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The Transition from Service Member to Veteran Student

Charles Daniel Ensminger
Walden University

Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Charles Daniel Ensminger

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Review Committee
Dr. James Herndon, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Stephen Lifrak, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Rachel Gallardo, University Reviewer, Psychology Faculty

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Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2022

Abstract

The Transition from Service Member to Veteran Student

by

Charles Daniel Ensminger

MS, Walden University, 2014

BS, Ashford University, 2013

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Ph.D. Industrial/Organizational Psychology

Walden University

May 2022

Abstract

Colleges may not be prepared to support veteran students transitioning from the military to higher education, resulting in more significant attrition levels for veteran students struggling to adapt to their new surroundings. This qualitative phenomenological study examined the experiences of post-9/11 veteran students as they transitioned from the military to higher education and their involvement and interaction with cocurricular, extracurricular, and nonacademic programs during their first year of college. The research questions focused on how veterans-students described the transition from the military and into their first year of college. The theoretical framework was a combination of Bridges's transitional model, Astin's theory of involvement, and Schlossberg's adult transition theory. Data were collected from 10 student veterans from a small college in Central Florida. Participants were interviewed via zoom, using open-ended questions, and data were transcribed and organized using NVivo 12. Using the modified van Kamm method, data analysis identified multiple emergent themes related to change, involvement, and adaptability, all critical aspect of the veteran students' transition from military service to their first year of college. Participants indicated that veteran students exiting the military were looking for new skills/opportunities, were not new to involvement in cocurricular, extracurricular, and nonacademic, and were effectively adapting to college during their first year of enrollment. The emergent themes can be used for positive social change by developing transitional or bridge programs for veteran students entering college and provide the rationale to support current veteran-based programs.

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Dedication

I want to dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Everlee. Thank you for your support throughout our entire journey. I am humbled by your tireless dedication to our family, support for my endeavors, and the ability to love with your entire being. You have inspired me to be a better husband, father, and man. I am eternally grateful for your patience and understanding during this journey. I draw the most strength from my connection to you, and I am thankful for you being in my life.

Additionally, I would like to dedicate this to my children, Gabriel, Elijah, and Anayah. Being your father has been an incredible privilege, and you all are why I have continued to pursue a journey of self-understanding to be a better father for you.

Lastly, I would like to dedicate this to my mother. I know your sacrifice as a single parent was great, and it is why I am the man I am today. The ability to learn from your journey inspired me to begin my own – Thank you.

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To my dissertation committee, thank you for your continued support. Thank you for becoming a beacon of light when my path is at its darkest to my Chair, Dr. Herndon, and Greg Murphy, my academic advisor. I am incredibly thankful for your willingness to lead me through this journey of self-discovery and the leadership and support you have provided along the way. The ability to learn from you has been an incredible experience, and I am eternally grateful. Your feedback drove me to pursue a deeper understanding of my topic and, ultimately myself.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

vi

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Education creates opportunities. Moreover, for post-9/11 service members

transitioning from the military following September 11, 2001, this philosophical belief

can motivate them to enroll in college following their military service (Zoli et al., 2015).

In a process formally entered through transitional military programs such as the

Transition Assistance Program (TAP), the service member begins a mandatory separation

process, moving them from service member to civilian (Congressional Research Service,

2018). These programs are designed to assist the service member through the transition

by providing them access to career-readiness preparation services, postmilitary financial

planning, and involvement (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). They also offer service members

the opportunity to identify emerging and often unanticipated transitional concerns/needs.

With the anticipated influx of service members into higher education, education

research focused on service members transitioning from military-to-civilian life among

those veteran students using Post-9/11 educational benefits has taken various qualitative

approaches to develop a more in-depth understanding of the veteran student experience as

it relates to college progression (post) military-to-civilian transition (Borsari et al., 2017;

Elliot et al., 2011; Ford & Vignare, 2015). Like Schlossberg (1981) developed, adapting

adult-transition theories has provided colleges insight into supporting student-veterans

through all phases of their progression. Additionally, research on nonveteran populations

has examined the effects of Schlossberg's transitional model concerning perceived levels

of awareness, transition planning, involvement, transitional needs assistance, assessing

the interactions between the 4S concept, and the importance of perceived levels (Lavalle,

2006). However, there is a lack of research examining these effects using a veteran student population.

Background

Post 9-11 veteran students are transitioning from the military to postsecondary education enrolling in various programs and courses they believe will help them gain or further their education while learning valuable skills to gain employment after military service (Borsari et al., 2017). Recent enrollment studies indicate that nearly 900,000 veterans have successfully transitioned from military-to-academic life and are enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs across the United States (Hill et al., 2019). Initial research suggests that the majority are likely to graduate, suggesting a 71.6% success rate (Cate et al., 2017); while this data supports the notion that veteran students are a flourishing population of students completing their degree programs, there is still a portion of veteran students who do not transition successfully and stop-out/dropout of their first year in college (Alschuler & Yarab, 2018)

Ford and Vignare (2015) were among the first teams to focus on post 9/11 veteran student progression, and associated challenges this particular veteran student group faced. Their data indicated a paradigm shift in colleges' perceptions of the veteran student need of September 11, 2001 (9/11) versus previous veteran students. Like MacLean (2005), they examined service member motivation's effects when choosing to transition to college education following their service obligation and found that military service distracted service members from their academic ambitions impacting their higher education achievement plans. Additionally, research by Peaslee (2016) supported this by

establishing a relationship between change in self-efficacy and perceived faculty confirmation. This insight identified a connection between student motivation to transition-related to self-efficacy and academic achievement, focusing on a change of self-efficacy in community college students due to the type of relationship students had with faculty members.

Borsari et al. (2017), Jones (2013, 2017), and Sansone and Tucker-Segura (2020) also examined the challenges related to the veteran student transition from military service to college enrollment. They began with the reason for driving veterans to move from the military to college life, identifying perceived advantages, expectations, and challenges related to degree completion. Their research provided readers with insight into emergent transitional challenges such as substance abuse and mental health concerns, highlighting a need for continued training for faculty and staff who support veteran students.

The research focused on veteran student academic achievement (e.g., Bucci & Shannon, 2012; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015) examined academia's influence on veterans' educational assistance, barriers, challenges, and possible future research recommendations associated with the veteran student experience. McClenney and Matri, Adkins (2014), and Elliott et al. (2011) researched student involvement via a focus on the relationship between student involvement used progression models to identify what causes alienation on campus among veteran students, providing insight into those challenges faced by veteran students reentering the educational dynamic via results

generated from surveyed data. Add summary and synthesis to balance out the use of information from the literature.

Lastly, research by Rumann and Hamrick (2009) examined the challenges faced by educational institutions as they attempt to support transitioning veteran needs. Their research identified critical academic considerations within developing a useful veteran student support concept. Furthermore, recent information (Gibbs et al., 2019; Marcus, 2017) related to veteran student graduation suggests that while colleges and universities eagerly recruit veteran students, faculty members are unaware of veterans' challenges transitioning from military service to college life struggle to graduate them.

Problem Statement

Research on veterans' transition into academia (Ghosh et al., 2020; Lange et al., 2016) implies that colleges/universities which do not understand their veteran student populations do not effectively support veterans' transitional success into higher education. Research from academic journal articles (Alschuler & Yarab, 2018; Osborne, 2016) and published personal narratives (Boodman, 2011) suggested that instead of completing their transition from serving in the military to a college student, a growing number of veteran students are electing to stop-out/dropout within the first year. As a result, veteran students are transitioning out of college without completing their education, significantly limiting their career options following military service.

Purpose of the Study

Today, academic research continues to concentrate on veteran students. It suggests that by focusing on their transition to academia, institutions can gain insight into

the process of veteran student transition and develop a more effective transitioning strategy to develop student support resources that establish narrowly tailored services to meet high-risk student needs (Byrd, 2017; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Jones, 2013 & 2017, Sansone & Tucker-Segura, 2020).

This qualitative phenomenological study examined the experiences of post-9/11 veteran students managing change through transition, understanding a student's involvement/interaction, and their ability to adapt following their first year of college. This study is critical because it addresses the literature gap related to post-9/11 veteran student transition from military service to college enrollment, focusing on change, involvement, and adaptation experienced during the first year in college. My goal was to provide an insight into the service members' transition from military to postsecondary academic life and attempt to deconstruct any current assumptions (see Gonzalez & Elliot, 2016) colleges may have by learning from the experiences of veteran students who have completed their first year of education.

Research Question and Hypotheses

This study explored the transitional experiences of veteran students who have left the military, entered college, and worked through their first year of college. Specifically, the researcher focused on change, involvement, and adaptations, three aspects significant to student-veterans success in college. The study used a baseline research question of "How do veterans-students describe the transition out of the military and into their first year of college?" The following research questions structured my inquiry into the topic:

- RQ1: How do veteran students describe the change of ending, losing, and letting go of the military as they transition into their first year (defined as the pre-enrollment period) of college?

- RQ2: How do veteran students describe their involvement (cocurricular, extracurricular, and academic programs) during their first year of college?

- RQ3: How does the veteran student describe adapting to college following their first year?

Theoretical Framework of Study

The theoretical framework for my study was based on a combination of Bridges' (1991) transitional model as it relates to change, Astin's (1970b, 2005) theory of involvement as it relates to student involvement during their first year of college, and Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2012; Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Goodman et al., 2006; Schlossberg, 1981, 1984, 2008, 2011) adult transition theory focused on adaptation. This framework supports an alternative approach to examining the veteran students' matriculation into and out of their first college year. It also provided insight into veteran student experiences navigating this first year. It used these three theoretical approaches to develop a better insight into the perspectives of those transitioning from military service to college when focusing on change, involvement, and adaptation.

