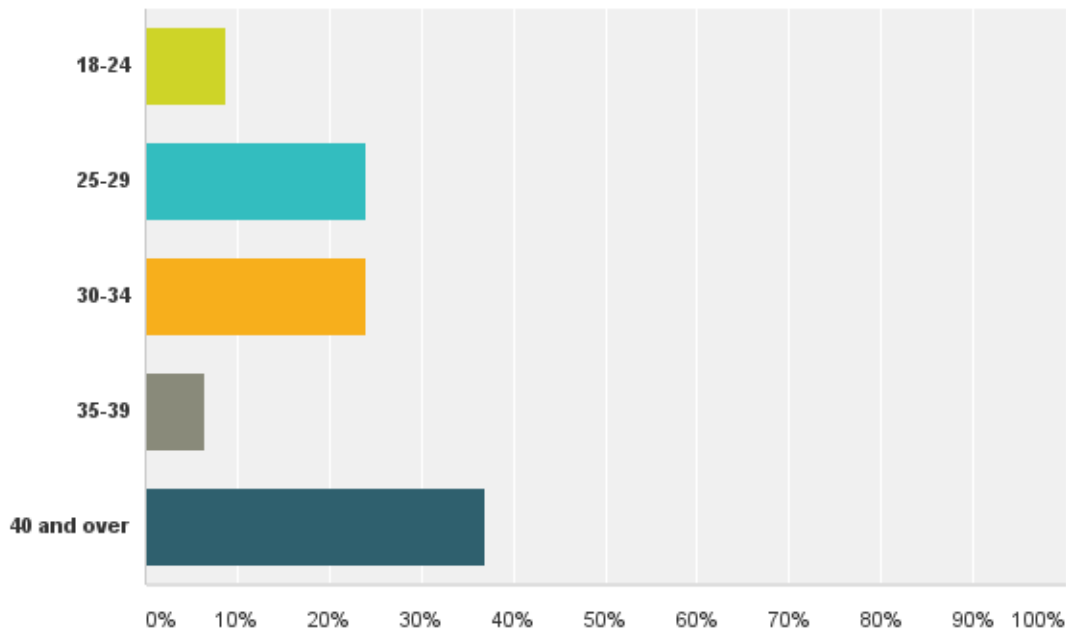
Analysis of Findings from Survey Question 9: Age

Question nine asked respondents to share their age. That information is displayed in Figure 4.9. These data are a source of significant information since the MVS community embarks on their education a few years after their traditional classmates. In fact this age gap is one of the many factors that impacts the military to civilian and academic transition process. As one veteran put it, “while I did find that going to college generally as far as the coursework seemed easier, the social life seemed more difficult because you don’t have anyone to talk to or hang out with...you don’t have anything in common with people who are 18, 19, 20, 21 years old who pretty much haven’t been anywhere or done anything” (Griffin & Gilbert, 2012, p. 12).

Figure 4.9 shows that a majority of the respondents are significantly older than their traditional college classmates. Four of the 46 respondents, only 9% were actually in the college age bracket of 18-24 years. Twenty-four percent of the respondents were between the ages of 25-29 and another 24 percent were between the ages of 30-34 year of age. The smallest group of respondents, three or 6%, fell between the ages of 36-39, while the largest group, Seventeen or 37% of the respondents comprised the oldest group of the MVS respondents.

Q9 Age:

Answered: 46 Skipped: 0



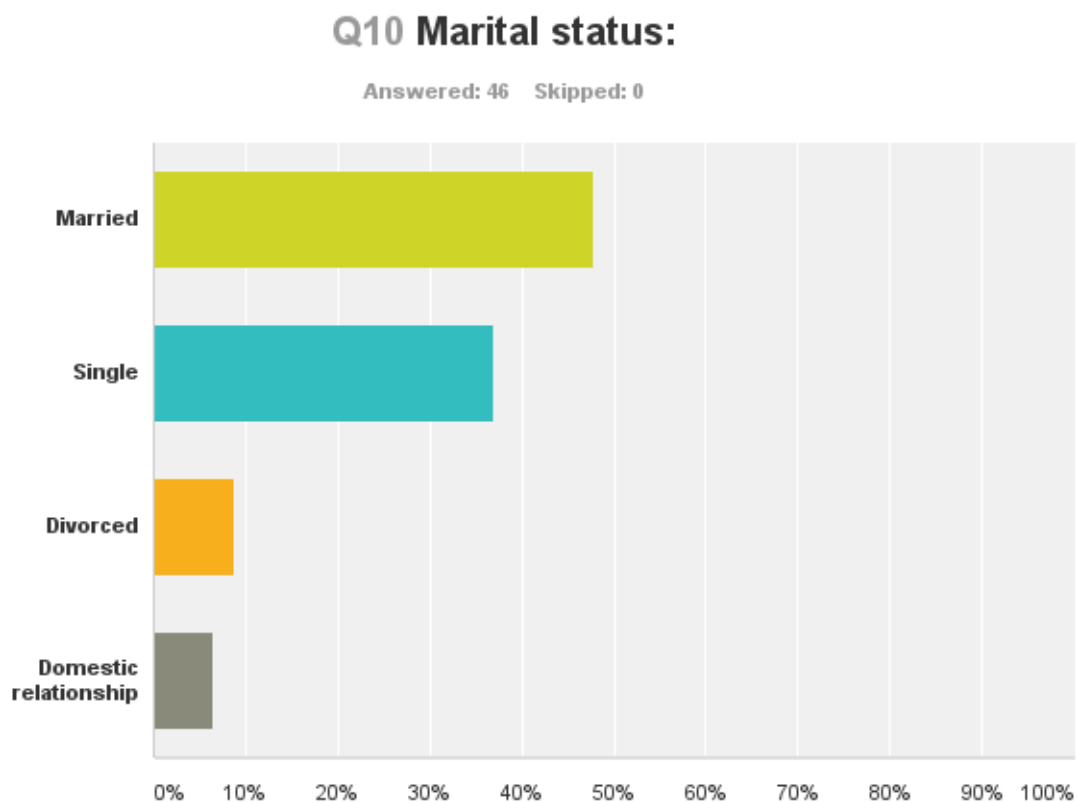
These data clearly align with national reports that a vast majority of the MVS are older than their classmates. Megan Tones reminds us that, “students older than 25 years of age, are more likely to be living away from home with a partner, and to have dependent children. These circumstances impose additional economic and time demands, both of which might hinder mature-aged students from completing their studies” (Tones, Fraser, & Elder, 2009 58(4), p. 506).

Because it is not easy to identify the age of any student, and the fact that the MVS students comprise only 3% of the total population at Duquesne University, just helping these older students locate one another is critical. Because MVS are probably older and might be shouldering more responsibilities, those charged with their care must consider ways to help the MVS students find one another to promote more effective socialization,

and to help them integrate more successfully with both their non-traditional as well as more traditional aged classmates. And, recognizing the special contributing factors this age gap can bring, it is even more crucial that campus faculty and staff learn ways to provide differentiated approaches to the work in serving all students.

Analysis of Findings from Survey Question 10: Marital Status

The largest group of respondents to question ten are married. Figure 4.10 shows that 22 of the respondents, nearly 48% indicated that they have a spouse. The smallest group, 3 respondents or nearly 7%, were those involved in a domestic relationship. The combined data reflect that 25 of 46 respondents or 55% are juggling school with a domestic relationship. On the other hand, four respondents (9%) are divorced, and may be dealing with the responsibilities of an extended family or old relationships.



The added stress of caring for a family or partner adds to the factors that might impact the MVS ability to succeed. As mentioned in the discussion of question nine, life with a partner and or children may hinder academic success (Tones, Fraser, & Elder, 2009 58(4)).

Finally, 17 respondents or 37% indicated that they are single. This group may be living alone and may have no supports in the home to help with daily routines. And, while we might at first blush consider them to be very much like traditional freshmen, it is important to remember that they enjoyed the camaraderie and structure of life in the military. These men and women may have made life and death decisions, engaged in combat, or were deployed out of country; reminding us once again that they are very different from the traditional student regardless of their marital status.

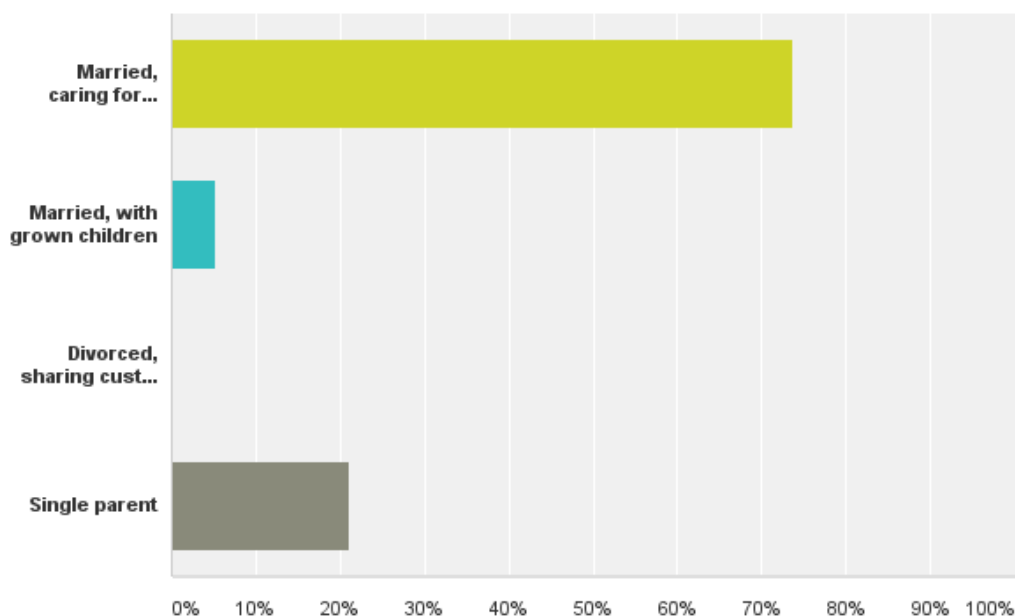
Analysis of Findings from Survey Question11: Raising Children

Figure 4.11 shows that a vast majority of the survey respondents are married and raising a family while attending school. Nineteen of the 46 respondents reported that they were caring for children. This number represents 41% of the total survey participants and tells us that these students share the responsibility for or are the sole provider for children while attending school. Fourteen of the 19 respondents or 73% care for children and are married. One respondent shared that he or she had children who were grown.

Two factors stand out from the responses to this question. First, only 19 of the 46 participants chose to respond to this question. That is 27 respondents or nearly 59% of the 46 total participants chose not to answer this question. While we cannot speculate the reasons for this decision, it is important to report it here. The second factor to consider is

Q11 If you have children, please choose the option below that best describes you:

Answered: 19 Skipped: 27



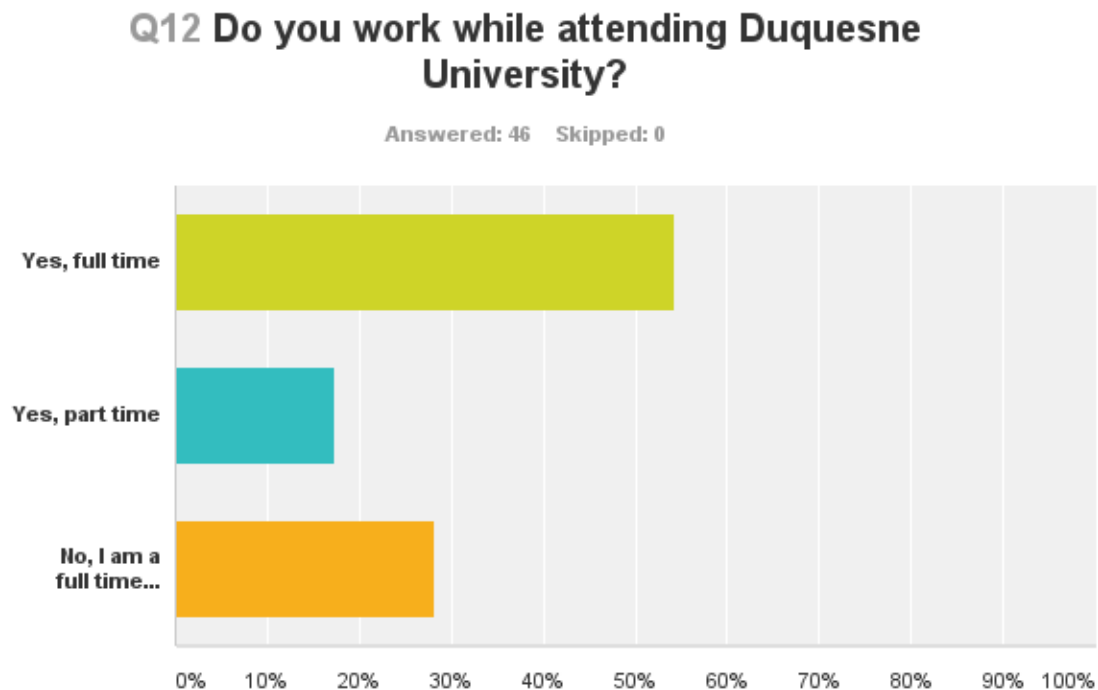
that of those who did respond, four of the 14 respondents who reported that they are caring for children are doing it without the help of a partner, as a single parent. The needs of single parents and compounding conditions of single parents are relatively familiar to college personnel, but when added to the factors that military service brings, this is just one more indicator of the need for a continuum of services that are specifically designed for MVS who bring a constellation of needs to campus.

Analysis of Findings from Survey Question 12: Working while in school

Veteran students using the Post 9-11 GI Bill to pay tuition costs can expect a Monthly Housing Allowance (MHA) that is generally the same as the military Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) for an enlisted rank of E-5 Sergeant, with dependents (E-5 plus dependent rate). The housing allowance is based on the ZIP code for the school the MVS is attending. In spite of the generous housing allowance built into the GI Bill,

\$1,600 per month in Pittsburgh (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017), many MVS find it necessary to work to sustain their lifestyle. These older students may have other financial responsibilities that \$1,600 does not cover.

Figure 4.12 shows that 13 of the respondents or 28% are full-time students and



don't work while attending school. It also shows that a high percentage of the 46 survey respondents indicated that they work full-time while attending school. Figure 4.12 shows that twenty-five MVS work 40 hours a week while juggling school work. That represents 54% of respondents. In addition, another 8 respondents, 17% work part-time. That means that seventy-one percent of the MVS who answered this question work while going to school. This differs significantly from the life of the traditional college student.