Nature of Study

The nature of the qualitative phenomenological research design is to study an individual's lived experience (Neubauer et al., 2019). Therefore, it aimed to understand better individual veteran students' perception of transition from military to academic life,

focusing on their description of the change, involvement, and the formation of adaptive strategies while moving in, moving through, and moving out of their first year of education. A phenomenological approach allows for selecting a deliberately selected population to be explored, illuminating the specifics of that population's experience as phenomena related to their situation (Lester, 1999).

Service members are transitioning to college after serving in their respective branches. They use military training and experiences as skills and abilities to transition from service member to veteran student, a process comparatively different from traditional learners (Steele et al., 2010). Supported by Bourdieu's conceptualization of cultural capital (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014), these skills are engrained through military socialization and perceived as an integral aspect of transition and persistence moving in, moving through, and moving out of their first year. The research focused on preventing veteran student attrition suggests that because of skills and abilities gained through shared military training and experiences, veteran students should be adept at finding success in the classroom; however, veteran students' attrition rates indicate this is not true in all cases (Alschuler & Yarab, 2018).

This study focused on post-9/11 veteran students who have completed their first year of education; it examined the transitional experiences faced by veteran students moving in, moving through, and moving out of their first year of education. It used Bridge's (1991) transitions theory to examine veteran students' feelings about ending, losing, and letting go of the military as they transition into their first year of college. Astin's (1970b, 1991) theory of involvement was used to examine veteran students'

involvement during their first year of college. It also used Schlossberg's (1981) 4Ss' (a situation, self, support, and strategy) to gain, describe, understand, and interpret the experience of veteran students transitioning out of their first year of college. This framework provides the nature of this study. It allowed me to examine the veteran students' transition from military-to-education life so those supporting (and navigating) this transition can better support emerging challenges and needs in their pursuit of degree completion.

Definitions

Post-9/11 veteran student: Students who have previously served within any national military branch (Army, Air force, Marines, Navy, and Coast Guard) and currently using post-9/11 education benefits to fund their postsecondary education experience (Ford & Vignare, 2015)

Postmilitary Planning and Involvement: This term identifies a veteran student's use of the service member TAP military-to-college transition (Congressional Research Service, 2018)

Veteran student - First Year of Education: Veteran students' successful completion of their initial academic year (Ghosh et al., 2020)

Assumptions

This study's qualitative framework assumed that veteran student participants would be able and willing to describe their first-year enrollment experiences. It also assumed that the veteran student participants were able and willing to describe their perception of change, involvement, and adaptation related to their first-year experience.

Additionally, it assumed that veteran students who had completed their first year of education had different experiences than their nonveteran student counterparts. Finally, it assumed that the veteran student experiences would align with the Schlossberg (1981) transition model, Astin's (1977) transition model, and Bridges' (1991) transition model, all three models supporting a three-phased approach to transition.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was to examine the service members' transition into and through their first year of college. Participants were recruited from a small community college in central Florida. Data collection was focused on understanding the experiences of managing change through transition, understanding a student's involvement/interaction, and their ability to adapt following their first year of college. Considering its importance concerning program/degree completion (Terenzini & Reason, 2005) and its place in military-to-civilian transition progression, the first year of veteran students' college enrollment was observed.

Delimitations

There were several delimitations that bound the study. The participants were all veteran students and served in one of the recognized U.S. military branches (Army, Air force, Marines, Navy, and Coast Guard). The participants used the Post-9/11 educational benefits to fund their enrollment. The participants had completed their first year of pursuing an Associate's degree. Data collection was limited to students from collaborating institutions and focused solely on the students' perceptions of their experiences.

Limitations

While common assumptions related to student success are that generic student support resources models still positively influence student success, this study did not incorporate this type of supposition. This study presented precincts that were identified before data collection. Limitations related to participation being based on volunteerism only, the subjectivity of findings, and the researchers' bias related to the personal experience as a military service member and college student were addressed.

Significance

Significance to Transitional Theories/Models

Veteran students attempting to complete their education enter academia to pursue a degree. However, colleges and universities are not always prepared and may align these students with other nontraditional students (Lange et al., 2016). While new student reception/orientation models may meet the needs of other nontraditional students, recent literature targeting this concept has shown that veteran students may not fit this model (Borsari et al., 2017) and may not receive the full benefit of transitional resources available for other new students.

Significance to Practice

Veteran students enter colleges and universities with skills and abilities to succeed after military service (Ford & Vignare, 2015); however, some are not. This study focused on understanding the veteran students' transition related to the first year of education, and

it aimed to understand how a veteran student's description of situation, self, support, and strategy is related to their first year of college.

Results should support faculty and staff in developing institutionally appropriate concepts focused on increasing campus-conscious support systems associated with the challenges incoming veteran students face transitioning from the military to college life. Thus, developing institutional-specific veteran student approaches to support promotes more excellent retention of veteran students and realizes that their military skills and abilities are not enough to complete.

Summary

Veteran student transition commonly highlights those skills and abilities that emerged as positive ways in which veteran students transition into education effectively, navigating through their first year in college and into their second year (Ford & Vignare, 2015). What is seldom reported is when these skills are not enough, and progression out of veteran students' first-year halt due to problems incurred during the transition. Challenged by reports that veteran students struggle to complete their first year, recent research identifying the percentage of veteran students completing their education is limited. The goal of this study was to examine the perceptions of veteran students as they transitioned out of the military and through their first year of college.

Chapter 2, the literature review, will cover previous research conducted by various scholars focused on veteran student transition. It will examine veteran student perceptions moving in, moving through, and moving out of their first-year experience while also examining recommendations by studies that utilize research related to veteran

student success, transition, and first-year experience. The conceptual framework will also examine the importance of the area and population of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

As early as the colonial times, long-standing suspicions of a powerful, professional standing military fostered the early development of local citizen-soldier militias, and college campuses became primary sites of access to and development of citizen soldiers for military service (Rumann, & Hamrick, 2009). At its origin, this type of development relationship supported the establishment of a "professional" military, providing educational opportunities for servicemembers entering the military to support the national interest. Today, this relationship has significantly evolved, transitioning from a developmental opportunity for recruits going into the military to a developmental opportunity for service members transitioning out. Currently, "colleges and universities across the United States are home to a different relationship, where the arrival of hundreds of thousands of veteran students whose recent experiences include combat" (Elliott et al., 2011, p. #). This qualitative phenomenological study examined the experiences of post-9/11 veteran students, focused on their ability to manage change through transition, involvement/interaction with cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs, and their ability to adapt following their first year of college.

This study focused research on developing a better understanding of the transitional experiences had by veteran students leaving the military to enter education. This chapter will establish the basis for using the combined theoretical frameworks of

researchers: Bridges' (1991) transition model) as it relates to the influence change has on transition, Astin's (1970b, 2005) input-environment-outcome model as it relates to student involvement, and Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2012; Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Goodman et al., 2006; Schlossberg, 1981, 1984, 1989b, 1995, 2011) transition theory to examine veteran students transition from military to college has on the formation of adaptive behaviors. A better understanding of the transition process by establishing an outline to interpret and learn from lived experiences.

This chapter will provide a literature overview of empirical research related to the veteran student transition from military to college life, strengthening the framework with authentic, accurate research. It will cover the following topics: theoretical framework, change, involvement, and adaptation.

The literature is essential in providing an insight into the process of service members transitioning from military-to-education life and examining the phenomena related to the importance of the first-year completion. Thus, identifying veteran students as a unique population and not part of the typical nontraditional, first-generation, and underrepresented population of students and introducing emerging issues such as disability and military and cultural stigma as influences related to issues within the transition.

Literature Search Strategy

This study employed a research strategy for the literature review that used academic databases to search for English-language peer-reviewed journal articles and other dependable academic sources. The research period was 2010–2020, using

EBSCOhost, ProQuest, and Google Scholar. Searches used the keywords *veteran student transition, veteran transition to post-secondary education, military transition assistance program, Schlossberg's adult development theory, Astin's theory of involvement, Bridges' transition model, veteran students' first-year experience, the importance of the first year in college, phenomenological research in the veteran transition from military service to the college,* and *transitional challenges faced by veteran students*.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation for my study was based on three developmental theories: Bridges' (1991) transitional model, Astin's (1970b, 2005) theory of involvement, and Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2012; Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Goodman et al., 2006; Schlossberg, 1981, 1984,2008, 2011) adult transition theory. These theories have a commonality in understanding the transition process, using three theoretically similar approaches to adult development. They establish a logical "roadmap" via a three-phase-progression concept that focuses on assessing the transitional experiences of veteran students' progression through the first year of education.

The first phase is the beginning phase of transition, initiated by several input factors associated with triggering the transition and identified by a person's move into a new situation (Bridges, 1991). This move results in becoming familiar with new roles, relationships, and routines identified within three distinct aspects of the transition process. The second phase of the transition process is moving through (Schlossberg, 1981). People commonly experience this after moving into a new environment and begin to experience the neutral zone. Often experienced as an "in-between" zone, where critical

psychological readjustments and behavioral re-pattering occur, people often find themselves in-between a place they originated from and where they are going (Astin, 1977). Lastly, the third phase of transition is moving out of one situation and into another, a phase focused on reflection (Schlossberg, 1981). This transition stage examines a person's experiences within the first two phases of transition, a valuable perspective related to someone moving out of a situation and into a new beginning.

Bridges' Transition Model

Navigating transition successfully can be challenging. Regardless of how necessary or advantageous to a person's situation, this period can often be perceived as a crisis (DuFrene & Lehman, 2014), resulting in a mixture of cognitive and emotional reactions influencing maladaptive or resilient approaches to interacting with the environment. Bridges' (1991) framework for managing change within transition reflects these challenges and provides a process map to identify a person's position within the transition, a direction driven by (change) itself.

Bridges (1991) noted that "It is not the changes that do you in; it is the transitions" (p. #). Focused on a person's ability to manage change within the transition, Bridges' approach to understanding the influence transition has on a person begins with understanding the problem, evolves into developing solutions, and anticipates dealing with continuous change in organizations and life concluded. As a foundation for examining the influences change has on transition, Bridge's research served as the basis for his framework to manage transition while attempting to make the most out of change.

Experiencing transition has become a guarantee versus the exception. Bridges and Bridges (2000) understood this and suggested that change happens to a person, and the transition is how someone experiences the change. A synergistic relationship between two interrelated aspects of a person's experience when navigating transitions suggests that people/organizations cannot merely manage change to replicate yesterday's habits/behaviors and processes to achieve success today (Bridges & Bridges, 2000). Instead, they surmise that successfully navigating a transition requires understanding how to manage change through the transition effectively. They employ seven steps in managing transition:

- Learn to define the change and why it must happen concisely.

- Be sure to plan the details of the change carefully.

- Understand what will have to "let go" of, what is ending

- Take steps to help people respectfully let go of the past

- Assist people through the "neutral zone" with communication (rather than simple information) that emphasizes connections with and concern for the followers

- Create temporary solutions to the temporary problems and the high levels of uncertainty found in the neutral zone.

- Moreover, help people launch a new beginning by articulating the new attitudes and behaviors needed to change work (Bridges, 1991).

Bridge's (1991) transition model established a practice framework to assist people with the varying challenges of change and transition. Miller (2017) used this design as a guide to understanding people's feelings as they navigate change and as a tool for clarifying the psychological effects of change. Conversely, while it helps implement change, it cannot be substituted for other change models or used independently as a standalone tool, a consideration when deploying it in any setting (Bridges & Bridges, 2000). The model comprises three distinct phases, views transition as a movement with a beginning, middle, and end, and recognizes the beginning and end overlap within a transition continuum. The phases are:

- *Ending, losing, and letting go* is when individuals disconnect from previous habits and identities. This initial transition phase is an ending identified by a need to help people deal with their losses (Bridges, 2009).

- *The neutral zone* is when an individual begins to go through an in-between time when previous habits begin to subside; however, new habits are not fully effective. The neutral zone is when critical psychological realignments and re-patterning occur (Bridges, 2009).

- *The new beginning* is indicated by an individual's emergence out of transition, establishing a new beginning. When people develop a new identity, experience new energy, and discover a new sense of purpose, that makes the change begin to work. (Bridges, 2009).

Bridges' (1991) transition model's benefit allows a person or agency to focus on the transition rather than change. It uses a holistic approach to managing change through

a transition rather than a compartmentalized focus on the change itself or the factors that led to it. It is a way for people to emerge from transition by acknowledging what was lost, understanding what they have been through, and accepting a new beginning. This study uses this theory to understand better the veteran students' experience with change transitioning from military service to college, isolating a single aspect of their transition to interpret.

Astin's Transition Theory

As influenced by their involvement in curricular, extracurricular, and cocurricular engagement, a student's development through education has become a point of curiosity in research that examines a student's entire journey from initial enrollment to graduation (Astin, 1984). Astin (1985) introduced the theory of involvement. Astin focused on identifying involvement, which he defines in his early work as an active term, through variables associated with the connections experienced during a student's higher education journey; ultimately, he uses this connection to establish a link between involvement and academic success.

Astin's (1977) early research focused on the student experience as it relates to outcomes, with the emphasis heavily placed on a student's attitudes, self-concepts, values, aspirations, behavior patterns, persistence, achievement, competency, career development, and satisfaction; factors, at the time, directly associated with the student experience. Astin understood that colleges and universities were entering a change period, as some became larger to welcome the private sector's expansion into their higher education. He found that student outcomes were (significantly) affected by contrasting

college designs, priorities, and student support systems. The relative use of the student experience as estimated by the institution versus the effects of developing maturity was different for each institution studied (Astin, 1984).

The research focused on student involvement has continued to ask the same set of essential inquiries, all relating to one central question: How does a student's experience in attending classes and participating in extracurricular/cocurricular opportunities promote change in students? (Moore et al., 1998). Astin (1985) stated that involvemen*t* relates to students' physical and psychological energy within their academic experience. Focused on a student's involvement via their place of residence, honors program participation, academic involvement, student-faculty involvement, athletic involvement, and involvement in student government, he was able to examine student involvement behavior. Astin found that this behavior was directly related to a student's propensity for studying, spending time on campus, active participation in student organizations, frequent interactions with faculty members and other students, and other involvement, thus defining student involvement by establishing a comparison between highly involved versus uninvolved students.

Astin (1970b, 1991) introduced his student development/transition model using his theory to recognize the relationship of student involvement across enrollment and assess the transitional effects experienced by a student's input and the environment related to their outcomes. Astin (1993a) describes these factors as:

- *Inputs* are related to a student's demographic characteristics and are fixed or varying before college enrollment.

- *The environment* is two different measures: characteristics of the total

  institution and particular educational experiences within an institution.

- *Outputs* are classified as either cogitative or affective and often relate to the

  course completion, term-to-term progression, and graduation.

Astin's triangular-framework was more conservative than other prevailing college

involvement theories that had previously used variable/multiple levels, phases, and

concepts (Strayhorn, 2008). This approach improved other conceptualized models,

establishing a less invasive approach to examining the student experience. It also

provided a framework for operational findings from these experiences by establishing a

graphical description supporting the student experience narrative.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Schlossberg's (1981) research highlighted transitions resulting in a change of

assumption and social network growth or deterioration. Schlossberg also examined a

person's adaptability to transition, a phased, progressive movement through pervasiveness

and reorganization. It used a process that collected data focused on: The Perception of the

Particular Transition; The Characteristics of Pre-Transition and Post-Transition

Environments; And, The Characteristics of the Individual. Focused on understanding the

influence transition has on behavior, this model highlights the variability of adaptation

experienced by people moving through a life change. Schlossberg (1984) assumed that

human development exists on a continuum and examined the transition experienced via

gerontological perspectives that influence human behavior in the form of adaptation. A

continuation of previous work, Schlossberg applied their previous process model to patients involved in rehabilitation counseling.

Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) first introduced four influential factors related to a person's ability to adapt to transition: situation, self, support, and strategy. These factors, derived from Schlossberg's (1981) earlier research on human development, established the lens to examine a person's assets and liabilities as indicators of their ability to adapt to transition effectively or ineffectively. These factors also provide a baseline for collecting data related to a person's perception of their experience within transition (Schlossberg, 2008, 2011), which is used to examine perceptions of veteran students transitioning through their first year of college. The 4S's are defined as:

- *The situation* represents the triggers, timing, control, role changes, previous experience, concurrent stress, assessment, and durations experienced within the transition (Schlossberg, 1981).

- *Self* is focused primarily on the person experiencing the transition and is identified by two categories (personal/demographic characteristics and psychological resources), examining these categories' significant differences in transition (Schlossberg, 1981).

- *Strategies* are divided into three categories: Those that modify the situation; those that control the meaning of the problem; and those that help manage the aftermath's stress (Schlossberg, 1981).

- *Support* is represented by the available assistance, intimate relationships, family units, a network of friends, and the initiations/organization navigated during the transition (Schlossberg, 1981).

Additionally, Schlossberg (2008) utilized the 4 Ss' to make sense of the transition experience. When applied to develop an insight into an individual's experience within the transition, they create a baseline to identify effective and ineffective adaptive strategies for navigating the transition. She believed that if someone could master the ability to identify their approach to change, take stock in that change, and take charge of the change, they would move in, through, and out of the transition effectively.

Schlossberg identified the 4S (Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies) factors established the "lens" to examine an individual's transition experience. It deploys structure within the observation of the transition experience, focusing on a factor's influence and the influences connected to a person's adaptability, all while navigating the transitions. While significant, this only provides an insight into an individual's assets and liabilities and does not provide the framework for accessing the transition process. Chickering and Schlossberg (1995) research realized this and applied these factors within a process model focused on a person's movement in, through, and out of the transition experience, developing a three-stage progression map to follow a person through the transition.

- *Moving in* is a person's need to become familiar with the rules, regulations, norms, and expectations of the new system

- *Moving through* is when people begin to "know the process "and develop familiarization with their new environment.

- *Moving out* is a person who ends the transition process model's final series and begins looking towards the next.