Several factors are highlighted by this finding. There may be additional stressors brought on by the MVS entering the University at a more advanced age than the

traditional student. In addition, many may have the additional burden of the need to work to support a family while attending school. It follows then that the University faculty and staff should pay close attention to the number of additional stressors or varying characteristics their MVS are juggling. It is also important to recognize that the combined weight of the stressors at any one time can become a barrier to success. These considerations are crucial if we hope to assist them with all MVS with a successful matriculation and eventual graduation. These challenges clearly set the MVS apart from their non-traditional peers and deserve a corresponding proactive approach to supporting their campus life.

Beyond Demographic Information: What motivated respondents to choose Duquesne?

The first twelve questions of the survey were designed to gather demographic information from the respondents. While it is critical to identify detailed information about the respondents, it is also important to understand how and why they decided to attend our university. Questions 13 through 20 were designed to tease out how the respondents heard about Duquesne, identify some of the contributing factors that led to their decision to register, determine how long they have been at Duquesne, reveal their learning mode (online, on campus, or a hybrid of the two) and degree option. The questions were also designed to provide information about their first impression about Duquesne, thoughts about the application process, and the value the respondents place on key military attributes of the university and how those attributes might influence potential students in their decision to choose Duquesne.

Analysis of Findings from Survey Question 13: How did you hear about Duquesne?

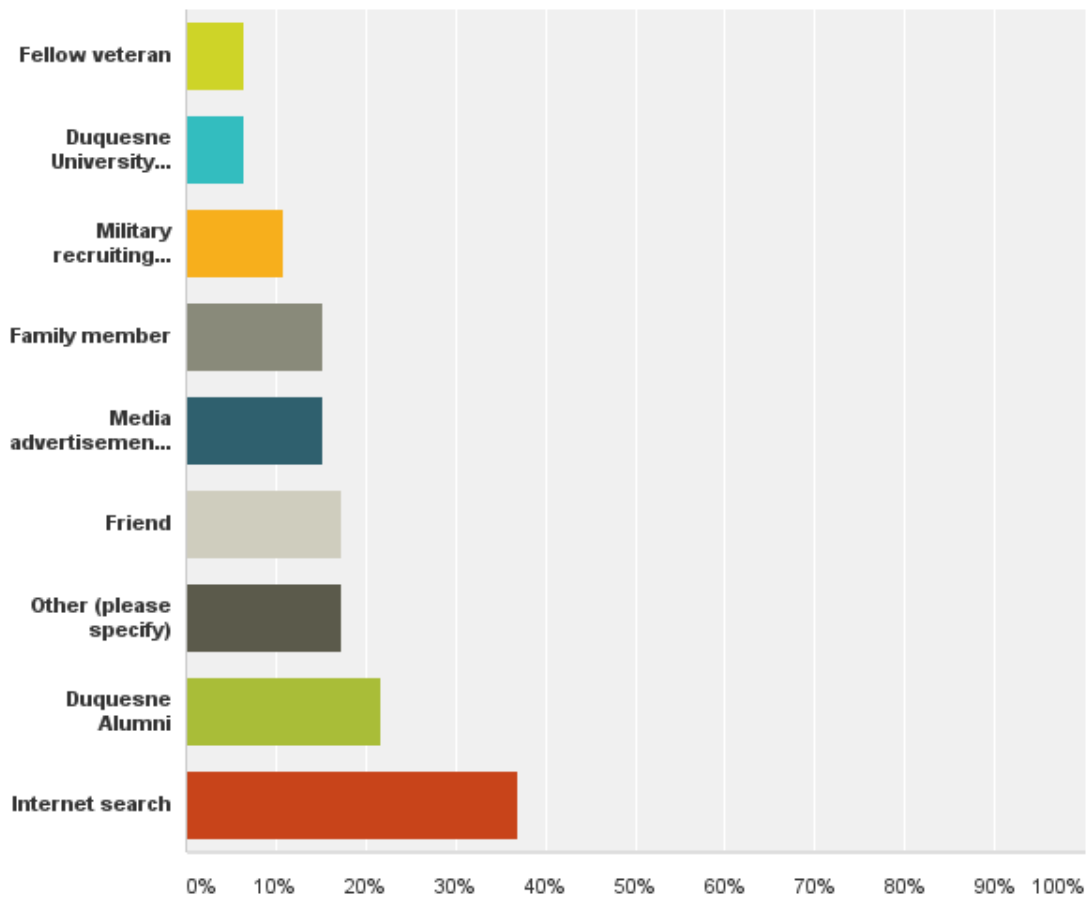
Survey question number 13 asked respondents to identify how they heard about Duquesne University. This is important information in terms of our marketing and recruiting strategy. As Figure 4.13 illustrates, respondents were given nine different options to describe how they heard about Duquesne.

All 46 participants chose to answer this question. The largest response group, 17 of 46 or 37%, learned about the university via an internet search. Duquesne alumni informed 10 respondents (22%), while friends informed 8 respondents (17%). Family members and media advertisements informed an equal number of respondents, 7 respondents or 15% for each category. Recruiting events informed 5 others (10%) and printed material and a fellow veteran referral rounded out the responses at 3 respondents each for 6% in each category. In addition to the eight categories shared above, respondents were also asked to provide “other” ways they may have learned about Duquesne. Eight respondents provided feedback for this option, and their responses varied from a visit to campus, or an information table on a campus visit. Two respondents reported that they were employed by the university, another was referred, two via email, another during a recruiting initiative.

Figure 4.13 clearly shows that although the internet informed a majority of the respondents to the survey, there are also a variety of ways that MVS learn about Duquesne University. How an MVS learns about the University also helps us identify some of the factors that enter into the decision to attend the University, and these underlying reasons are hugely important. Beside geographic location—schools enrolling large numbers of GI bill students are located near military installations, the schools

Q13 How did you hear about Duquesne University? (Select all that apply)

Answered: 46 Skipped: 0



enrolling the most MVS make clear efforts to reach out to those students. They accomplish this by tailoring sections of their Web sites to military students, offering scholarships, and other specific support services to meet their non-traditional student needs (Field, 2008).

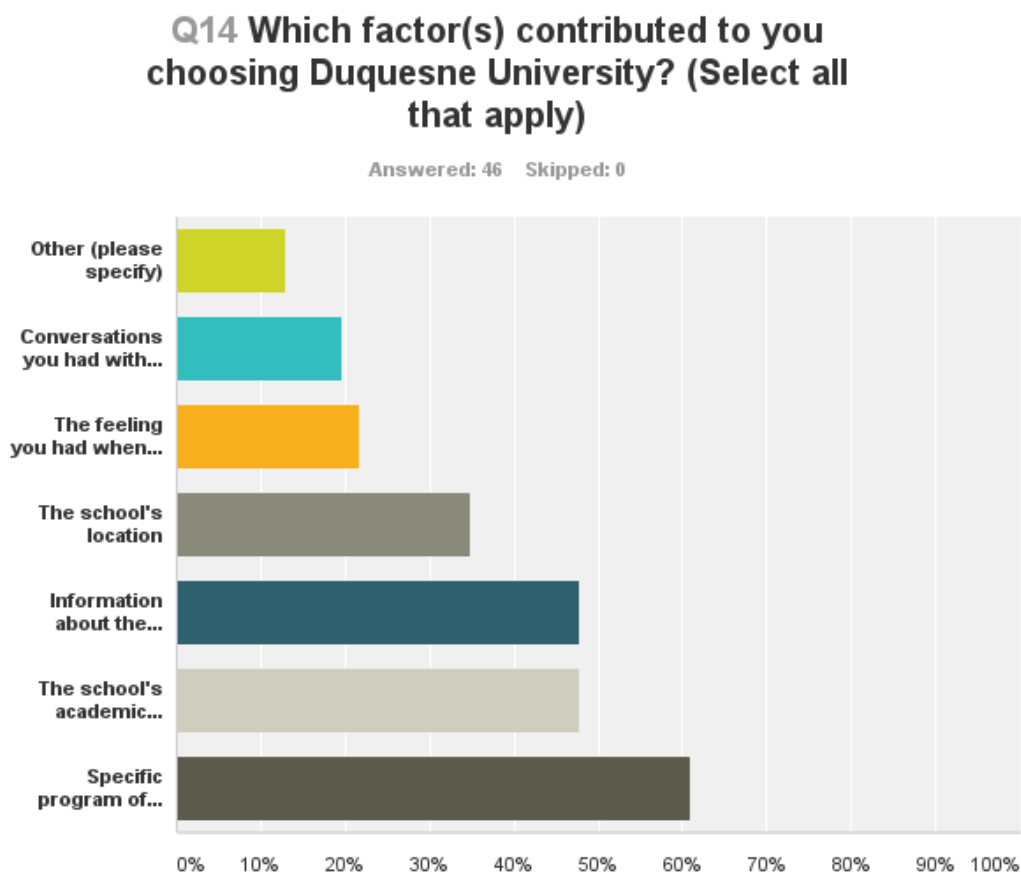
Most importantly, colleges and universities with a single point of contact to help veterans with their transition to college, attract MVS (Cook, Bryan J; Kim, Young M., 2009). This factor is highlighted by the Departments of Labor, Defense, Education and Veterans Affairs. They have outlined clear strategies that will attract MVS to schools,

and contend that schools adhering to their 8 Steps to Veterans Success on Campus will attract MVS. Step number four identifies the need to coordinate and centralize campus efforts for all veterans, together with the creation of a designated space for them (even if limited in size). (U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012).

Analysis of Findings from Survey Question 14: Contributing Factors for Choosing Duquesne

Understanding how the respondents from the MVS community heard about our program is extremely important if we hope to recruit more of students from their ranks. Of equal value is the reasoning behind why MVS chose to attend our school.

For question 14 respondents were asked to choose as many of the six different options that applied to them. Figure 4.14 ranks the responses this question. The responses



show that, in a majority of the cases, the driving reason behind the decision to attend Duquesne University was attributed to the match between the specific educational program, major, or specific concentration within a school and the student's interest. This particular reason was selected by 61% or 26 of the 46 respondents.

Just behind the type of academic program offered, respondents ranked the next two categories, academic reputation and military friendliness as the second and third most influential factors in their decision. Both categories were selected 22 times which constituted a 47% response rate. The school's location was chosen 34% of the time by 16 respondents, the specific feeling MVS got when visiting the school followed at 22% by 10 respondents, while specific conversations swayed respondents on nine occasions for a 20% rate of response. Six respondents mentioned that the cost, flexible course scheduling and feedback from others as contributing factors in their decision.

Again, understanding the how and why MVS decide to apply to Duquesne is an important concept if we hope to attract their attention, appeal to their needs, and eventually recruit them. Based on a limited budget, it is imperative that school officials pay close attention to the marketing strategy for specific programs. Identifying the various skill sets graduates will acquire and how those outcomes might mesh with specific academic or career paths may point to ways to strengthen targeted advertising and marketing strategies.

Analysis of Findings from Survey Question 15: How long have you been attending Duquesne? (Number of semesters)

Question 15 was designed to identify how long MVS respondents have been attending the university. An assumption could be made that MVS who have been

attending school longer might have reduced needs in terms of other university services. Identifying how long the respondents have been in school might be cross referenced with information regarding the frequency with which they may be using other services to provide potential avenues to design more relevant supports. O'Herrin (2011) spoke of the biggest challenge facing new MVS upon their arrival to campus - the alienation they feel when they start classes, along with feeling confused and overwhelmed. This evidence tells us how significant it is for those dealing with MVS to identify them at the earliest point possible in their academic life in order to provide intervention and service as needed.

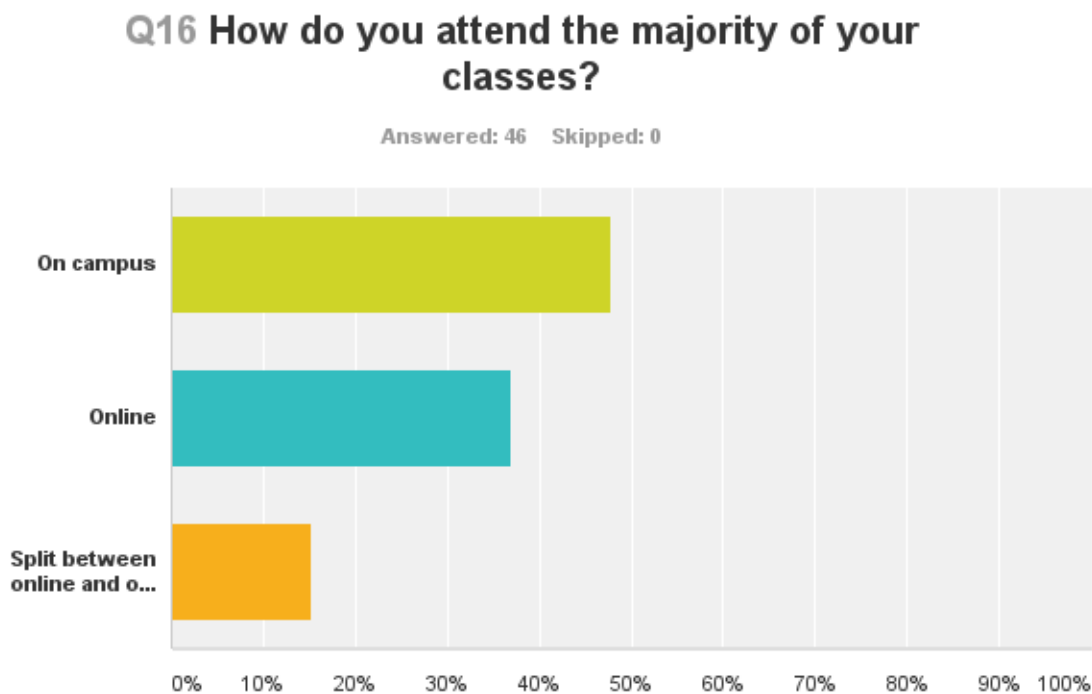
Since this was an open-ended question, there is no figure for Question 12 and the findings are as follows. One respondent was unsure about how the number of semesters attended semesters responded with a question mark. Two students reported attending for 15 semesters and represent the longest attendance time reported. One respondent has been here for 10 semesters, three students have attended Duquesne for 9 semesters, four for 8 semesters, two others for 7 semesters and three for 6 semesters. A bulk of the 46 respondents have been here for 5 semesters or less. Five have been in school for 5 semesters, eight are completing their second year with four semesters, six for 3 semesters, three for 2 semesters, and eight respondents reported being in their first semester.