A final component to completely understanding Schlossberg's transition theory, this integrative transition model of moving in, though, and out of the transition process is complemented by the 4Ss. Anderson et al. (2012) used this model to explain that a person's reaction to transition depends on the type, perception, transition, and context related to the transition; and that a transition has a definitive end; instead, it is a phase of adaptation, and continuous situational assessments as individuals move in, through, and out of transition.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Change: Leaving the Military

Leaving the military can be difficult; and is one of the most critical decisions a service member will make in their military career. Similar to the decision to serve, it signifies the beginning of the end of a service member's military experience and is (often) rationalized by a multitude of factors related to perceptions of "what-if, what-could, and what-will" (Kelly et al., 2001) happen after exiting the service. To assist in this transitional process, regardless of branch, all service members must complete a Transition Assistant Program, providing them the opportunity to develop a plan for after the military. This plan often includes utilizing educational benefits, if earned, to enter college.

Separating from the Military

Reasons for leaving. David Boesel and Kyle Johnson (1984) first examined why service members leave the military and found that a service member's reasons for exiting the military are often related to feelings that their experience has not provided the expected value and life (possibly) better on the outside. A departure from the widespread assumption that service member separation is (primarily) caused by military stress (Cunha & Curran, 2013), most service members choose to leave the military for the possibility of a better future outside the service.

Types of Separations. The types of discharge a service member receives when exiting the military impact the types and amount of resources available to them upon transitioning to civilian life (Everett, 1965). As accurate now as it was in the '60s, separation can be a period of opportunity supported with transitional resources focused on success outside of the military or a period of stress as service members attempt to navigate this transition without assistance. Today, several discharges (Military Benefits, n.d) are associated with service members exiting the military (see below).

- Honorable discharge

- General Discharge under Honorable Conditions

- Other Than Honorable (OTH) discharge

- Foul Conduct discharge (issued by special court-martial or general court-martial)

- Dishonorable discharge

- Entry-level Separation

- Medical Separation

- Separation for Convenience of the Government

While different branches may (informally) refer to these types of separation in different ways, when a service member exists in the military, they do so via one of these designations.

A service member's separation designation/type is essential and is directly related to the assistance they may or may not receive once leaving military service. Todd Leroux (2014) examined this by identifying intentional and unintentional consequences of separation when a service member's designations/type of separation limit their access to post-service resources and support. He supported the value and existing service with an honorable discharge. It offers the service member access to educational benefits; and identifies the challenges associated with other designations/types of separations that did not provide access to this type of support/resource.

Transition Assistance Programs

Early Service member Transition Assistant Programs (TAP) for Service Members. What happens after the military? This question commonly arises when service members begin to leave military service. While early transitional efforts, referred to as out-processing, focused on the recoupment of military assigned equipment and the submission of service termination documentation, there was no service members' support regarding the transition from military to civilian life. Not until service members began to be (involuntarily) separated during the structured reduction of the force drawdowns in the 1980s (Congressional Research Service, 2018) that these programs become a part of the

service member separation process.

Today's Transition Assistant Programs for Veteran Students. Today, TAPs are built within their specific branch and support service members transitioning to civilian life as early as six months before separation. They mandate service members, regardless of separation type/designation, to attend transition counseling that includes (but is not limited to) topics related to their health, financial planning, career and employment planning, spouse and caregiver resources, and awareness (Congressional Research Service, 2018). These topics are incorporated into curriculum design, referred to as the Transaction GPS (Goals, Plans, Success), Introduced as a "roadmap," leading to service member success through the transition. Beginning with an initial separation counseling, then pre-separation briefs, developing a specialized TAP career plan, and ending with a capstone (Military.com, n.d.).

Educational Benefits

Military education benefits offer transitioning service members an opportunity to enroll in educational institutions and programs, assisting them in building on previous skills or gaining new skills to use in their life outside of the military. Wenger et al. (2017) examined the effectiveness and efficiency of current military education benefits and found that service members (and college professionals): lacked awareness and knowledge of the Post-9/11 GI Bill and TAPs; did not understand the use of military education benefits, and college enrollment and had not identified the impact education benefits had on the veteran student college experience. What was known was that more than often, service members indicate education/training opportunities (Kelly et al., 2001) as reasons

for joining the military and utilize institutional programs to help them transfer military experience to academic credit (Perkins et al., 2020) with a desire to utilize their education benefits to pay for college after their time in service.

Involvement: First Year of College

The first year of college is the most important. Vincent Tinto (2001) understood this and examined a student's transition into college, highlighting the importance of involvement, adjustment, and fit. Concerning the veteran student experience, this transition period is not less complicated. As veteran students transition out of the military and into their first year of college, they seldom understand the importance of involvement, the transitional challenges students face during their first year, and the benefit of veteran student involvement.

The Importance of Involvement.

The influence of academic, cocurricular, and extracurricular involvement on students navigating their first year of college has been studied by various researchers attempting to understand if these connections either help or hinder a student's progression. Teniell Trolian (2019) assumed that students involved in academic, cocurricular, and extracurricular activities would have a higher probability of academic success and examined this connection through statistical analysis, predicting students' involvement in their first year of college based on an evaluation of pre-enrollment characteristics. While this research focused on the traditional student (ages 17-20) and did not include non-traditional students, it did introduce the connection that students

predicted to engage in academic, cocurricular, and extracurricular involvement were more likely to graduate.

Transitional Challenges Faced by Veteran students.

The challenges associated with veteran students transitioning into their first year of college have not studied the challenges of other, more prominent, student populations on campus. While some challenges, such as being a first-generation college student (Wurster et al., 2013), relate to other student populations, veterans-specific challenges separate this group from others. Eduardo Tinoco (2015) attempted to separate veteran students from their non-veteran counterparts by indicating that challenges associated with academic preparedness, financial concerns, family issues, and a lack of social connection and identity are similar in scope experienced differently by veteran students navigating their first year of enrollment. He also noted that veteran students were more likely to navigate these challenges alone and without the support of academic and nonacademic support agencies, a decision that often failed to complete their first year.

The Benefit of Veteran students Getting Involved

Author James Humphrey (2020) examines the perceptions of veteran student involvement in academic, cocurricular, and extracurricular activities during their first year of college. Focusing specifically on understanding their resistance to involvement related to a sense of priority, sharing world-views, and goals and objectives, he suggests that student-veterans begin to get involved during their first year of college on a short, middle, and long-term basis. While his article provides anecdotal evidence supporting his suggestion, research (McBain et al., 2012; O'Herrin, 2011) targets the necessity of this

type of connection and its influence on overall academic success and provides evidence-based support. Researchers Kirchner, Coryell & Yelich-Biniecki (2014) indicate a need for engagement by studying the importance of quality engagement, developing program support, Establishing and Strengthening Student Military and Veteran Organizations and Student Veterans of America, and the utilization of Military and Veteran Resource Centers. Their findings support those suggested by James Humphrey and (ultimately) prove that veteran student involvement in academic, cocurricular, and extracurricular activities is essential for their success when navigating their first year of college.

Adaptation: Effective and Ineffective Strategies

An article (Marcus, 2017) focused on exposing challenges associated with veteran student progression during their college enrollment suggests that veteran students rarely graduate from local and state colleges, citing concerns with veteran students' ability to effectively or ineffectively adapt to college life during their first year as a primary factor. While the article lacks a fundamentally secure empirical foundation, it creates an opportunity to explore the process of student-veterans adapting to college and what practical and ineffective strategies are related to this adaptation.

Human Adaptation

In the book *Writing, Reading, and research* (2009), the author describes a story in which a college freshman experiences a significant amount of stress while attempting to "fit in" with her new peer group. While this may common in various situations where an individual begins entering a new situation or establishing a new connection with new people/groups, it is also the origin of adaptation; a derivative of change.

Sonja Lyubomirsky (2011) studied the process of human adaptation, specifically those experiences related to positive and negative situations. She found that a person's experiences through the joys of "loves/triumphs" and sorrows of "losses/humiliations" eventually fade with time. Additionally, she found that an individual's goals are to increase (or maintain) their state of well-being; meaning objectives will diverge depending on whether their fortunes change for the better or worse, and establish a basis for understanding human adaptation to change and how these adaptive behaviors become permanent or fade with time.

Effective Veteran Student First-Year Strategies

Sportsman, Thomas (2015), and Tinoco's (2015) research focuses on supporting veteran students transitioning from the military to college and suggests that the only way to ensure these students are successful within this transition is to have the needed support to provoke effective strategies. Peter Granger (2016) examines this further as a grounded theory study and finds that while success is not guaranteed, a veteran student's ability to identify with a community and understand one's strengths and weaknesses is commonly associated with finding support and milestone achievement overall college success. He based his research on understanding the motives influencing change in the veteran students' proclivity to develop effective strategies for navigating emergent challenges associated with college.

Ineffective Veteran Student First-Year Strategies

The research focused on students' success through their first year of college indicates that students entering college are relatively unaware of their learning strategies

(Al-Harthy et al., 2010; Dawson et al., 2010; Ferla et al., 2008; Rodarte-Luna & Sherry, 2008; Vanmuylder et al. 2006), and subsequently begin with inefficient strategies for navigating their first-year experience. Researcher Denise Williams (2015) examines the transitional factors related to veteran student success. He indicates that ineffective strategies related to veteran students' ability to navigate the "bureaucratic process" and develop relationships with peers and support personnel contribute (significantly) to challenges experienced within the first year of college and (ultimately) to the veteran students' decision to leave before completion. While her findings were related to student persistence theories through education, they did indicate that veteran students who developed ineffective strategies during their first year of college adapted poorly to college life and ultimately failed to complete.

Summary

From the information reviewed above, it becomes apparent that veteran students attempting to navigate the transition from military to college must deal with many challenges to complete their first year of college. This literature review introduces a proposed theoretical framework to assess the veteran student experience; while also exploring the challenges associated with veteran students transitioning in, through, and out of their first year of college. It also establishes a connection between the theoretical frameworks and veteran student progression by linking the process of leaving the military to change, navigating the first year of college to involvement, and emerging from the first-year experience with the formation of adaptive behavior.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This qualitative phenomenological study examined the experiences of post-9/11 veteran students, focused on their ability to manage change through transition, involvement/interaction with cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs, and their ability to adapt following their first year of college. This chapter identifies the method used to collect, record, and analyze participant data. It describes the rationale, participant selection criteria, sample size justification, design, instrumentation/measures, and procedure. This chapter also includes the data analysis strategy, describing how participant data was handled, translated, cleaned, and discarded. Lastly, it establishes the study's trustworthiness by evaluating the method's credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Research Design and Rationale

The research focused on better understanding the veteran student experience by examining how veterans-students describe the military to college transition. The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: How do veteran students describe the change of ending, losing, and letting go of the military as they transition into their first year (pre-enrollment) of college?

RQ2: How do veteran students describe their involvement (cocurricular, extracurricular, and academic programs) during their first year of college?

RQ3: How does the veteran student describe adapting to college following their first year?

This study is a phenomenological design. This design aims to study the phenomena of transition as a veteran student is experiencing it (see Von-Eckartsberg, 1998), an approach that provides an insight into their college experience and the influence change, involvement, and adaptation have on transition. Synchronously, the qualitative analysis provides a personal account of the experience and offers a chance to dissect a person's narrative to understand their experience better. In the pursuit of connections (Smith et al., 1999), when structured within a phenomenological research design, this approach uses these connections to understand the experience and how an individual's perception influences the experience's influence.

In today's educational literature, a significant amount of research focuses on examining how institutional complexity poses a challenge for students as they attempt to choose a program, appropriate courses, and a career (see Community College Research Center, 2012). Research has catalyzed the development/redevelopment of veteran student programs that target students' growing population. Programs often developed from comparing veteran students to their nonveteran counterparts (Kim & Cole, 2013). They also fail to identify limitations in understanding the veteran student experience instead of using comparison groups who may not have had a similar experience transitioning in and out of their first year of college (Raudenbush & Kim, 2002).

Previous research conducted in higher education, targeting the veteran student experience while transitioning from the military into, then out of their first year of college, supported my decision to use a phenomenological research design. Jones (2013) validated this qualitative approach in a study focused on understanding veteran students'

experience as they navigate transition by successfully deploying this design to capture qualitative participant feedback. He then uses a theoretical framework derived from alternative development theory to examine their responses and identify emerging themes.

<div align="center">**Position and Role of the Researcher**</div>

Position of the Researcher

A phenomenological research design aims to identify a topic and research question with a societal significance and personal significance to the researcher and reader (Moustakas, 1994). Inspired by my journey out of the military and into and out of my first year of college, this research explains my transitioning from active-duty service in the United States Army to graduate student in less than 2 weeks, leaving after leading soldiers through high-stress situations to try and navigate academia. Ultimately, this transition from service member to veteran student was like many other service members exiting the military and entering college; as a college administrator, doctoral candidate, and adjunct professor, and as a member of several veteran-transitional-support groups and work with veteran students (independently), assisting them in navigating their transition.

Combining these experiences has defined my understanding of transition-related to exiting the military to accomplish my academic goals. A journey filled with various challenges, the ability to effectively adapt to a new environment not only used previous skills used to accomplish military goals but it also used new ones learned as a student. This new environment also required using a new approach to goal accomplishment focused on academic achievement rather than mission success.

My goal with this study was to learn how other veteran students experience transition. Beginning this journey as one of many veteran students, only to finish as one of few, hoping to understand their college experience by examining how they describe the transition out of the military into and out of their first year of college.

Role of the Researcher

A researcher's qualitative research role provides context and understanding of the topic through a process structured with thoughtful insights (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The research focused on conducting formal interviews and direct observations with participants during this study. There was no personal or professional connection to participants to ensure that the perception of personal bias, assumptions, or expectations does not interfere with the college, analysis, and data reporting. Finally, all data collected was used only for academic purposes, ensuring no perception of conflict of interest.

Methodology

Participant Section Logic

Participants of this study were first-year student-veterans attending a small state college in Central Florida. Focused on veteran students who have just completed their first year of education, it used structured and semistructured interview guides to conduct in-depth interviews with participants. A vital aspect of the structured and semistructured interview guide is that it contained open-ended questions, allowing me to guide the question and answer process to help them fully understand the transition experience. Additionally, it also helped me from deviating from the question, a process that offers the respondent the opportunity to provide a genuine response (see Johnson, 2014).

Instrumentation

Open-ended veteran student participant interviews were the instrument used for collecting data for this study. In consideration of the phenomenological approach, interviews used a structured and semistructured interview guide to allow responses to divert from a rigid question and answer format, expand on responses, and provide a genuine interpretation of lived experience. Initially, participants were scheduled for multiple sessions to ensure they completed the interview; however, all interviews were conducted within a single session. Interview times fit both my and the participant's availability and consider researcher and participant fatigue. The interview followed Bolderstons' (2012) approaches to conducting qualitative interviews, creating an environment where both researcher and participant felt comfortable.

Procedures for Recruitment

The purposive sampling concept allows subject selection based on aspects or characteristics that the research intends to examine (Crossman, 2014). A small college in central Florida served as the primary location to recruit participants due to its proximity to the researcher; additionally, Florida has the third-largest veteran population in the United States (see Veterans Florida, 2017). The participant branch of service was indicated but not considered because the research focus did not examine branch differences concerning transition. The sampling strategy targeted veteran student participants enrolled in the small central Florida College, providing ease of access due to proximity (see Learning for Action, n.d.).

Participation

The study targeted a minimum of 10 participants to reach saturation, ensuring "there is enough information to replicate the study, when obtaining new information has been attained, and when further coding is no longer feasible" (Fusch & Ness, 2015, p.1408). Additionally, sampling saturation was confirmed using Guest et al.'s (2020) research on thematic saturation, which used the base size, run length, relative amount of incoming new information, or threshold formula to ensure that the new information threshold formula would provide available saturation in this qualitative research.

Data Collection

Interviews were conducted using the online zoom platform. Participants' solicitation for participation was done through college department social media platforms (Instagram, Linkedin, and Facebook), Campus Newsletter, and course/class announcement. Participants will be provided with a participant consent form to ensure voluntary student-veteran participation. Once chosen, participants did not utilize their names; instead, they will be identified by the "VS" code and the interview order. Furthermore, no personally identifiable information was used.

Data handling

Transcript collection was conducted exclusively through a single computer terminal, disconnected from internet access. Each participant's transcript was inputted by one researcher, assuring that the respondent's data was not inadvertently manipulated or by mistake.

Data cleaning and discarding

Data cleaning and discarding occurred before analysis, ensuring transcripts contained usable participants' transitional experience data. This process included: clarifying the meaning, when and where needed, via the addition of bracketing meant to increase the readability of sentences and adjusting sentence fragments into complete sentences; rewriting any abbreviations and acronyms as total words; moving text to its appropriate place; and, flagging good quotes, then removing names and other personal/identifying information.

Data Analysis

The taped/recorded interviews with the veteran student participants provided data for this research. The NVivo data analysis software was used to store the qualitative data while serving as a platform to code the interview transcripts. Coding was conducted by selecting the transcript using line numbering in the physical transcript document or highlighting the specific quotation selected to be coded (Basit, 2003), using the modified van Kaam method introduced through Moustakes' (1994) phenomenological data analysis concept, a thematic approach to electronically coding interview transcripts was conducted. Once coded, the data analysis provided the identification of emergent themes.

<div align="center">**Issues of Trustworthiness**</div>

A trustworthy qualitative research design includes an assessment of its credibility, transferability, and dependability (Zhang & Wildemuth (2009). The researcher must use a phased collection process to prepare, organize, and report data (Elo et al. (2015), certifying valid and reliable findings. Below, the steps that ensured the validity and

reliability of findings related to the research method's credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability were identified.

Credibility

Credibility is the initial aspect/criteria established before conducting qualitative research; it is essential. Credibility relates to the research's internal validity (Irene & Albine, 2018) and serves as the foundation of this research's" trustworthiness," linking collected veteran student transitional experiences findings to actual lived experiences. To enhance the data's credibility (internal validity), the researcher preregistered the original research plan by submitting a research premise, prospectus, and proposal to the dissertation committee. This registration allowed the committee to scrutinize the research plan and reduce (possible) misbehavior and improve reproducibility (Haven & Grootel 2019).

Transferability

Transferability within qualitative researchers is just another way of indicating its generalizability and external validity (Irene & Albine, 2018). It serves as the basis for research to be considered transferable to other settings and applied. In this study, the researcher reinforced transferability by recording and describing all processes related to the study in successive progression. Beginning with participant selection logic and ending with results, the researcher systematically described the entire research process to provide the framework for future research. This approach to improving transferability will support rich data to identify emergent themes related to change, involvement, and adaptation, concepts already associated with the transition process.

Dependability

According to researcher Andrew Shenton (2004), researcher dependability focused on: the research design and its implementation, the operational detail of data gathering, and the reflective appraisal of the project. It understands that the dependability, or quality of research, is directly connected to its reliability and serves as the instructions for repeating or recreating the study. Therefore, the researcher only asked questions identified on the participant interview questionnaire (Appendix C) to ensure the dependability of the finding. This approach to questioning the participants supports the appropriate utilization of the above data analysis concept and the interpretation of correct student-student-student data.