Interestingly enough, two thirds of the respondents, 30 of the 46, reported being in school for five semesters or less. Could this have something to do with the response rate to the survey? Are students who have been here the least still engaged with the veteran community and interested in participating? Are MVS here the longest simply ready to finish and move on? All good questions to cross reference.

Analysis of Findings from Survey Question 16: How do you attend classes? (class format)

There are a variety of ways MVS attend classes. Some are on campus in the traditional sense, attending classes throughout the week with their traditional classmates. Still others are earning their degree online. Some are blending their studies, taking some classes online and on campus in a hybrid format.

Figure 4.15 was shows that 22 of the 46 respondents (48%) are traditional on campus students. Seventeen others, 36% participate online. Seven or 15% of the respondents combine online classes with on-campus classes.

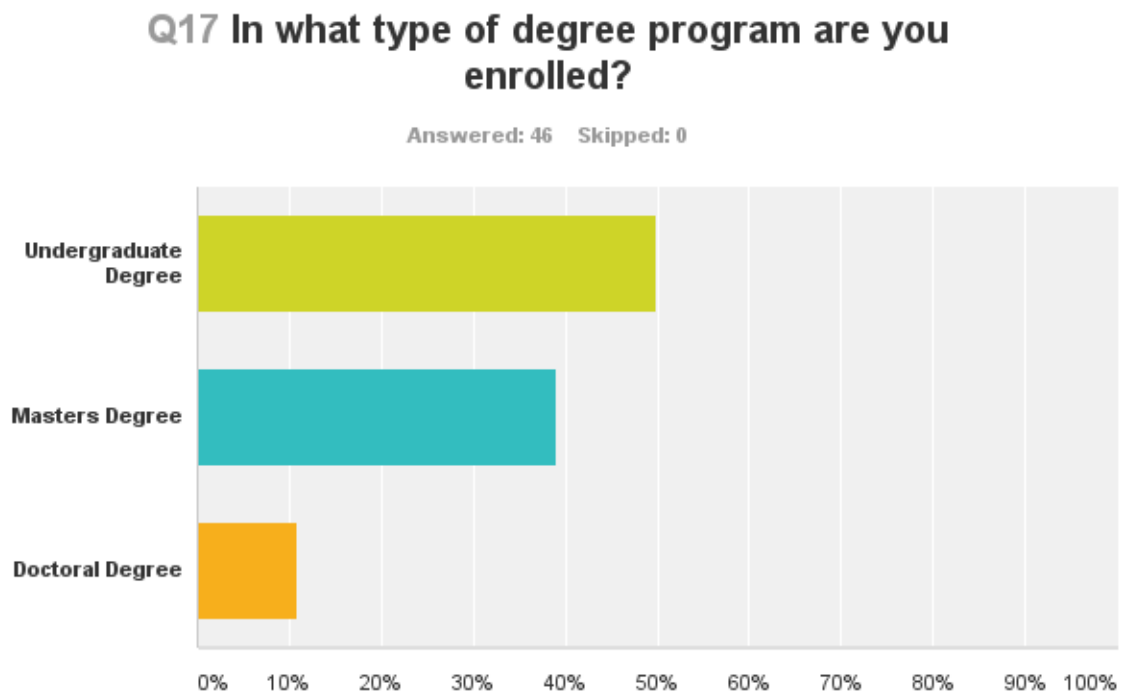


There are a number of reasons these data are important. Understanding that a majority of the MVS responding tells us that they have the potential to be available for a variety of on campus services. Likewise, those studying online, may be unaware of the

many services that they are entitled to and we must do a better job getting that information to them. The fact that nearly one half of the respondents are not on campus on a routine basis speaks volumes in terms of how well we are able to interact with them and to identify if they need help. Understanding the way the MVS are studying can unlock key information regarding our success at meeting their needs.

Analysis of Findings from Survey Question 17: Type of Degree

The literature tells us that there is a limited amount of research compiled on the transition success of MVS. This lack of research forces many university officials to speculate on a wide variety of issues tied to the MVS rather than base their academic and fiscal recommendations on fact. For instance, it could be suggested that MVS attending school for post baccalaureate studies may be more apt to succeed due in large part to the fact that they have experienced learning on campus before. Regardless of the likelihood



of this actually being true, it is important to understand the specific degree program of the MVS community on campus.

Figure 4.16 shows that 23 of the 46 respondents, 50%, are pursuing an undergraduate degree, while the other half are in the process of earning Masters or Doctoral degrees. Regardless of the degree they seek, every MVS must be oriented to the fact that a designated office along with a variety of services exist to help them if or when a need arises. That means that we have a great deal of work to do to assure that all faculty, deans, program directors and support staff are aware of the services we currently provide our MVS and how those services are coordinated by the Office of Military and Veteran Services. The findings also point to the potential for the Office to seek input from all parts of the Duquesne community as it works to improve both services and ways to communicate those opportunities to our MVS.

Analysis of Findings from Survey Question 18: First Impressions

It is often stated that you only have one chance to make a good first impression. Gauging the first impressions our MVS value in terms of their decision to attend Duquesne can be impactful. Question 18 seeks to understand those first impressions.

Respondents were asked to consider five distinct options and rank each option on the degree with which it influenced their first impression by ranking it in terms of (Strongly disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Agree (A), Strongly Agree (SA). The options were: 1. A perceived authentic military friendly climate, 2. The ease with which MVS could find information for them on the website, 3. An authentic welcoming attitude toward MVS from the staff, 4. A clear distinction that Duquesne was a Yellow Ribbon School, and, 5. The importance of a dedicated Veterans Office for MVS.

Q18 Think about your first impression of Duquesne University, and use the scale below to respond to the following:

Answered: 46 Skipped: 0

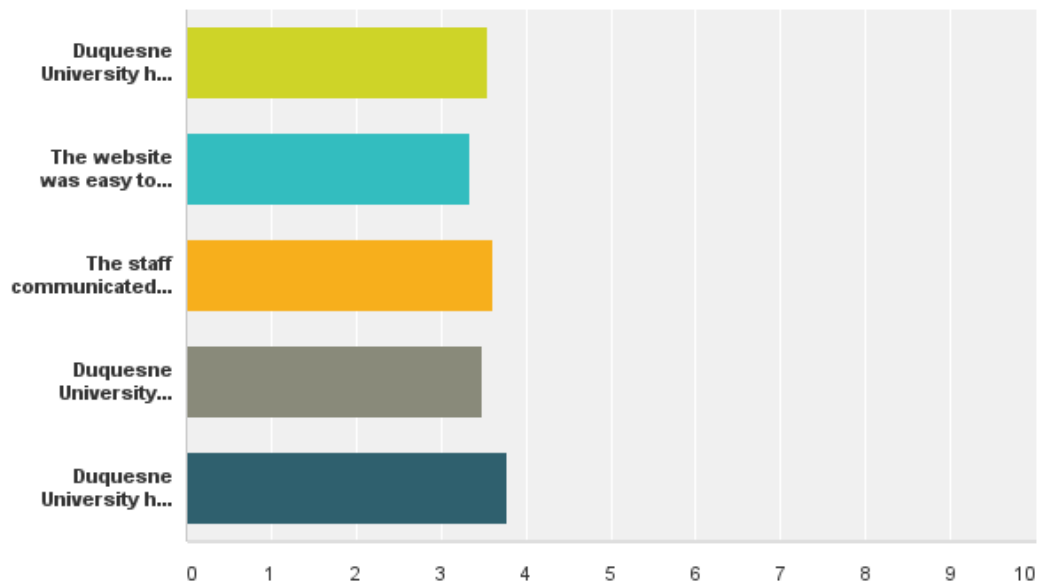


Figure 4.17 displays the findings regarding how the MVS respondents rated each category. Clearly, the respondents acknowledged that all five categories of relative equal importance to them. Even with the relatively tight rankings, the presence of an Office for Military and Veteran Students emerged as slightly more important. All 46 respondents indicated the value of this office with 36 (78%) strongly agreeing. Ten others or 22% agreed that it was important. None disagreed or strongly disagreed. A welcoming staff was selected next, with 45 respondents ranking it. Thirty-one or 69% strongly agreed, 11 or 24%, agreed, and three others (7%) disagreed. The last three categories were ranked equally. Forty-four respondents stated that an authentic military friendly climate was important. Twenty-four or 56%, strongly agreed, 18 of 44 respondents or 41% agreed, and 1 respondent or 3% disagreed. Having a clear Yellow Ribbon designation was also

strongly agreed to by 24 (54%) or the respondents, 17, or 39% agreed, and 3, or 7% disagreed. Last, an easy to navigate webpage was strongly agreed to by 16, or 36%, 27, or 61%, agreed, and finally, 1, or 3% disagreed.

The respondents seem to be telling us that there is not a single way to make a good first impression, since each of the five choices were nearly equally valued by the 46 respondents. This finding indicates that all University representatives working with the MVS community must understand that how they address potential students is important—and their actions can make or break a first impression. The findings also indicate that our MVS value a wide range of feedback from those providing information about the school they might choose.

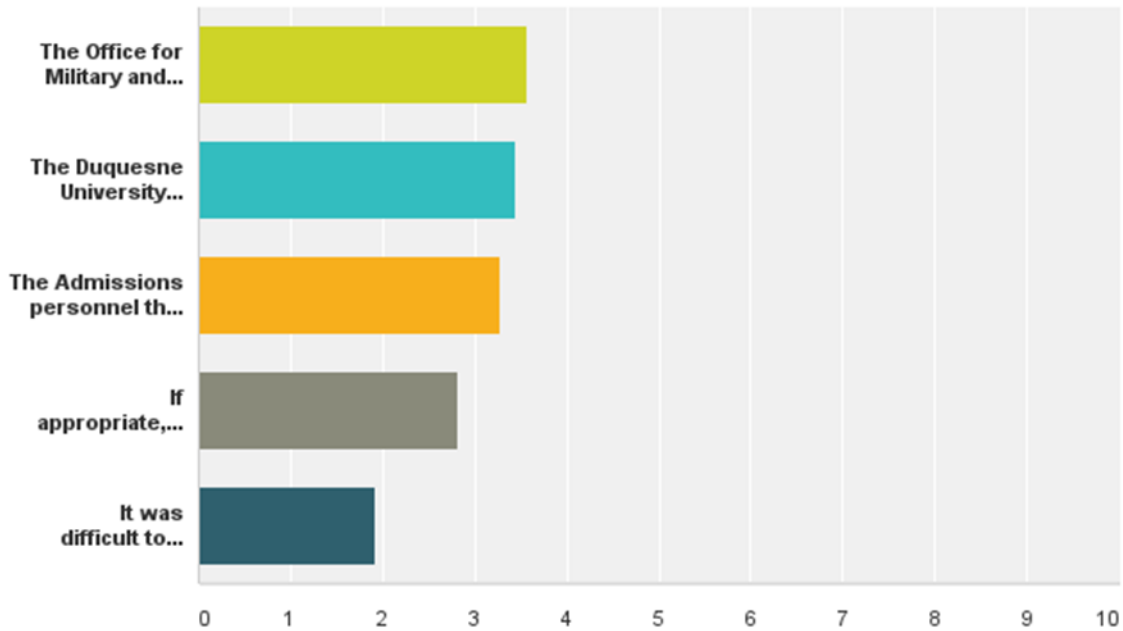
Analysis of Findings from Survey Question 19: Reflections on the Application

Process

Question 19 sought to gather feedback about the application process. Similar to the format of question 18, respondents were asked to rank five distinct statements or queries. 1. Did the Office of Military and Veteran Students (OMVS) meet their needs? 2. The Duquesne University admission process is military friendly. 3. Admissions personnel were knowledgeable about MVS issues. 4. The University offered credit for military training where appropriate. 5. It was difficult to find help about MVS issues. In addition to selecting the importance of the five distinct categories, respondents ranked each in terms of degree of agreement ranging from, Strongly disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Agree (A), to Strongly Agree (SA).

Q19 Think about the application process at Duquesne University, and use the scale below to respond to the following:

Answered: 45 Skipped: 1



Forty-five respondents provided feedback for this question. Once again Figure 4.18 is arranged in descending order of importance, with the most important category listed at the top of the figure. All 45 respondents agreed in some way that the (OMVS) met their needs. Twenty-five or 55% strongly agreed, while 45% agreed. In terms of the admissions process promoting a feeling of military friendliness 43, respondents ranked it as important, slightly less than the ranking for the Office of Military and Veteran Students. Of those, 23 respondents or 53% strongly agreed that it did, while 17 others (39%) agreed, only three or 7 % did not agree. The third ranked category, Admission's personnel gave the impression of being military friendly was chosen by 22 of the 43 respondents (51%) as strongly agree, 13 (30%) chose agree, six respondents (14%)

disagreed, while 2 others (5%) strongly disagreed. Forty-two individuals responded to the fourth category, regarding the award of college credit for military training. Only nine respondents (21%) strongly agreed, while 21 (50%) agreed, seven, (17%) disagreed, and 5 (12%) strongly disagreed. The last question sought to learn how difficult it was to find specific help with issues related to MVS. Forty-five respondents provided feedback, 4 (9%) strongly agreed, 8, (18%) agreed, while 14 (31%) disagreed, and the largest group, 19 (42%) strongly disagreed with this notion.

The data seem to show that a majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the importance of having an office for military and veteran students, a Military Friendly Admissions process, and Admissions personnel who were knowledgeable about military and veteran student issues. This assumption supports the assertion made in the literature that many veterans seeking a degree in higher education rely on a single point of contact, or a staff that is knowledgeable of their needs (DiRamio D. &., 2011). The MVS community respondents also agree that that earning some college credit for their military was important (9 or 21% strongly agreed, and another 21 or 50% agreed).

It appears that the MVS community place a good deal of importance on the presence of a caring staff who are accessible and value their military education. Clearly, if we hope to earn the trust of the MVS, and hope to attract more MVS, we must pay more attention to how they perceive us.

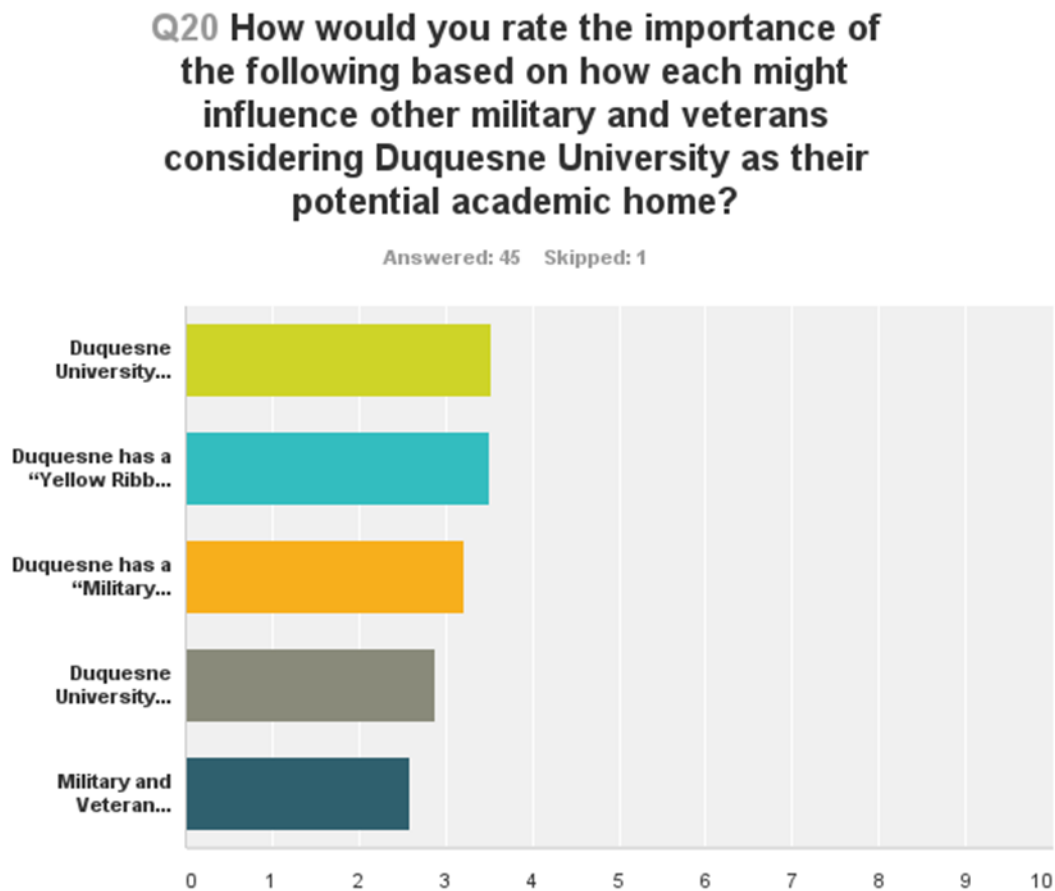
Analysis of Findings from Survey Question 20: How do respondents rate specific aspects of the University as they pertain to their decision to choose Duquesne?

The authentic provision of a variety of services for incoming MVS is extremely important if a university truly intends to ensure that new military and veteran students

succeed. “For a student veteran to persist and move into the role of a fulfilled civilian self, he or she must experience...belonging and connectedness in the college environment” (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008, p. 26) Question 20 asked respondents to identify the value and importance that key services had on their decision to attend Duquesne. The guidelines to answer question 20 were the same as questions 18 and 19, respondents were asked to provide feedback on five distinct categories. 1. Is a Military Friendly designation important? 2. Does the university participate in the Yellow Ribbon program? 3. Is a welcome letter from the President or Provost important? 4. Is it important for faculty and staff to receive training regarding the specific needs of MVS? 5. How important is a detailed financial aid briefing for MVS? In addition to selecting the importance of the five distinct categories, respondents were asked to rank each in terms of their influence selecting from Not Influential (NI), Somewhat Influential (SI), Influential (I), or Very Influential (VI)).

Figure 4.19 displays in descending order the value MVS place on these five distinct services. According to the 45 respondents the two most important elements that might influence other MVS to choose Duquesne were, a detailed financial aid briefing, and the Yellow Ribbon partnership. For both questions, 40 of the 44 respondents (80%) believed it was either influential or very influential. Of nearly the same value was Duquesne’s Military Friendly designation, with 37 respondents ranking it as either influential or very influential, seven respondents choosing somewhat influential, while one respondent chose not influential at all. Forty-four respondents felt that the fact that faculty receive training alerting them of the needs of MVS, was influential, 12, or 28% believed it to be very influential, while 19 or 43% thought it was influential, and another

9 or 20% believed it to be somewhat influential. Only 4 or 9% believe it to be not influential. The category that earned the least influence was a specific welcome letter from Administration. Only 8 respondents of 44 or 18% believed it was very influential, 19 or 43%, influential, 8 respondents or 18% somewhat influential, and nine others or 21%, not influential.



The MVS respondents seem equally influenced by the choices offered in this question. They agree that they value a level of care and attention whether it comes in the form of a special office designed for them, the fact that the University is military friendly or that they receive attention from administration and staff. It is safe to assume, therefore,

that colleges and universities hoping to attract and help MVS should consider providing services specifically tailored for this population.

How are we currently doing, and what can we do better?

It would not be wise to create a survey for MVS and not ask them to rate how effective we are at meeting their needs. Questions 21 through 28 are designed to solicit feedback on our current level of service, and to seek input on how we might improve the transition experience for the MVS.

Analysis of Findings from Survey Question 21: Which Services do MVS use?

If the staff at Duquesne hopes to provide premium service to MVS attending our University, then it would be helpful to hear from the MVS which services they need and actually use. It would also be informative to determine the level of awareness MVS have regarding the services that are available for them to utilize.

Question 21 sought to gather information regarding the frequency with which the MVS at Duquesne utilized specific services available to them. Figure 4.20 depicts the responses of 45 of the 46 participants in the survey. Respondents were asked to indicate the frequency with which they used these services and were given four choices to identify their frequency of use, “Did not use”, “Somewhat”, “Frequently” and “A Great Deal”.

There were four different choices to identify the frequency of use, “Did not use”, “Somewhat”, “Frequently” and “A Great Deal”. Figure 4.20 depicts quite clearly how the MVS rated the use of these university-wide services.

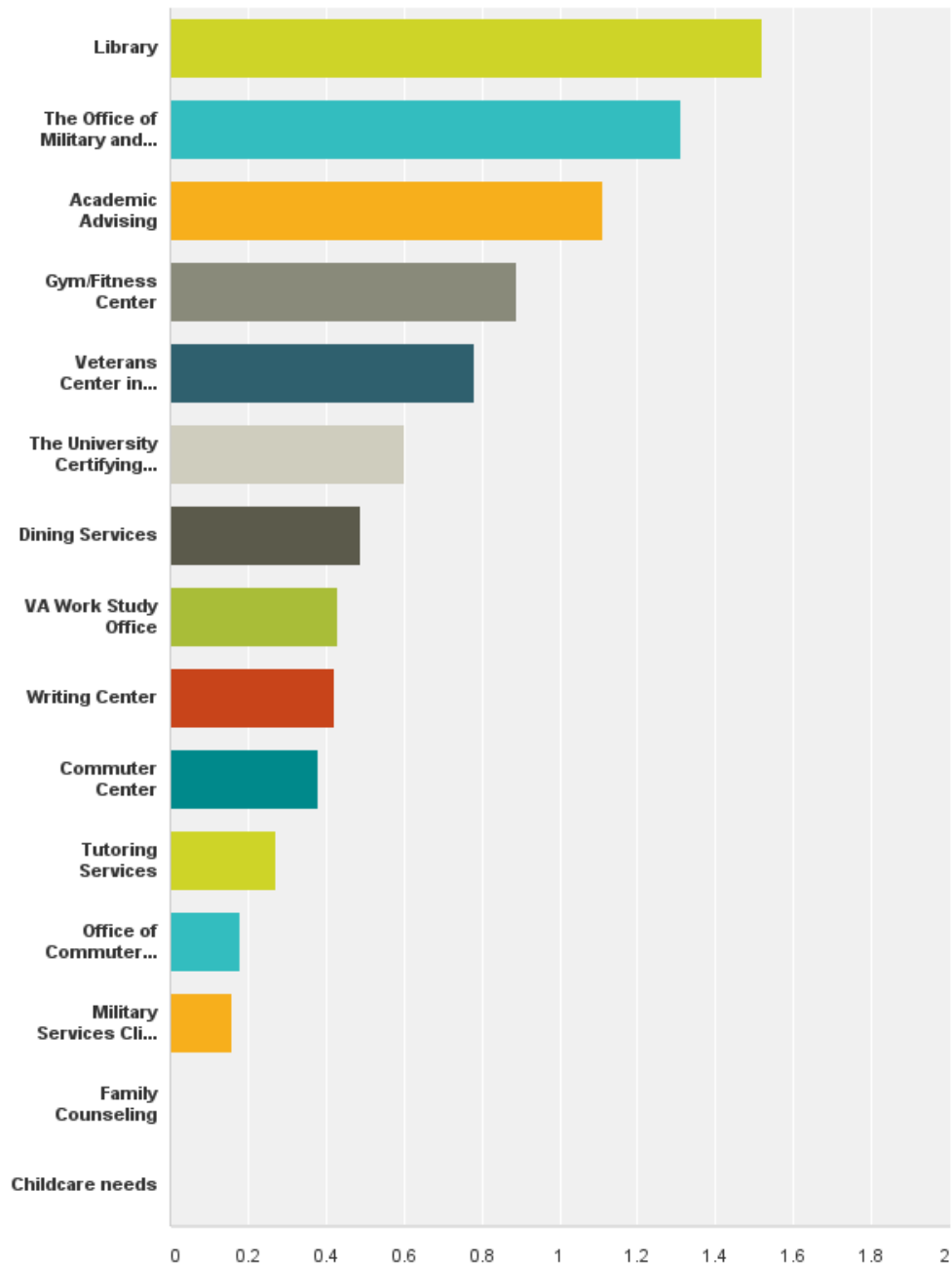
Forty-five of the 46 respondents provided input for question 21. Only 44 provided input regarding their use of the Gumberg Library. Thirty-three respondents reported using the library somewhat or better for a 75% usage rate, with 10 respondents or 23%

choosing somewhat, 12 for 27% using it frequently and 11 or 25% using it a great deal.

Eleven respondents or 25% reported that they did not use the library.

**Q21 Please indicate, using the scale below,
how often you have used each of the
following services:**

Answered: 45 Skipped: 1



The Office of Military and Veteran Students (OMVS) was the second most commonly used service at the university. In this case, 45 respondents provided feedback. Thirty-four, or 75% used the OMVS somewhat to a great deal of the time. Seventeen or 38% of the respondents said somewhat, 9 or 20% said frequently, and 8 or 18% said a great deal. Another 11 or 24% did not use the OMVS.

Academic Advising was the third category. There were 45 respondents providing input to this category. 20 or 44% weighed in at somewhat, 9 respondents or 20%, frequently, and 4 or 9% said a great deal. Twelve respondents or 27% did not use the services of their academic advisor.

There were 45 respondents providing a usage rate for the gym, 6 or 13% somewhat, 8 or 18% frequently and 6 for 13% a great deal. 25 or 56% MVS did not use the gym.

Nine or 20% of the 45 respondents who provided input regarding their use of the Veterans Center used it somewhat of the time, 7 (15%) use it frequently, and another 4 or 9% use it a great deal. 25 or 56% do not use the Veterans Center.

When it comes to the University Certifying Official (certifies VA benefits) 16 of 44 respondents, 37% reported using these services more than somewhat of the time. Seven or 16% somewhat of the time, 8 or 19% frequently, and 1 or 2% a great deal. Twenty-seven or 63% did not use the Certifying Official. Forty-five respondents provided feedback about the dining services on campus. 11 or 24% used them somewhat, 1 or 2%, frequently, 3 or 7% a great deal.

Dining services, the VA study Office, the Commuter Center, the Writing Center, Tutoring Services and the Office of Commuter Affairs/Residence Life were even less

popular with the respondents. Sixty seven percent or 30 of the 45 respondents did not use the dining services. Of the 44 respondents weighing in on the use of the VA Work Study Office, 5 or 11% used it somewhat of the time, 4 or 9%, frequently, and 2 or 5% used it a great deal. The Writing Center, 45 provided feedback, 13 or 29% used it somewhat of the time, 3 or 7%, frequently, and no one used it a great deal. Still 29 of the respondents answered that they did not use the Writing Center. Similarly, 45 responded to the use of the Commuter Center, 8 respondents or 18% used it somewhat of the time, 3 or 6%, frequently, and only 1, 2% a great deal. Thirty-three, 73% did not use this service. Tutoring services fared a similar way. Five respondents or 11% used it somewhat of the time, 2 or 4%, frequently, and 1 or 2%, a great deal. 37 respondents or 82% did not use the Tutoring Services. The Office of Commuter Affairs/Residence Life was used even less. A total of 45 MVS responded, 6 or 13% somewhat of the time, 1 or 2%, frequently and no one used it a great deal. Thirty-eight of the 45 respondents or 84% did not use their services.

Finally, the responses indicated that the least used service on campus was the Military Services Clinic on campus that provides free counseling to MVS. Forty-five respondents weighed in on their use of this service. 4 or 9% reported somewhat, on respondent reported frequently, and 1 or 2%, a great deal. Forty of 45 did not use the Clinic, a lack of use by 89% of the respondents. Forty-four respondents provided answers to Childcare needs, all 44 reported to not use this service. Finally, 45 respondents provided feedback on their use off Family Counseling. All 45 did not use this service.

Overall, the responses to question 21 show that our students do use some of the services on campus, but many are rarely used, underused, and in some cases, not used at

all. It is imperative that campus administrators do a better job informing their MVS of the many services available to them. If any college or university hopes to connect the MVS community through a variety of support services, it will be important to do a better job communicating what those services are and why they are relevant to both academic success and personal life balance. The feedback from this question clearly highlights some of the services the respondents valued.