Confirmability

Establishing confirmability ensures findings are derived from the data, not invented by the researcher (Anney, 2014). To ensure confirmability, the researcher applied reflexivity to the review of all transcripts, removing any/all of my responses from the interview transcripts. Utilizing this approach ensured the data's confirmability by removing any/all personal bias related to the interview was not associated with the findings (Watkins, 2012).

Ethical Procedures

The researcher received permission to conduct the study from Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Approval #04-29-21-0392142) prior to participant recruitment and approval from the small Central Florida College IRB (Approval#21-0014). Participant recruitment focused on the small Central Florida College veteran

student club members, ensuring participants had experience participating in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs utilizing a purposive sampling approach. The researcher published the recruitment flyer on a digital marketing platform accessible to veteran students enrolled in the small Central Florida College, emailing interested participants upon initial contact.

The researcher explained that the study the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to examine the experiences of Post 9/11 veteran students focused on their ability to manage change through transition, involvement/interaction with cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs, and their ability to adapt following their first year of college. The researcher then asked if they were interested in participating in the study and sent them, via email, an informed consent form with a request for signature. The researcher also requested a specific date and time to conduct the interview, using Microsoft outlook calendar to schedule the appointment and provide them with a copy of their signed informed consent form and interview participant number (VS01 – VS10). The calendar appointment included removing all personal information from their zoom account, muting their video, and renaming their screen.

Recorded participant interviews were transcribed on Microsoft word, then uploaded into NVivo (12) Qualitative Data Analysis software. The interviews were accompanied by transcripts created by the virtual conferencing platform and utilized as a reference when transcribing the interviews into Microsoft Word. Various challenges associated with using NVivo for transcription related to my lack of familiarity with the platform; therefore, the researcher used Microsoft word prior to uploading. Each

transcript was created with identical formatting, using times new roman font (12) for participant response, heading 2 for questions, and heading 3 to identify the participant. Lastly, all transcript interviews were verified by participants, via email, prior to upload.

Summary

Guided by an approach that "aims to focus on people's perceptions of the world in which they live in and what it means to them; a focus on people's lived experiences" (Langdridge, 2007); the goal of a qualitative design is to assist the researcher in developing an understanding the meaning of a participants experiences by interpreting their feelings and thoughts through collected data (Sutton & Austin, 2015). In chapter 3, the research design uses a qualitative phenomenology approach to examine how veterans-students describe the transition from the military and into, then out of, their first-year college. This chapter supports collecting data on veteran student transition, guided by research questions that focus on veteran students' change, involvement, and adaptation from the military, into college, and out of their first year of post-secondary education. Through a detailed insight into research design, rationale, position, and role of the researcher, methodology, and trustworthiness, we can now begin to collect data related to the transitional experiences lived by veteran students transiting out of the military and in, though, and out of their first year of college.

Chapter 4: Results

This qualitative phenomenological study examined the experiences of post-9/11 veteran students, focused on their ability to manage change through transition, involvement/interaction with cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs, and their ability to adapt following their first year of college. This was achieved by interviewing 10 veteran students enrolled in a small Central Florida College. Veteran student interviewees re-counted their experience transiting from the military, their cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic program involvement, and their ability to adapt to their first year of college. The veteran student data was related to the following research questions:

RQ1: How do veteran students describe the change of ending, losing, and letting go of the military as they transition into their first year (defined as the pre-enrollment period) of college?

RQ2: How do veteran students describe their involvement (cocurricular, extracurricular, and academic programs) during their first year of college?

RQ3: How does the veteran student describe adapting to college following their first year?

These research questions explored the veteran students' transition from military service to their first year of college. This chapter explains the research setting, demographic factors, data collection, evidence of trustworthiness, data analysis, and the study results. Additionally, the researcher also summarized the data related to the research questions.

Research Setting

A small college in Central Florida was chosen as the research setting to recruit participant veteran students. The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with ten veteran students from July 15, 2021, to January 2, 2022. Interviews focused on veteran students' experience transiting from the military, their cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic program involvement, and their ability to adapt to their first year of college. Once recruited, all communication occurred virtually, setting up interview times and participant questions via email. Participants were emailed the informed consent agreement before the interview and required to submit a signed digital copy before being approved to participate in the interview process. Interviews were recorded using the virtual conferencing platform Zoom, requesting that participants hide their video and use an assigned participant number instead of their name.

Demographics

Participant demographic factors, shown in Table 1, focused on the veteran students' gender, age, the branch of service, component, time in service, and participation in a service-connected transition assistance program. The study sample size was 10 participants identified as VS01 to VS10 and included a group of veteran students who recently transitioned from the military and are pursuing a degree or additional certifications postmilitary service.

Table 1

Demographic information of study participants

Participants	Gender	Age	Branch of Service	Component	Time in Service	TAP
VS01	F	57	U.S. Marines	Active-Duty	8	Yes
VS02	M	49	U.S. Army	Active-Duty	20	Yes
VS03	M	48	U.S. Army	Active-Duty	20	Yes
VS04	M	29	U.S. Army	Active-Duty	4	No
VS05	F	36	U.S. Army	Active-Duty	8	No
VS06	F	28	U.S. Air Force	Active-Duty	3	Yes
VS07	M	40	U.S. Marines	Active-Duty	8	Yes
VS08	M	26	U.S. Air Force	Active-Duty	1	Yes
VS09	F	25	U.S. Army	Active-Duty	4	Yes
VS10	M	30	U.S. Army	Active-Duty	4	Yes

Note. N = 10

Data Collection

This study examines 10 veteran students who have recently transitioned from the military to college. Interviews were conducted using a structured interview protocol as specified in Appendix B as the primary data collection method, allowing veteran students to expand on questions by providing context related to experience. Ten face-to-face interviews were conducted using the virtual conferencing platform Zoom from July 15, 2021, to January 2, 2022, from a single computer terminal.

Data was collected from veteran students using an open-ended interview protocol. Interviews were conducted using a digital copy of the interview questions identifying the date and participant number. Veteran students who participated in the interview were interviewed separately, with interview sessions lasting an average of 25 minutes.

Participants were asked 10 questions about their transition from military service to college, expounding on questions they felt needed additional context. Participants

provided comprehensive responses related to the experience of transiting from the military, their cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic program involvement, and their ability to adapt to their first year of college. The virtual conferencing platform Zoom was used to record participants' responses.

Data Analysis

An interview procedural concept was used to collect, organize, and store participants' data for this study. Before analyzing the interview data, the researcher removed instances of the researcher asking interview questions or asking for clarity to focus on the veteran students' experience transiting from the military. Removing this data from veteran student involvement in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs and their ability to adapt to their first year of college ensured that emergent themes were directly related to the participant experiences and not a projection of my own experiences in college. The researcher did not interview participants with whom the researcher had a preexisting personal or professional relationship to minimize bias. Each participant was asked 10 questions related to the three research questions without deviation or redirection. Participants were sent a copy of the transcript and asked to verify their response via email; no changes were requested.

The researcher used a thematic approach to analyze the data. Sutton and Austin (2015) suggested that conducting qualitative research requires that the researcher understand participant experience vicariously, developing an interpretation so that others can learn from their experiences. Data analyzed in this study was information-rich, including various intersecting experiences and providing a deep insight into the lived

experience of veteran students transiting from the military, their involvement in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs, and their ability to adapt to their first year of college.

The researcher used the modified van Kaam method introduced through Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological data analysis concept. This method requires seven separate steps to analyze interview transcripts manually. They include:

1. Horizontalization

2. Reduction and Elimination

3. Thematize the Invariant Constituents

4. Checking the Themes Against the Data

5. Create Individual Textural Descriptions

6. Create Individual Structural Descriptions

7. Create a Composite Structural-Textural Description

Data Analysis Strategy

Horizontalization was the first step to begin the preliminary coding and grouping by establishing a baseline organization concept that aligned the interview questions, related research questions, and category (Moustakas, 1994). The goal is to analyze every relevant quote/expression shared during the interview process to the veteran students' experience transiting from the military, their involvement in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs, and their ability to adapt to their first year of college when grouping participants' responses, the researcher used the interview

question repetitiveness and likeness in language and meaning criteria based on the

baseline coding categories shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Baseline: Interview Question, Categories, and Related Research Questions

Interview Questions	Related Research Questions	Category
1. Could you please describe your experience ending your military service? 2. What factors influenced your decision to enroll in college after leaving the military? 3. How would you describe your decision to leave the military and enroll in college?	RQ1: How do veteran students describe the change of ending, losing, and letting go of the military as they transition into their first year (defined as the pre-enrollment period) of college?	Change: Leaving the Military
4. What previous experience did you have similar to cocurricular, extracurricular, and nonacademic program involvement? 5. What personal experiences led to you becoming involved in cocurricular, extracurricular, and nonacademic programs during your first year of college? 6. How did being involved in cocurricular, extracurricular, and nonacademic programs influence your transition from a military-service member to a college student?	RQ2: How do veteran students describe their involvement (cocurricular, extracurricular, and academic programs) during their first year of college?	Involvement: First Year of College
7. How would you describe your first-year experience transitioning from military service to college student? 8. How has being involved in cocurricular, extracurricular, and nonacademic programs helped you adapt to your first college year? 9. How has your first year of college prepared you to achieve your educational goals? 10. If possible, what would you have done differently during your first year of college?	RQ3: How does the veteran student describe adapting to college following their first year?	Adapting: Effective & Ineffective Strategies

Note. N = 10

The next step was to reduce and eliminate invariant constituents of the experiences of veteran students transiting from the military, their involvement in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs, and their ability to adapt to their first year of college. Each quote was evaluated for importance and relevance to the question, eliminating invariant responses.