Ensuring Veterans Success on Campus (VSOC) relies on a number of key steps. One such step urges that Universities create a culture of trust and connectedness across their campuses (U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012). And while connecting and communicating with the MVS is an important first step the VSOC also concluded that a Central Veterans Office is crucial to coordinating this effort and the key ingredient to highlighting the services available to the MVS on campus while also maintaining a high quality range of services that are relevant and impactful.

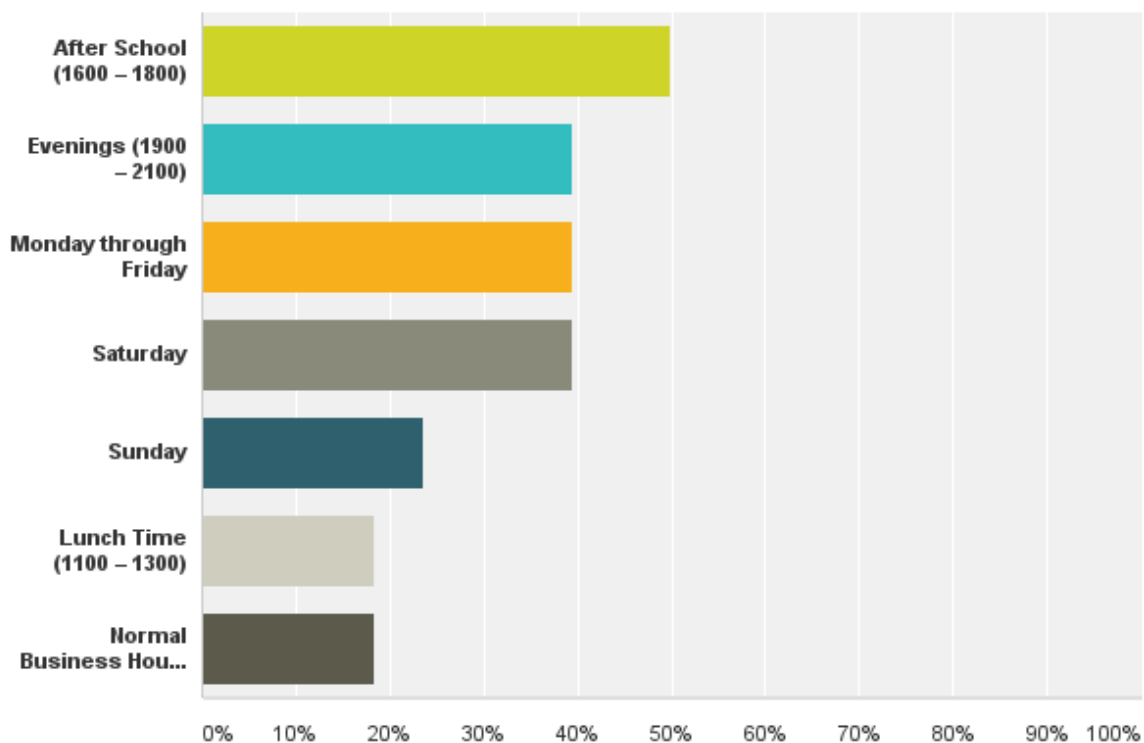
Analysis of Findings from Survey Question 22: Dates and times to plan events for MVS

The literature suggests that the MVS community are comfortable with the structured lifestyle found on military installations. There is also plenty of research to support the notion that members of the military are trained to work together as a team to accomplish the mission. That structured life and cohesion is rarely found on today's college campus, and if college service providers are to be successful in helping the MVS with their transition, there may be great promise in making a concerted effort to help the MVS find each other. One veteran student put it this way, "It was really nice to be able to talk to other veterans that maybe know what it is like to also be a student veteran.

Because while I did find that going to college generally as far as the coursework seemed easier, the social life seemed more difficult because you don't have anyone to talk to or hang out with...you don't have anything in common with people who are 18, 19, 20, 21 years old who pretty much haven't been anywhere or done anything. So the social aspect seemed more difficult than the academic aspect" (Griffin, 2012, p. 12).

Q22 To assist us in planning more effective social events, please indicate the dates and times that work best for you (select all that apply):

Answered: 38 Skipped: 8



Finding ways to bring the MVS community together would be easier with information regarding the time of day that these non-traditional are more likely to be able to meet. Figure 4.21 indicates that for the 38 of the 46 participants who responded to this

question, the most convenient time for a meeting would be after school. Fifty percent of the 38 respondents selected the after school time slot of 4:00PM – 6:00PM as the most optimal time to meet. Still, 15 or 40% of the respondents indicated that they would be happy getting together between 7:00PM – 9:00PM, while an equal number, 18% or 7 respondents agreed that the lunch slot, 11:00AM – 1:00PM as well as any time during the normal business day (8:00AM – 4:00PM) could work.

In addition to the time of day, the actual day itself might be important. The second portion of question 22 sought to identify which specific day might work best.

Interestingly enough, an equal number of respondents agreed that meeting Monday through Friday as well as Saturday would be effective for them. 15 of the 38 respondents (40%) reported that they could meet any day of the week rather than Sunday. Nine respondents or 24% answered that they would be amenable to meet on Sunday.

There are a number of variables that affect the frequency, time and day that the MVS community might be willing to get together. Beside the fact that they have a wide variety of class meeting times, many MVS have families (see Figure 4.11) are working (see Figure 4.12), and other commitments that may preclude them from gathering for meetings or social events. It will be important, therefore, for the campus staff to remain flexible in terms of scheduling events, and persistent in their attempts to bring the MVS community together across a variety of times and days.

Analysis of Findings from Survey Question 23: Which services eased the transition?

Identifying the specific types of services MVS need is crucial. Designing and offering services that no one wants is an exercise in futility. Question 23 sought to identify the services respondents saw as helpful to them and other MVS if offered. Six

different categories were listed as choices. Employment Assistance, Academic Advising, Career Counseling, a dedicated Veteran's Office, Study Skills and advice and a Veteran's Orientation.

Q23 If offered, which of the following services would be helpful to you and other military and veteran students who are transitioning from military to college life? (Select all that apply)

Answered: 42 Skipped: 4

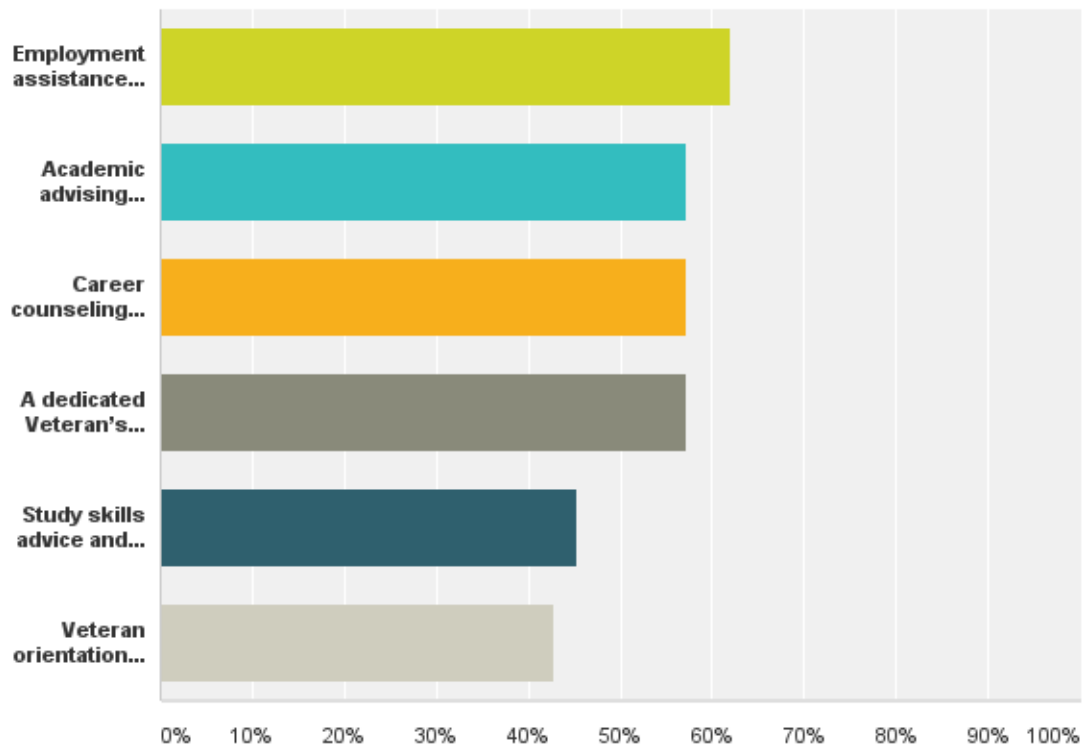


Figure 4.22 illustrates the responses of the 42 of the 46 participants who shared their perspective on these services. Employment Assistance was the most important service selected by the respondents. Twenty-six of the 42 respondents (62%) agreed that this was of the greatest value of the choices listed. Academic Advising, Career

Counseling and a dedicated Veterans Office earned an equal number of positive responses and each earned a degree of importance by 24 or 57% of the 42 respondents. Study Skills was selected by 19 (45%) of the respondents, and a Veteran's Orientation was selected by the least amount of respondents by 18 or 43%. Interestingly enough, even the Veteran's Orientation category that selected the least number of respondents was still seen as important by 43% of them, indicating that all five services brought a strong degree of value to the MVS student body who responded to this question.

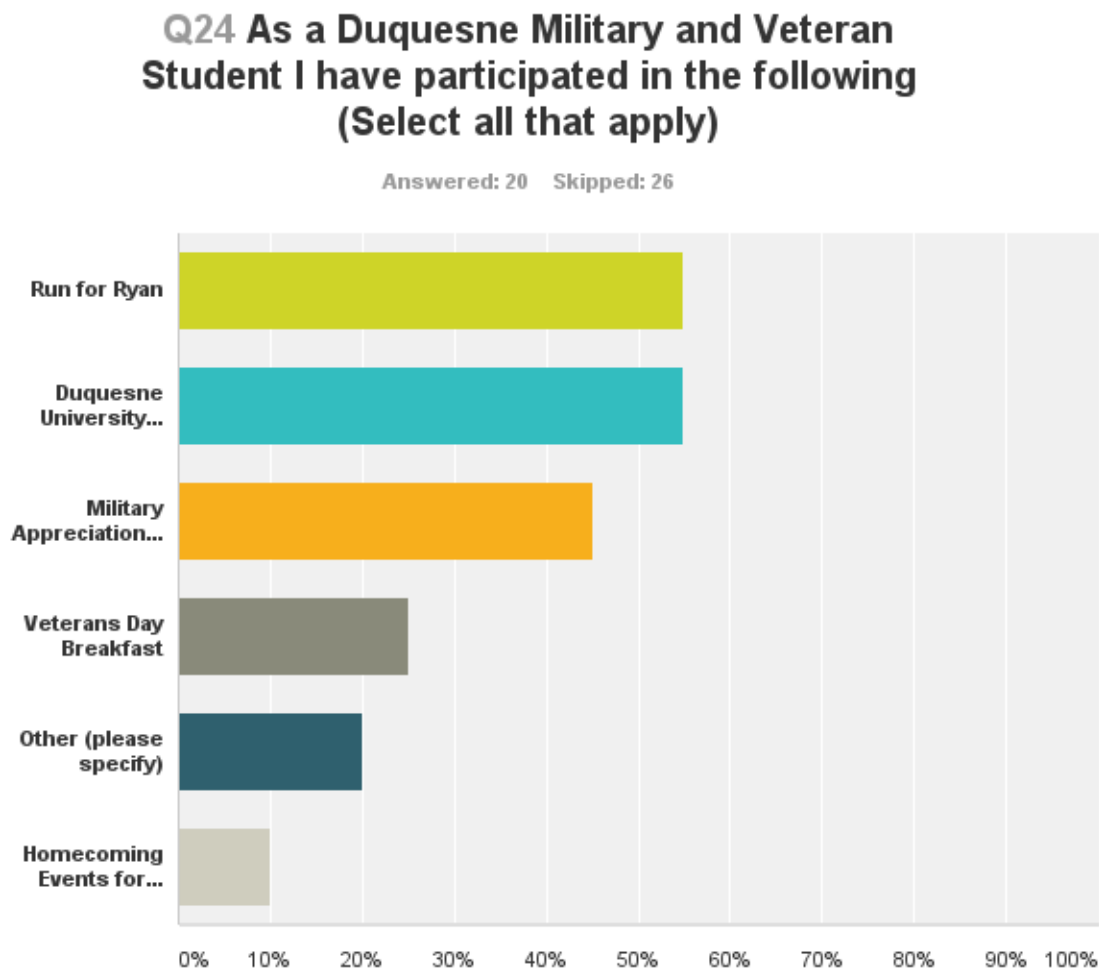
Analysis of Findings from Survey Question 24: What events do you participated in?

Because the number of MVS is much smaller on most college campuses, veteran students may develop a feeling of isolation. After all, life in college is quite different from life in the military (Ackerman & DiRamio, 2009). Therefore, it is important to find ways to bring the MVS population together with engaging events and gatherings.

The literature is full of examples that validate the heavy reliance veterans place on one another during their service commitments (McNealy, 2004, Branker 2009, Griffin, et. al. 2012, Tones, et. al., 2009). This same reliance on those who are supporting them at the university is necessary if MVS hope to make a successful transition and succeed academically. Of equal importance is the need of university personnel to mitigate the cultural and social barriers that impact this transition (Zoli, Maury, & Fay, 2015).

This question reviewed a number of events typically planned throughout the academic year to foster and support opportunities for the MVS to gather. Some examples include: Military Appreciation sporting events where all veterans are recognized prior to the start of the game or during halftime; a week long schedule of events during the week of Veterans Day, including panel discussions and movie screenings; and, an annual

Veterans Breakfast. The Office of Alumni Affairs holds a veterans prayer service to open Homecoming and veteran alumni process in the Homecoming parade. In addition, there is a Student Veterans Association Chapter on campus (a veteran only social group) that schedules routine social gatherings. There is even an annual memorial five kilometer run on campus to raise money for a MVS scholarship, known as *The Run for Ryan Memorial 5K*. Question 24 was designed to identify the frequency that the MVS attended these various events. Twenty of the 46 respondents, 43%, responded to this question. The remaining 26 respondents skipped this question, as illustrated in Figure 23.



The responses for question 24 are depicted in Figure 4.23. Eleven, or 55% of the 20 respondents mentioned that they attended both the Run for Ryan and participated in the Student Veterans Association. Nine, or 45% have attended a military appreciation sporting event. Five respondents, 25% have attended the Veterans Breakfast, and 2 respondents, 10% have attended Homecoming events. Four respondents, 20% indicated they participated in a veterans get together hosted by the School of Nursing, one participated in a photo shoot to help the Duquesne marketing team, and two respondents indicated they have yet been able to attend an event. One of those two respondents indicated that non-participation was due to deployment and participation in the online degree program.

It is difficult to determine why more MVS have not taken advantage of social offerings, but several assumptions can be made. First, as indicated in previous questions, many MVS have family obligations and work full-time jobs. Some are still deployed and taking courses online. Whatever the reasons for their sparse attendance, it is up to those at the University who support their social and academic success to learn more about their individual needs and interests in order to plan events that are both relevant and accessible.

Analysis of Findings from Survey Question 25: Did participation in these events help you meet other MVS?

We cannot be certain as to why many MVS are not participating in events described in Question 24, and why the majority of respondents chose not to skip 24,. The purpose of Question 25 was to seek feedback on the impact participation in these events had on their ability to actually meet other MVS and connect with them in a social way.

Nineteen or 41% of the 46 survey participants responded to question 25. Figure 4.24 displays their responses regarding whether their participation in social events helped the MVS meet other veterans. Twenty-seven, or, 59% of the participants chose to skip this question. The responses fell into four specific response categories;

- 1. Helped me connect with other MVS
- 2. Have not helped me connect
- 3. Must be more veteran specific
- 4. I was unaware or have not attended these events

Ten of the 19 responses, 52%, agreed that attending these events helped them connect with other MVS. Five respondents, 26% stated that it did not help them meet other MVS. Two respondents, 10% felt the events needed to be more veteran specific, and another two (10%) plan on attending future events or were unaware that the events took place.

Three respondents in particular offered very positive feedback on the impact of the events on their transition and ability to meet other MVS.

Respondent #31, a married, female, separated from active duty, enlisted Navy veteran who deployed to a combat location shared this response; “Unfortunately, I am a strictly online student. If I had the opportunity to attend Duquesne on campus I would have liked to participate in veteran activities. We as veterans share a special connection regardless of branch, job, etc. It's sometimes hard to fit in after service. These services are vital to our education. Thank you for providing them.”

Respondent #25, a married, male, separated from active duty, enlisted Navy veteran, also deployed to a combat location stated, “The run was a fun event to get out

and meet some other folks. The SVA is an important organization to help keep a sense of cohesive sense of belonging.”

Respondent #11, a male in a domestic relationship, separated from active duty, Marine Corps veteran combat deployed said, “Through the SVA, I was able to connect with other student veterans and find common experiences with transitioning that helped me to transition easier.”

Though there were several positive thoughts shared for question 25, respondent #3, a married male, active duty national guard, Air Force veteran, who did deploy to a combat zone, summed it up this way, “I have mixed thoughts about my ability to connect with veterans my own age. The events like the Run for Ryan and SVA events helped, but the other events were more geared for an outside veteran community.”

Generally, the responses to question 25 were positive, more than half of the respondents, 52% agreed that social events help. Their responses support the importance of scheduling social gatherings as a way of helping the current MVS population meet others like themselves. But the responses also seem to indicate that more strategic effort must go into promoting the events as well as trying to make them more veteran specific.

Analysis of Findings from Survey Question 26: Which social activities appeal to MVS?

It is important to provide a variety of ways for MVS to meet each other. There are a number of veteran specific events planned by the university each year. This question seeks input regarding other types of events that might appeal to the MVS population.

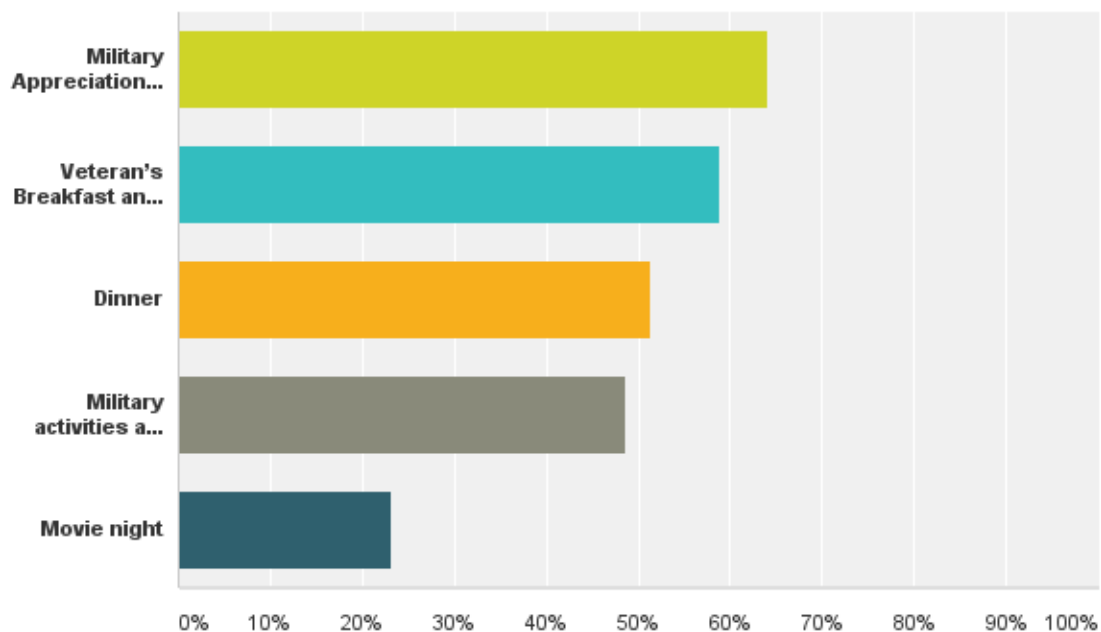
Question 26 provided five event options from which to choose:

- 1. Military Appreciation games, on and off campus

- 2. Breakfast and conversation
- 3. Dinner event
- 4. Veteran specific events at the gym
- 5. MVS Movie night.

Q26 Which of the following examples of social activities would appeal to you (select all that apply):

Answered: 39 Skipped: 7



Thirty-nine or 85% of the 46 respondents provided feedback, and 7 respondents, 15% skipped the question. Three of the choices earned more than 50% agreement from the respondents. Military Appreciation Games had 25 responses for 64% response rate, Breakfast and Conversation, 23 respondents for a 59% positive response rate, and Dinner, 20 respondents for a 51% rate of response. Nineteen respondents or 48% agreed that

veteran specific events at the gym would appeal to them, and 9 respondents, 23% might consider going to a movie.

Based on the responses highlighted on Figure 4.24, there does not appear to be any specific event that MVS prefer over another, with the exception of a movie night. But because there seemed to be a favorable response of more than 50% for three of the five choices could indicate that MVS would consider attending a social event if it coincided with a time or day that they could possibly attend.

Overall, the responses to questions 24 through 26 indicate that nearly half of our respondents agree that social events helped them engage with other MVS. This is neither a full or resounding endorsement, nor is it a denial of the importance of social interaction between the MVS as an important factor in their successful transition to college. It is, however, an honest appraisal that for some it is helpful.

Part of the struggle for both the MVS and those serving them rests with their willingness to collaborate to bring these groups together through sustained planning and communication. Because the MVS live such full lives outside of the university, finding time to participate in on or off campus events will continue to challenge both groups but present an opportunity for more relevant and creative ways to foster community.

Questions 27 and 28: Open ended prompts

The final two questions on the survey asked respondents to provide responses to the follow two open-ended prompts: Question 1: Are there services or support mechanisms that Duquesne University should put into place to improve the experience of transitioning from the military to academic life? Question 2: Do you have any additional suggestions regarding supporting military and veteran students at Duquesne University?

The goal of these two questions was to gather information about the additional steps the OMVS could take to improve the MVS transition experience. The responses were analyzed to identify specific response categories based on the frequency with which they occurred.

Analysis of Findings from Survey Question 27: What services or support should Duquesne institute to improve the transition process of MVS?

Twelve of the 46 survey participants (26%) responded to question 27, and 34 respondents (74%) skipped the question. Fourteen different categories emerged from the responses. The most popular response (cite how many) focused on the need for assistance or clarification with VA benefits. One student, respondent #4, an active duty, enlisted Navy, married male veteran who did not deploy to a combat area, put it this way, “Some kind of forum that could explain how we can use our benefits. And what else veterans have through the VA. My experience in leaving active duty was I didn't get much education on how I can use my benefits for education, VA Home loan, or healthcare. Most of mine was from word of mouth and posting on forums. If it wasn't for Duquesne's helpfulness I would have been lost on how to access my Post 9/11 benefits.”

Two categories had three responses each: the need for an Orientation and a mentor to assist throughout the transition process and the need to link MVS to programs that already exist, as well as provide increased transition assistance.

The five responses could not be connected to any other response and were unique. These responses were: Help finding a Chaplain, the fitness center, Career Services and Counseling and Clinical help for PTSD. These responses are related to the previous category that stressed the importance of connecting MVS with programs that already

exist. One student, respondent #44, an active duty married, male, Air Force veteran, who has not deployed said, “Consider emphasis on counseling services/availability of chaplain to speak with service members who may be dealing with PTSD or adjustment issues.

Although this doesn't apply to my situation, I can foresee problems in this area- especially with undergraduate students who are now a few years older than their counterparts/don't share as much with them in common.”

Three additional responses were unrelated to any other category, but must be mentioned. The first sought credit for military training. A second response commented on the good job the OMVS is doing, and one respondent mentioned being unsure if there was a need to provide additional services in place.

Research underscored that MVS must feel as though their basic needs are met, and that a central support system is in place to provide for their needs (Radford, 2009, DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell; 2008, Wert, 2016). The responses to question 27 support this notion very clearly, and solidify the fact that if MVS hope to transition successfully, and move forward academically, they will have to be well supported by the administration and staff on college campuses.

Analysis of Findings from Survey Question 28: What other suggestions do you have to improve the support for MVS at Duquesne University?

Respondents were asked to provide their suggestions to improve the support the offered by the OMVS. Nineteen participants or 41% responded to the prompt.

Interestingly, but not surprising, there did not appear to be much consistency in the recommendations. Each respondent had a unique plea. Four categories did appear more than once. Five respondents, the most frequent response, recommended that the OMVS

keep up the good work. Respondent #2 a single, male, enlisted, Navy combat deployed veteran (did not answer military status question) had this to say, “Keep doing what your doing, I was in frequent contact with Alexis and Lee before starting this semester and they made sure I was on the right track.....veterans are used to having a designated point of contact to get issues resolved, Duquesne's veterans office has done that well. They both are very friendly and professional.” But another respondent, #44, the active duty married, male, non-deployed Air Force veteran, felt just the opposite and asked for more communication, stating, “I have no idea what your office does beyond the veterans events and helping with the GI Bill. Maybe get the word out a little better? I'm sure you're doing great things and offer fantastic services. I just don't know exactly what they are. I don't think I'm alone in that department, either.” Three respondents stated that the OMVS should promote what they do better, three others stated that their full lives complicated their ability to devote their full attention to their studies, and that they could use help. Two others mentioned that socials would help with their transition.

There were a number of individual suggestions like, priority scheduling for MVS still serving, free parking, counseling, and the support of a mentor. Other respondents sought financial aid help, credit for their military training, and more effective communication of our events.

As previously stated, it is not surprising to note the range and diversity of the responses. They mirror the range and diversity of the MVS themselves. One of the recommendations from the multi-governmental Eight Steps for Veterans Success on Campus was the establishment of a culture of trust (U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012). One way to begin to foster trust between two groups would be to show

that the feedback sought by this survey be acted on. There were a number of suggestions provided by the respondents to the survey and many of them would easy to initiate and support. The ability of the OMVS to prove that the suggestions were heard and acted on will go a long way toward establishing this vital step in the transition process.

Limitations:

- I designed the survey questions and analyzed the findings.
- The findings cannot be generalized to the MVS population in general, or to the full MVS population at Duquesne University.
- The 46 participants did not complete all survey questions.
- The survey was administered online and may have eliminated MVS without access to a dedicated computer.
- The survey was available for 2 weeks thereby eliminating possible participants whose life circumstances prevented them from responding in that timeframe.
- The survey invitation was sent via the MVS official university email could have diminished the number of participants for 2 reasons:
 1. MVS may not check their Duquesne University email with regularity.
 2. MVS may not have checked their Duquesne University email within the 2 week span that the survey was available.
- The researcher, a United States Air Force combat veteran brings inherent bias to the study.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Leadership Agenda

Since the enactment of the Service Members Readjustment Act of 1944, the original GI Bill, young women and men have returned from their struggles at war, or ended their military service commitment and transitioned to the next phase in their lives as a college student. And though recent policy decisions at the highest levels of government have been passed to reduce the number of American servicemembers sent into harm's way, a variety of global threats continue to cast doubt that the fighting will end anytime soon. It is with this uncertain future in mind that we, the caregivers for military and veteran students on postsecondary campuses must remain poised to provide quality services and supports designed to better meet the differing needs of all military and veteran students.

The limited amount of literature focused on MVS transition to college campuses coupled with my personal observations as Director of the Office for Military and Veteran Students at Duquesne University served as impetus for this research study. The research that does exist tells us that colleges and universities are very skilled at helping traditional students transition to their campuses, but that we are less successful supporting non-traditional students who have postponed college application for a specified period of time and who struggle with the academic transition for a variety of reasons (Schlossberg, Goodman, & Anderson, 2006). MVS are non-traditional students, and as such require and deserve a special level of assistance with their transition from a military life to that of a college student (Schlossberg, Goodman, & Anderson, 2006).

This study was designed to learn more about the MVS population at Duquesne University and how we could more effectively meet their needs and ease their transition

to academic life. This chapter will discuss lessons learned from the findings that emerged from the survey data by connecting them to two theoretical frameworks designed to ensure MVS successfully transition to academic and personal success at the college level. The two frameworks, Adaptation of the Hierarchy of Needs for Veteran Students on college campuses (Figure 2.3)(DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008; DiRamio, 2011) and the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs's 8 Keys to Veterans Success on Campus (Figure 2.5) (U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012) will also be used to frame suggestions and implications resulting from the findings.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of the current services offered to Duquesne University MVS. The discussion includes descriptions of where we are effective, and where we are not, and offers suggestions and plans for the next level of work that Duquesne University might take in its ongoing efforts to support MVS academic transition. The chapter concludes with a Leadership Agenda that envisions what the OMVS must do, what Duquesne University must do, what individual schools must do in order to best serve these brave men and women, and how we might foster strategic, collaborative efforts to improve our practices on a local, regional and national level.