Step three required the clustering and thematizing of the invariant horizons. Coding was developed utilizing descriptions to indicate themes and patterns beginning with the baseline. This step was significant as it explored participants' lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Using the NVivo (12) qualitative data analysis platform, the researcher was able to simplify the process by aligning interview questions with their associated category and their related research question.

Table 3

Coding

Category	Subcategories
Change: Leaving the Military	Military service ended unexpectedly due to injury
	Military service ended with the planned separation
	I did not feel prepared for life outside of the military/in college
	Did not want to continue working in the same field as Military Job
	enrolled in college looking for new skills/opportunities
	Found the transition from the military to college challenging
	I did not feel supported during the transition from military to college
	Identified feeling different or having an identity crisis during the transition from military service
	Enrolled in college to gain additional skills related to military job
	Challenges related to using Veterans Education Benefits
	felt prepared for the transition from military service to the first year of college
	College Experience Prior to Military Service
	Wanted to attend college prior to the military

Category	Subcategories
Involvement: First Year of College	Participated in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs before military service
	Involved in veteran cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs during the first year of college
	Involved in non-veteran cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs during the first year of college
	Joined Cocurricular/Extracurricular/Nonacademic Program Involvement for Support
	Enjoyed cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic program involvement DID help
	Felt isolated/alone/lost of community and support during the first year of college
	Cocurricular/Extracurricular/Nonacademic Involvement was uncomfortable
	No Cocurricular/Extracurricular/Nonacademic Program Involvement before military service
	Did NOT feel cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic program involvement helped
Adapting: Effective & Ineffective Strategies	Being involved in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs helped veteran students adapt during their first year of college
	Found support/sense of community from participating in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs
	Wished they would have made more of an effort to connect with other people
	Found the initial transition to college difficult
	Wished they would have contributed more time and effort to their studies
	Felt like they waited too long to go to school/too old for school
	Was able to develop/establish a personal relationship with peers via cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic program involvement
	Used skills/behaviors learned in the military to succeed
	Wished they would have participated in more cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs during the first year of college
	They used the first year of college to develop a better understanding of self and explore different career paths
	If given a chance, I would not have done anything differently
	Involvement with non-veteran groups was difficult

Step 4 required that the researcher check the invariant components and corresponding themes against the dataset. The step ensures that themes represent the participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). It also ensures that the participants' story is told as it relates to their experience with the interview question.

The fifth step established an individual textural description of participant experiences using quotes and excerpts from their transcripts. These descriptions related to

the lived experiences of veteran students transiting from the military, their involvement in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs, and their ability to adapt to their first year of college. NVivo's (12) qualitative data analysis platform creates a separate document that evaluates veteran student data.

The sixth step required me to create an individual structural description for each participant based on their experience transiting from the military, their involvement in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs, and their ability to adapt to their first year of college. These descriptions use imaginative variation to examine the emotional, social, and cultural connections between participants' quotes (Moustakas, 1994). They look past the essential and into the contextual aspect of their experience.

The seventh step involved constructing a table that connected each participant's emergent themes and related research questions. This step involved the synthesis of both textual and structural elements of participants' experiences to develop a more comprehensive understanding related to the lived experiences of veteran students transiting from the military, their involvement in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs, and their ability to adapt to their first year of college.

Identification of Emergent Themes

This qualitative phenomenological study examines the experiences of post-9/11 veteran students, focused on their ability to manage change through transition, involvement/interaction with cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs, and their ability to adapt following their first year of college. Analyzing emergent themes, the

researcher understood better the lived experiences of veteran students transiting from the military, their involvement in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs, and their ability to adapt to their first year of college. Each research question was developed to guide veteran students through an account of their experiences transitioning from the military into college and through their first year of college. These experiences were then analyzed using the modified van Kaam method introduced through Moustakes' (1994) phenomenological data analysis to identify emergent themes.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research requires researchers to deploy a series of quality checking and vetting strategies focused on the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of data (Muzari et al., 2022). To ensure data collected from veteran student participants was valid and reliable, the researcher organized a systematic approach to analyzing respondent data that reflected the participants' experience (credibility), ensured conditions were comparable (transferability), used a step-by-step approach (dependability), and removed researcher bias (confirmability). This approach provided a robust set of participant data, examining veterans' experiences related to veterans' ability to manage change through transition, involvement/interaction with cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs, and their ability to adapt following their first year of college.

Credibility

To enhance credibility in research, the researcher must focus on the truth value, consistency/neutrality, and applicability (Noble, 2015). The researcher used the online

Zoom platform to record the interviews and the platform's transcript function to record participant responses. Finally, the researcher requested that participants review their interview transcripts. Combining these approaches allowed me to document the participants' "truth" related to their transitional experience.

Transferability

Transferability requires that the research provide thick descriptions and use a purposive sampling strategy to ensure it can be transferred to other contexts using other respondents (Anney, 2014). In the study of veteran students' ability to manage change through transition, involvement/interaction with cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs, and their ability to adapt following their first year of college, this was accomplished using the modified van Kaam method introduced through Moustakes' (1994) phenomenological data analysis concept. Additionally, the deployment of a purposive sample strategy established a robust dataset allowing broader inference (Thomas, 2022).

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research relies on the researcher employing overlapping methods and providing an in-depth methodological description to allow the repetition of the study (Shenton, 2004). Data collection related to the veteran student experience used the protocol (Appendix B) to deploy a step-by-step process to conduct interviews. This ensured that participant interviews followed an identical process and allowed the interviewer to focus on responses and ask clarifying questions.

Confirmability

Conformability requires that research findings characterize the participant response and omit factious information created by the researcher (Elo et al., 2014). To improve the study's conformability, the researcher allowed the participant to lead the interview direction and only interrupted to ask for clarification. Additionally, the researcher added the research notes section to the excel document to collect interview responses and reflected on the interview immediately following the session. Combining these techniques allowed me to identify any personal bias/opinion related to the interview.

<div align="center">

Emergent Themes

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Emergent Theme 1: Veteran Students are looking for new skills and opportunities

The first group of interview questions (1 – 3) focused on the change associated with leaving the military. When reflecting on their transition from military service to the college, veteran students expressed a strong interest in enrolling in college to develop new skills and find new opportunities, emerging as a primary theme. Furthermore, when exiting the military, veteran students, regardless of separation reasons, identified leaving the military with a plan for life after the military (Table 4).

Table 4

Emergent Themes of Change: Leaving the Military

Category	Subcategories	References
Change: Leaving the Military	Military service ended unexpectedly due to injury	5
	Military service ended with the planned separation	9
	I did not feel prepared for life outside of the military/in college	4
	Did not want to continue working in the same field as Military Job	1
	enrolled in college looking for new skills/opportunities	12
	Found the transition from the military to college challenging	5
	I did not feel supported during the transition from military to college	2
	Identified feeling different or having an identity crisis during the transition from military service	7
	Enrolled in college to gain additional skills related to military job	3
	Challenges related to using Veterans Education Benefits	3
	felt prepared for the transition from military service to the first year of college	6
	College Experience Prior to Military Service	5
	Wanted to attend college prior to the military	2

Note. N = 10

Theme 1: Military service ended unexpectedly due to injury.

A first theme related to change included five out of ten (50%) of the veteran students interviewed, injury related to military service played a factor in their separation from the military. Responses did not elaborate on the type or severity of the injury; however, veteran students did indicate this as a reason for separation. Furthermore, this type of exit was identified as unplanned, causing the veteran student to anticipate separation earlier than thought shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Theme 1: Military service ended unexpectedly due to injury

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 1	R1 - It was ended unexpectedly due to injury.
VS 8	R1 - Sure, so my military service ended due to a medical issue
	R2 - Well, I mean, it was not necessarily my choice
VS 9	R1 - So, as I was medically discharged, which was okay, that prompted me to separate from the services at the time
VS 10	R1 - Injury resulting in surgery, and then following medical board medical separation

Theme 2: Military service ended with planned separation.