Survey Conclusions: What did we learn from the survey data?

Students with military experience present a challenge to college campus staff due in large part to the specific differences they have from their traditional aged classmates (DiRamio, 2011). To learn more about these differences I sent a 28-question survey to 227 MVS attending Duquesne University in the fall of 2016. Forty-six MVS completed the survey reflecting a 20.2% response rate. The respondents answered questions

requesting specific demographic information as well as their insights regarding present and future services to gauge their needs and our support of those needs. Their responses hold merit, and as such, can guide efforts to improve the academic life of MVS at Duquesne University. What came through loud and clear across the responses was the diversity of thought, need, interest, and desires of this group and a reminder that we cannot meet the interests and needs of this group with a “one-size fits all” program. Rather, we must view military and veteran students as individuals who deserve a personalized approach that includes a continuum of services designed to meet their personal needs and support their individual goals.

The rich diversity of the MVS, can be examined in greater detail by considering the implications of the demographic data from the survey, (See Figures 4.1 through 4.8). This examination is informed by the work of Ackerman and DiRamio (2009) that reminds us that MVS face major challenges as they transition from their highly regimented military life to an academic setting that lacks the support and structure to which they are accustomed. We can best understand this challenge by considering the portrait of the MVS population that was painted by their responses to the survey.

A Portrait of the Duquesne MVS: A richly diverse and unique community

Our MVS students come to us from every branch of the service (See Figure 4.2). One of the most surprising shared characteristics of our MVS population is that 75% of the survey respondents indicated they had seen active duty. This was a particularly interesting finding and quite unexpected since Duquesne University is not located near an active duty facility. As Ackerman and DiRamio (2009) state, when on active duty the military ensures that all needs, both personal and professional, are met. It is logical to

assume, then, that MVS students who were on active duty are more prone to expect that services provided by a university would be highly organized and individualized. This finding encourages the development of a continuum of services that begins with intense and intentional supports across a variety of needs to gradually release the MVS to become more self-regulated and self-directed while increasing the likelihood that they will begin their academic life on a more certain footing and maintain a successful approach to their studies.

Also of note, the respondents told us that regardless of their service commitment, active duty, National Guard or Reserve, many of them have seen combat. In fact 22 of the 46 respondents revealed that that this was the case, and another ten indicated they had deployed in support of combat operations. Connecting this information regarding active duty and combat support with the findings of the Rand Corporation (2009) points to an important implication for the University. Rand reported that nearly 20% of those serving in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan will suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). For these brave men and women who sacrificed so much for their country, it is even that much more critical for those serving them to develop a continuum of wrap around support services that helps to guarantee their success.

MVS put college on hold to serve and that delay impacts their transition

Another key fact revealed by the survey responses centered on respondents length of service. As Zoli, Maury, & Fay (2015) remind us 53% of the young people who join the service do so to earn the robust education benefits that the GI Bill provides pointing to a huge number of potential future MVS. If we as education providers hope to meet the

needs of these future MVS, we must consider the implications of amount of time they have been out of the formal classroom.

The first implication is that it takes 36 months to earn the GI Bill (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017). The majority of our respondents indicated they served between one to five years (Figure 4.3). What's more, the remaining respondents indicated serving for even longer periods of time, some, in fact for as long as 20 years! This is a major implication for universities and their staff. Helping MVS transition to an academic setting will require careful monitoring and along with a continuum of support from a host of on and off campus service providers. This implication closely aligns with the recommendations highlighted in the *8 Steps to Veterans Success on Campus* (U. S. Department of Education, 2016).

Veterans who are now our students as well as our students still serving in the military are quite unique. Some have seen the ravages of war, others have felt the anxiety of preparation to deploy, while still others are ready go at a moment's notice. They have lived very structured lives and are well provided for while they focus on their missions. MVS have been away from school for many years, some for decades. This implication begs us to look even closer at their differences, view their strengths and needs in a different way, and be ready to support and encourage them throughout their academic careers.

MVS juggle other commitments, where does school fit in?

The amount of time the MVS population has spent out of the classroom is not the only factor impacting their ability to learn. Putting their lives on hold to fulfill their service commitment places the MVS in a different age group—one that is three, five, ten,

even twenty years older than their college classmates. As much as they want to fit in, they don't (see Figure 4.9). Additionally, the MVS often juggle more than an age differential. Many work full or part-time jobs, are married or in a domestic relationship, others are divorced. Some have children and some raise their children alone. Megan Tones reminds us that, "students older than 25 years of age, are more likely to be living away from home with a partner, and to have dependent children.

These circumstances impose additional economic and time demands, both of which might hinder mature-aged students from completing their studies" (Tones, Fraser, & Elder, 2009 58(4)). Clearly, we cannot expect our MVS population to transition in the same fashion and require the same supports as their traditional college classmates. I have often reminded university colleagues that although MVS want to be the same as their peers, they are different, and it is for the reasons mentioned above we must recognize and honor these differences.

Their best chance to succeed is with our help and with each other: One Team One Fight

The vast differences that exist between the MVS and their traditional college classmates, compel those of us who serve them during the academic careers to adopt, modify or create policies and procedures that honor their distinct strengths and meet their unique needs. A close examination of the theoretical framework, (Figure 2.1) "The Military and Veteran Academic Pathway to Success" will help to visually explain how we might approach our next levels of work on their behalf.

Branker (2009) reminds us that veterans will experience an unfamiliar feeling of isolation after their service commitment ends and they begin to transition to civilian life.

During their initial military training they are taught to think and act differently. The training process fosters a strong reliance on one another that non-veterans are not able to understand. Yet, it is important to recognize and consider this intentional “hard-wired” thought process engrained in the MVS during their training and how it continues to impact their lives, if we want them to succeed. The strong bonds that led to the development of a fighting team mentality--the unit cohesion veterans rely on for survival--does not exist with the same intensity or sense of purpose in civilian life in general and on the college campus in particular (Chambers, 2015). The implications of this basic yet complex concept heightens our responsibility to organize a well thought out support system geared to ensuring the academic success of the MVS. Their success can only occur if we take time to really get to understand the basic needs of our students, one of which is a need for structure and connection (Hamrick F. A., 2012).

Another way the MVS differ from their traditional school aged peers is the manner in which they arrive on campus. Most MVS are eager to start their education as soon as possible after their separation from the service. They are more apt to start at different times of the academic year rather than wait until the traditional fall start that coincides with the four-year format found on college campuses. MVS are used to making decisive choices and want to get moving as soon as possible.

In addition to requiring a rolling start rather than a fall matriculation, MVS also require a different welcome experience than their traditional aged peers. Keep in mind that because of their military training and experiences, they are minimalists and require only the essential details to get started. They aren't interested in traditional college social groups, probably won't want to spend time touring the city or learn what life in the dorms

is like. It is not that they see an orientation to college life as unimportant, but rather they crave information that is timely, relevant, and that is tailored to their specific needs, questions, and fears. MVS can be best served with critical information about how to get started, who are the most important people to know, where to get tutoring services that will help with the rust that may have formed due to the time gap since their last round of studies being out of school for some time, how to best get their books, and if there are other ways to fund their education. MVS are older, married in some cases, with kids, and they work. They are at a different point in their lives, and have differing needs. Clearly, they deserve an orientation process that recognizes who they are, meets them where they are when they arrive, and offers them the information they need to succeed.

The need for a one-stop shop: The creation of a Veterans Center

Because the MVS lose support system they have come to rely on once they leave the military, many will begin to experience a degree of worry about their basic needs. These concerns about finances, housing, finding new friends and social groups will challenge the early phases of their transition to academic life. In many ways the situation parallels the basic needs described in Maslow's Hierarchy (Figure 2.2). To minimize these risks, DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell (2008) developed an Adaptation of the Hierarchy of Needs for Veteran Students on college campuses (Figure 2.3). Much like Maslow's hierarchy, the veterans' hierarchy has five levels. In a similar fashion, the third level on each hierarchy deals with socialization. To ensure success at this level, DiRamio, et al., recommend that postsecondary schools establish a way for MVS to mitigate the worry that will come from separation. The authors recommend that an established Veterans Center is a highly effective way to ensure that the MVS have a central location

to find answers to their questions, relieve their concerns, and connect with other veterans in a safe environment that supports and build camaraderie.

Based on what we know about MVS in general and what we learned from the Duquesne MVS who responded to the survey (Questions 21 and 28), it makes good sense to envision an enhanced “one-stop-shop” in the form of an expanded Duquesne Veterans Center that advocates for them and helps them connect. Besides providing a place where MVS can gather at their convenience, the center could act as a hub that connects MVS to the rest of the campus support services and personnel

Because they share unique experiences that are part of military life and combat, to name two examples, MVS are enjoy spending time with other veterans. They feel comfortable leaning on their MVS peers in much the same way as they did while in the military. The current Veterans Center allows them to rally at a known space with a trusted representative. That is why the central veteran’s space is both crucial and foundational. Enhancing it however, would permit the center to serve as the command post, or headquarters for the university, connecting MVS to a variety of critical services that they need to get started; services ranging from the most basic, to the most important (Figure 2.3). This enhanced Veterans Center could also serve the campus staff by providing campus-wide and department specific training to help educate the campus community regarding the strengths and needs of these non-traditional learners.

But, providing an enhanced Veterans Center where the MVS can not only relax and connect with the OMVS but also with other campus services will only address a portion of the problem. We as the caretakers of the MVS community must find ways to

actively engage them with each other during relevant events that happen when it is convenient and beneficial for them to meet.

Now we engage them: Bringing the MVS together is the key

The final implication informing our quest to provide an effective MVS transition process, rests on our ability to bring them together. An enhanced Veterans Center where MVS may congregate to find answers to their questions and help to solve their basic needs is crucial. And while the Center will give MVS and dedicated space to congregate, we will need to facilitate opportunities for MVS to come together in meaningful ways.

More than half of the survey respondents agreed that social events helped to bring them together in a social way (Figure 4.25). This finding supports the notion that scheduling social gatherings is one way to assist the current MVS population to meet each other. But the finding also indicates the need for us to do a better job of promoting events while making them more veteran specific.

There are 214 MVS attending Duquesne University in the spring of 2016. Nearly half of them attend class online (Figure 4.16). Because there are only approximately 115 MVS taking classes on campus, and another 100 or so taking classes online, it is nearly impossible for MVS to identify and find each other. Once again, an enhanced Veterans Center will enable them to drop in anytime that they are on campus or have a minute between classes. But, beyond the center encouraging spontaneous connections, there is more to do in order to establish opportunities for larger groups of MVS to connect with each other. This will require a focused effort to pinpoint specific times and days when more MVS can meet, as well as designing relevant events that would entice them to get together, in much the same way that they were connected while serving.

The survey responses highlighted that the complex lives that many MVS lead tug them in many different directions. When asked if there was a specific time to get together, not surprisingly, they could not agree. Yet the most common response was either immediately after school, or on Saturday (Figure 4.22). In terms of the types of events that appealed to them, the MVS who responded said that they were not too interested in gathering in larger venues, but preferred something more relaxing, like coffee and conversation or breakfast (Figure 4.26).

These findings help us understand that because MVS are strapped for time due to their varied responsibilities, the campus staff must remain flexible in terms of scheduling events. Even more importantly, campus personnel must be persistent with their attempts to bring the MVS community together across a variety of times and days focusing more on the quality of the connections that they foster rather than the numbers of MVS who attend any given event.

We need to reach out to the MVS in a different way

A lack of interest, self-efficacy concerns – the feeling that school was not for them, and a perceived lack of financial resources and competing responsibilities will hamper MVS as they consider the notion of attending college (McNealy, 2004). These assertions coupled with the fact that many MVS will be applying to college on their own, without the support of their parents or high school counselors like traditional students, substantiates the need for Admissions personnel to develop an effective outreach and communications plan to recruit MVS.

The Duquesne MVS who responded to the survey declared that they valued a caring, well informed staff, who understood their unique needs (Figure 4.19) And though

they did not identify a single admissions resource as the most important, they evenly noted the importance of a school's military friendliness, the ease with which they could locate a veteran specific office, and the presence of an Admissions team that could answer their questions. The implication of this finding, then is that a variety of concerted actions, rather than one specific characteristic, contribute to a potential MVS's interest to follow through with an application.

And, because some MVS may be hesitant to apply, all campus personnel responsible for responding to new student inquiries must be well versed in their needs. Clearly, the minute a school fumbles during the recruitment process, the potential MVS candidate may flee and never try again. We have one shot to get this right. This implication suggests that the Administration might profit from considering a direct communications plan targeted specifically to the MVS population. This would entail working hard to craft a message specific to veteran needs as non-traditional students that honors their experience and lets them know that we are prepared to welcome them to campus and support them every step of the way. A unique community requires a unique marketing campaign that telegraphs that Duquesne is sensitive to MVS needs at all phases of the application process.

Summary Implications: What does this mean?

The discussion above provided five key lessons about military and veteran students. It painted a portrait of a diverse group of individuals with unique set of shared experiences who are vastly different from their traditional college classmates. They will come to campus with study skills that might be a bit rusty because their service to our country has kept them away from academics for some time. Because they have such

varied needs, a single point of contact or Veterans Office will be required to help them get started. Additionally, a Veterans Center where they can feel free to congregate or just sit alone to gather their thoughts will help them find one another to begin the process of forming new bonds similar to those formed while serving. Finally, we will need to communicate with them in a different way than we do with the traditional college prospect.

A Leadership Agenda: Our Next Level of Work

Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit was established to serve those students who were marginalized. I contend that many MVS are living on the margins for many of the reasons covered in this study, and fall right into the path of our mission. It is because of our shared mission and goals that the Duquesne community must strive to be the best choice for military and veteran students. Duquesne University is a perfect place. Our campus is a sanctuary cloistered away on the 50 acre bluff, quiet, tranquil and grounded on a commitment to faith. Our commitment to education of the mind, heart and spirit perfectly describes the following next steps that we should take to not only honor the service of these brave women and men, but to also serve God by serving them. In that spirit, the spirit that is Duquesne, the following five step preliminary leadership agenda grew from the survey responses and the context of our University Mission:

STEP One—Develop an MVS Strategic Plan: We must adopt our own hierarchy of service for veterans patterned after the DiRamio model. This is critical because the system of supports for MVS currently in place is designed for a traditional college-aged student, not the non-traditional MVS. If we are strategic, we can create a continuum of services aimed at successfully meeting their basic needs, and then helping

them to thrive in order to reach higher stages of the hierarchy. In this way we will be well on our way to helping MVS succeed at Duquesne University. (All – OMVS, Schools and the University)

STEP Two—Adopt Research-Based Structures and Actions: Our attempts to serve MVS should not be guided by opinions. There is solid research on what works and what does not. We must adopt the 8 Keys to Veterans Success on Campus (U. S. Department of Education, 2016). The recommendations outlined by this voluntary initiative of the Departments of Education, Veterans Affairs and Defense provide clear guidance and specific ways that colleges and universities can support veterans and hold themselves accountable for their success. (All – OMVS, Schools and the University)

STEP Three—Increase our Capacity to Serve: Human resources are key to the success of any initiative. Identifying ways to increase the personnel within the OMVS may involve inexpensive methods initially, and then a more deliberate attempt to increase staff and support in the future. Perhaps the university might provide interns or graduate assistants to augment the OMVS staff. A campus wide committee might identify ways that current graduate students might intern with the OMVS to provide specific services to our MVS such as legal, medical, and mental health services. Our current Veterans Center, and Office for Military and Veteran Students (OMVS) is working at the outer limits of capacity. One dedicated individual cannot meet the full spectrum of needs of our MVS community and sustain an effective and engaging program. Current manning might be augmented through funding from grants or foundations in the region and those avenues are worth exploring. (OMVS and the University)

STEP Four---Develop an effective communications plan: The

Communications Plan would include a calendar that depicts the social, spiritual and recreational events that will occur throughout the academic year. The Communications Plan would also include avenues for delivering essential information on a daily basis through email, newsletters and posters at the Veterans Center to update the MVS with pertinent information. Sharing this information ensures that the OMVS is connecting with the MVS in all the ways that they communicate including a variety of social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.). Our goal will be to more effectively communicate with the MVS population in a variety of relevant and accessible ways. (OMVS)

STEP Five---Develop a culture of trust and connectedness on campus: The

first key of the 8 Keys to Veteran Success on Campus (U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012) calls for development of a culture of trust and connectedness across campus. To live up to that standard, we should link the MVS population to the existing on-campus services to more effectively meet their basic needs. The university has a long standing tradition of excellence in serving the needs of traditional students. Our goal must be to educate the service providers about the complex set of needs and unique strengths the MVS have so that these services transfer the services can be tailored in a manner that meets the needs of the MVS. By presenting MVS with an orientation and continuum of services tailored to them, we build the trust that will grow as we continue to serve them. (All – OMVS, Schools and the University)

Concluding Thoughts

As the Director of the Office for Military and Veteran Students, I see first-hand the great work this office and a number of support agencies and countless individuals have done to advance the social, emotional, physical and academic needs of servicemembers transitioning to Duquesne University. But I believe that our University is capable of doing much more. The Leadership Agenda that concludes this study offers a simple outline of what is possible with a minimal amount of focused effort and support. Together we can do this.

I offer this plea and take this position not merely as the custodian of the Office for Military and Veteran Students, but as a veteran myself. I have personally experienced many of the same transition issues outlined in the literature, and have experienced many of the feelings provided by the respondents to the survey. As mentioned in the limitations of the study, my military service may have biased my opinion, but I am passionate about this new mission I have undertaken, and I remain confident that it can succeed because of the many parallels it shares with the underlying mission of Duquesne University.

Duquesne University has established a rich and storied tradition of serving individuals on the margins of our community. I can think of few more worthy candidates who fit that classification than today's military and veteran student candidate. These young women and men have placed their lives on hold to serve their nation, and now it is our responsibility to serve them. To say thank you for your service is not enough. It is time for our University to set a new standard of service for our proud military and veteran students, and to help the minds, hearts and spirits of these proud warrior's.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Military and Veteran Student Survey

1. Service Status (select all that apply)
 - ☐ Active Duty
 - ☐ Reserves
 - ☐ National Guard
2. Branch of Service (select all that apply)
 - ☐ Army
 - ☐ Navy
 - ☐ Air Force
 - ☐ Marine Corps
 - ☐ Coast Guard
3. Length of military service
 - ☐ less than one year
 - ☐ 1-5 years
 - ☐ 6-10 years
 - ☐ 11-20 years
 - ☐ over 20 years
4. Which choice best describes your service:
 - ☐ deployed to a combat zone,
 - ☐ deployed, non-combat,
 - ☐ never deployed
5. Are you still serving in some capacity?
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Yes (please explain) _____
6. Rank at time of separation/retirement from active service
 - ☐ Officer
 - ☐ Enlisted
 - ☐ Warrant Officer
7. How much time has passed between your separation/retirement from military service, and your enrollment at Duquesne University?
 - ☐ Less than 6 months
 - ☐ 6 months to 1 year

- ☐ 1-5 years
 - ☐ 6-10 years
 - ☐ 11-20 years
 - ☐ over 20 years
8. Gender
- ☐ Male
 - ☐ Female
9. Age
- ☐ 18-24
 - ☐ 25-29
 - ☐ 30-34
 - ☐ 35-39
 - ☐ 40 and over
10. Marital Status:
Are you:
- ☐ Married
 - ☐ Single
 - ☐ Divorced
11. If you have children please choose the one that best describes you:
- ☐ Married, caring for children with my spouse.
 - ☐ Divorced, sharing custody of my children with my spouse.
 - ☐ Single parent
12. Do you work while attending Duquesne University?
- ☐ Yes, full time.
 - ☐ Yes, part time
 - ☐ No, I am a full time student
13. How did you hear about Duquesne University? (choose all that apply)
- ☐ Family member
 - ☐ Friend
 - ☐ Fellow veteran
 - ☐ Internet search
 - ☐ Duquesne University printed material
 - ☐ Other: Please specify_____
14. Which factors contributed to you choosing Duquesne University?
- ☐ Information about the school's military friendliness
 - ☐ The feeling you had when you visited campus or talked with someone

- ☐ The schools long standing reputation
- ☐ Conversations you had with a school representative
- ☐ Other: Please specify_____

15. How long have you been attending Duquesne University? (please list the number of semesters)

Number of semesters_____

16. How do you attend the majority of your classes?

- ☐ On campus
- ☐ Online
- ☐ Split between online and on campus

17. In what type of degree program are you enrolled?

- ☐ Undergraduate Degree
- ☐ Graduate Degree
- ☐ Post-Graduate Degree

18. Think about your first impression of Duquesne University, use the scale below to respond to the following:

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

- Duquesne University has an authentic Military Friendly climate
- The website was easy to navigate to find information specific to veterans
- The staff communicated a welcoming and authentic attitude toward veterans
- Duquesne University clearly designated itself as a Yellow Ribbon participating school
- Duquesne University has a dedicated office for military and veteran students

19. Thinking about the Admission Process that you experienced at Duquesne University, use the scale below to respond to the following statements

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

- The Duquesne University admissions process is military and veteran student-friendly
- The Admissions personnel that I spoke with were knowledgeable about veteran specific issues (i.e. transfer credits, credits for military service)
- The admissions personnel offered me credit for my military training experience
- It was difficult to find specific help with military and veteran student issues

20. How would you rate the importance of the following based on how each might influence other military and veterans considering Duquesne University as their potential academic home?

Not influential Somewhat influential Influential Very Influential

- Duquesne has A “Military Friendly” designation
- Duquesne has a “Yellow Ribbon” partnership
- Military and Veteran Students receive a letter from the President or Provost of Duquesne University that welcomes military and veteran students
- Duquesne University advertises that all of its faculty and receive awareness training regarding the specific needs and characteristics of military and veteran students
- Duquesne University provides detailed Financial Aid information for veterans (scholarships, resource funds, merit awards)

21. Please indicate, using the scale below, how often you have used each of the following:

Not at all Somewhat Frequently A Great Deal

- Dining Services
- Housing needs
- Family Counseling
- Childcare needs
- Writing Center
- Library
- Tutoring Services
- Academic Advising
- Military Services Clinic in Rockwell Hall (free to MVS)
- Gym/Fitness Center
- Veterans Center in Libermann Hall
- The Office of Military and Veteran Services
- VA Work Study Office
- The University Certifying Official

22. To assist us in planning more effective social events, please indicate all dates and times that work best for you

- ☐ Lunch time (1100 – 1300)
- ☐ Normal Business Hours (0800 – 1600)
- ☐ After school (1600 – 1800)
- ☐ Evenings (1900 – 2100)
- ☐ Monday through Friday
- ☐ Saturday
- ☐ Sunday

23. If offered, which of the following services would be helpful to you and other military and veteran students who are transitioning from military to college life?
- ☐ Study skills advice and coaching specifically designed for veterans
 - ☐ Academic advising specifically designed for veterans
 - ☐ Career counseling specifically offered for veterans
 - ☐ Employment assistance specifically for veterans
 - ☐ A dedicated Veteran's Office
 - ☐ Veteran Orientation course the first semester
24. As a Duquesne Military and Veteran Student I have participated in (Please choose all that apply):
- ☐ Run for Ryan
 - ☐ Veterans Day Breakfast
 - ☐ Duquesne University Student Veterans Association (SVA)
 - ☐ Homecoming Events for Military and Veteran Alumni
 - ☐ Military Appreciation Games – Basketball or Football game
25. Please share your thoughts on how this participation impacted your ability to socially connect with other military and veteran students.
26. Which of the following examples of social activities would appeal to you:
- ☐ Movie night
 - ☐ Dinner
 - ☐ Military Appreciation Games (Dukes, Pirates)
 - ☐ Military activities at the gym (yoga, strength training, boot camp, spin)
 - ☐ Veteran's Breakfast and Conversation
27. Are there services or supports that Duquesne University should put in place to improve the experience of transitioning from the military to academic life? Please explain:
28. Do you have any additional suggestions regarding supporting Military and Veteran Students at Duquesne University? Please list and explain:

APPENDIX B: Twelve Responses to Survey Question 27

1. Consider emphasis on counseling services/availability of chaplain to speak with service members who may be dealing with PTSD or adjustment issues. Although this doesn't apply to my situation, I can foresee problems in this area- especially with undergraduate students who are now a few years older than their counterparts/don't share as much with them in common.
2. Perhaps the use of a mentor.
3. Help with evaluating transferable credits to help gauge completed academic progress prior to starting Duquesne coursework.
4. Exercise programs - could be fun
5. N/A
6. Veteran sponsors that are currently attending Duquesne to help ease the adjustment to college.
7. None that I need, so I'm not really sure
8. Not really, Duquesne already does a much better job at this than any other Pittsburgh University
9. Some kind of forum that could explain how we can use our benefits. And what else veterans have through the VA. My experience in leaving active duty was I didn't get much education on how I can use my benefits for education, VA Home loan, or healthcare. Most of mine was from word of mouth and posting on forums. If it wasn't for Duquesne's helpfulness I would of been l St. on how to access my Post 9/11 benefits.
10. The university should work more on connecting the various services that already exist, and somehow adjust the services they provide for traditional college students to meet the needs I have, and be geared more to when I might need them.
11. Clear point of contacts, which already exist (Alexis and Lee have been great), help with ensuring GI Bill issues are taken care of (Kathy has also been great)
12. Coordinate with federal Department of Veterans Affairs and recruit/hire a Vet Success counselor.

APPENDIX C: Nineteen Responses to Survey Question 28

1. I have no idea what your office does beyond the veteran's events and helping with the GI Bill. Maybe get the word out a little better? I'm sure you're doing great things and offer fantastic services. I just don't know exactly what they are. I don't think I'm alone in that department, either.
2. Apply the same benefits and tuition discounts at the Master degree level.
3. Veterans and Military students should have priority in creating class schedules for upcoming semesters alongside the student athletes and ROTC students who do. This is because many of us either still have a service obligation that is being balanced with our coursework or are have families or jobs outside and have a few more responsibilities than traditional students.
4. The financial aid process was the least military friendly part of my education experience at Duquesne. Billing errors, holds on my account
5. Reduce the 16 week semesters to 12 weeks and I believe your enrollment would greatly increase.
6. Very helpful staff in the Duquesne Veterans office.
7. Grateful that there is an awareness of the importance of taking care of current military and veteran students.
8. My only suggestion would be to continue what you're doing. I've been working on my Masters for many years, and have taken time off when needed. One of the reasons I come back is because of how amazingly helpful Duquesne is with helping me taking time off and start back up again. I highly recommend Duquesne to every military member who says they're looking at getting their Master's degree. Thank you for all your assistance over the years!
9. More acceptance of past military experience for college credits
10. I believe that it should be stressed how demanding some of the courses can be. I was plugged into two courses with no real understanding of how demanding online courses can be. Being that I work full time, was a new parent, and a drilling reservist (with a high OPTEMPO) while attempting to take two courses was overwhelming. By the time I personally came to terms with not being able to keep up I was overly stressed about the situation and it was too late to drop one of the courses. I feel that many military personnel would do the same and take on more than they may be able to depending on where they are in their lives if they too do not understand the overall requirements of whatever program they are involved in.
11. Parking for veterans with disabilities.

12. Maybe follow up calls to see if students who sought out help from counseling center were able to secure services elsewhere if they did not follow through with services A check in for students still attending

13. Not at this time

14. Having an email distribution list one can sign up for that can communicate specific events and social get-togethers geared toward the Duquesne Veteran Students.

15. Keep up the good work and THANKS for all the help already provided!!

16. Guaranteed seats in the Rangos school programs and nursing programs for veterans with a medical background. Guaranteed interviews for all veterans that meet the minimum academic requirements.

17. I'm pretty self-sufficient and am happy with the level of support the school offers

18. Keep doing what you are doing, I was in frequent contact with Alexis and Lee before starting this semester and they made sure I was on the right track.....veterans are used to having a designated point of contact to get issues resolved, Duquesne's veterans office has done that well. They both are very friendly and professional.

19. Make the program more viable and more visible.