The next theme related to change emerged during interviews and was related to

the veteran student military ending with a planned separation. Seven out of ten (70%)

veteran students identified that their separation from service was planned. Interviews also

reviewed that regardless of separation cause, with retirement and medical discharge being

identified as the primary cause for separation, exiting the military did not come as a

surprise shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Theme 2: Military service ended with the planned separation

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 2	R1 - I would say that transition began about four years prior to leaving
	R2 - So, I positioned myself for my last duty station to be in an area that I wanted to raise kids in and had more propensity for it, jobs
VS 3	R1 - Okay, when I ended my military service, I was coming to my 20th year. I had already had an approved retirement, and that is when I had made a decision that I wanted to go back and finish college
	R2 - On my final deployment, I knew then that I was ready to start transitioning out
VS 4	R1 - Exited my time of service during the peak months of COVID 19. So I started my ETS and left my terminal leave in June 2019, or I am sorry 2020 and sorry I said 1990. I started my leave in June of 2020, and then officially, you know, ETS last day in August
VS 5	R1 - So my experience is ending my military service me on see it was pretty quick um I, got out in November, like those my final time in, and trying to think, I was stationed in Monterey California and they didn't have any of the out processing items, so I do remember that I had to go and do like my final turn in like my gear turn into how to drive to Barstow California, which was, I think, a couple hour drive, and then, a couple weeks after that I kept it was a really strange account because I'm I was Monterey is not is a language institute so it's all kinds of different branches so really like a mill like it wasn't aren't geared army, but, you did hear a lot like I don't think I heard from the army reserve person, I think we heard from like navy and stuff like that so um but yeah I think it was this is a while goes like 10 years ago, but it was a day I think; um, I remember, we did a few things one was like writing a resume maybe I DAV came and talked to us about filing claims um but I know that the vibe was like, because, I picked up on it was like it's going to suck being out like you're going to miss being in I remember that a lot um, but yeah, that's about it um it was pretty quick and I was kind of on my own just because it wasn't a massive military installation it's pretty small so they just gave me my checklist of things to turn in and who to see, and it was pretty quick and not that's fine
VS 6	R1 - When I was getting [I was] honorably discharged, But once I started to realize it was not as scary as it was, and I finally moved back home, It was not that bad, and it was obviously for the better because I did not enjoy the military
VS 7	R1 - I went through a long process of contemplation about my options of reenlistment was able to get in contact with an, I think it was, think, a career transition officer to discuss reenlistment options
VS 9	R1 - I had a plan for everything

Theme 3: Did not feel prepared for life outside of the military/college.

The following theme related to change provides insight into the veteran students' feelings about exiting the military. Four out of ten (40%) veteran students identified as not feeling prepared for life outside the military. Furthermore, analysis shows that these feelings were related to the utilization of education benefits, not feeling "ready" for the civilian sector, and a belief that their academic skills had diminished while in service (Table 7).

Table 7

Theme 3: Did not feel prepared for life outside of the military in college

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 1	R1 -I did not feel prepared for the civilian sector.
VS 6	R1 - They tried to tell you much helpful information regarding your VA benefits, so I was lost. I am not going to lie; I was a little lost after I got out
VS 7	R1 - I was found that I needed to work on my math and my reading and writing
VS 10	R1 - Involuntary! Initially, with the medical border, the idea of separating was not necessarily my full option but transitioning into the civilian side became apparent that school was the way to transition.

Theme 4: I did not want to continue working in the same field as Military Job.

The next theme is related to the veteran student's motivation to enroll in college following military service. One out of ten (10%) of Veteran students did not want to continue working in a similar field as their military job. Additionally, the language used to indicate their choice to learn a new skill was direct, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8

Theme 4: Did not want to continue working in the same field as Military Job

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 1	R1 - I did not want to continue working in the same field,

Theme 5: Enrolled in college, looking for new skills/opportunities.

The next theme related to change is the Veteran student's motivation to obtain new skills/opportunities by enrolling in college. Nine out of ten (90%) Veteran students identified enrolling in college to obtain new skills/opportunities following military service. Further analysis indicates that a concern with employment opportunities was a key factor, shown in Table 9.

Table 9

Theme 5: enrolled in college, looking for new skills _ opportunities

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 1	R1- I decided to go to college to get a skill that would make me employable.
VS 2	R1 - Once you get into that education realm and get to a certain level. That seems to be the common denominator, to open up doors of opportunity where otherwise. Those opportunities do not exist
VS 3	R1 - The job market for someone with as much senior management experience as I had with no degree was not looking promising, so I knew that the only way that I could, you know, sustain, you know, my way of life was to get an education.
	R2 - once I realized that I needed to go to college too, you know, compete in the professional career world, you know it was, it was an easy decision.
VS 4	R1 - I knew that I wanted to go to college after the military because I knew that the military was not going to be a career path for me
VS 6	R1 - After the military, I decided to, you know, pursue school, and I started to realize all these benefits that I got. You know, as you said earlier that most students or most veterans day join the military for the educational benefits; whenever a military training instructor or any type of training instructor educator in the military they always ask that question like, why did you join the military, 90% of those answers are always oh cause you know I want to go to school or I want the benefits it is great for the benefits. I fell into that category. I joined because I wanted to; I wanted to not pay for anything, so I just went to school as I pleased.
VS 7	R1 - started with that and was able to get some sort of early support while listening to him, while in service, and then that kind of transition outside of service, so I think that influenced my decision to enroll in college afterward because I wanted to continue the work that I was doing
	R2 - I felt like I had a passion and that I wanted to build, I had set some little learning blocks and building blocks, and I felt an eagerness and an urgency to keep building on
VS 8	R1 - So, I knew that I wanted to have a lucrative career somewhere in my life.
	R2 - But when I knew that my time was coming to an end, I immediately knew that I was not just going to settle for the associate's degree that I had.
	R3 - This is a lot of what drew me back and wanted me to continue my education because I knew this was something I wanted to do, and I knew I had to continue my education to further myself along this career path.
VS 10	R1 - The number of certifications and experience that jobs wanted to consider. Education was the best route to attaining higher income and a better job.

Theme 6: I found the transition from the military to college challenging.

The next theme related to change is the Veteran student's feelings of challenge during the transition from military service into college. Five out of ten (50%) Veteran Students identify the transition as challenging. Additionally, Veteran students used the words confusing and complex as terms related to the challenges they faced, shown in Table 10.

Table 10

Theme 6: Found the transition from the military to college challenging

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 1	R1 - [found the transition] Confusing.
VS 4	R1 - I was scared shitless! I was; I mean, it is you are picking up your whole life, everything that you have known for the past four years, and you are taking a different road
VS 6	R1 - How my career was going, or my college career was going because again, going from the military and going into college like that was a very, Confusing part because I did not know what to like I had no one in the like telling guiding me that this is what I need to do, I figured it all, on my own,
VS 7	R1 - I left the military; the enrollment process was challenging, even with having someone on the inside.
VS 9	R1 - Um, it was, honestly, it was a little tricky at first,

Theme 7: Did not feel supported during the transition from military to college.

The next theme related to change while supported during the transition from military to college. Two out of ten (20%) Veterans Students' identified not feeling supported during their transition from the military to college. This feeling was expressed (primarily) when talking about their experiences utilizing student support resources, shown in Table 11.

Table 11

Theme 7: Did not feel supported during the transition from military to college

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 1	R1 - I am on my own, like on an island, so to speak; there was not any support there and just a lot of not knowing what to do
VS 4	R1 - you know you are the business office approved your tuition, but now that scholarships are paying for tuition, you have to contact the scholarship fund organization, which disperses that money to the business office, and you are like, why is this is not all in one you, know you what I mean? I do; having to go through all that stuff as it is very intimidating terrifying; you feel like you, are if you are worried that you missed something because there is no one to help

Theme 8: Identified feeling different or having an identity crisis during the transition from military service.

The next theme related to change focuses on the Veteran Student identity while changing from military service member to veteran student. Four out of ten (40%) Veteran Students indicated they experienced a different/ or/had an identity crisis during the transition from military service. Furthermore, the data indicates these feelings are related to the Veteran student entering a new career field and perceived gaps in age among other students on campus, shown in Table 12.

Table 12

Theme 8: Identified feeling different_and_or_having an identity crisis during the transition from military service

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 2	R1 - in my case, it began with like a somewhat an identity crisis well whom am I have been a soldier in communications specialist my whole life, so now what do I want to do
	R2 - once I started that was is there was the kind of I would not call it awkwardness, but generally, folks around 38 to 40 years old, taking classes with the younger folks, it is a different feeling
	R3 - the most complex challenge was just my own identity during that transition time.
	R4 - Probably in one word, it is scary. A little fear you go from us in my specific case; I went from 18 to 38. Being has this one identity and then going to be a student. Moreover, coupled with. Trying to figure out your new identity
VS 5	R1 - I have to if I want to stay in, like the medical field and do that, I have to go to school, either become like a nurse that's what like most I think I feel like most medics maybe think that so that was my initial plan was like I guess I am just going to get out and I want to go to school I am just going to be a nurse and continue my like medic life after that. Okay.
VS 7	R1 - I was struggling, you know, with identity
VS 8	R1- I would say it is just the amount of growth and learning opportunities I was able to get, and those helped me separate my identity from being a service Member to a civilian

Theme 9: Enrolled in college to gain additional skills related to the military job.

The next theme related to change is the Veteran student's motivation to enroll in college to gain additional skills related to the military job. Two out of ten (20%) Veteran students identified enrolling in college to gain additional skills related to the military job. Both Veteran students indicated they did not feel their military training/experience would create employment opportunities, shown in Table 13.

Table 13

Theme 9: Enrolled in college to gain additional skills related to military job

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 2	R1 - I wanted to take some additional college classes and certifications R2 - I feel I feel like that. I felt I did not want to go to college because I had the experience and the certifications to do. What the degree would prepare me to kind of do,
VS 5	R1 - I mean, being a medic, you have all this medical experience, but you have an EMT-B, so when you go to like the outside world, like the civilian world, to get a job, the most you can do is get a minimum wage driving an ambulance.

Theme 10: Challenges related to using Veterans post 9/11 Education Benefits.

The next theme related to change is the challenges associated with using veterans' educational benefits. Two out of ten (20%) Veteran students identify challenges while utilizing their veterans' post 9/11 education benefits. Both Veteran Students indicated challenges related to using their Post 9/11 education benefits were related to the inability to access funds, shown in Table 14.

Table 14

Theme 10: Challenges related to using Veterans Post 9/11 Education Benefits

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 2	R1 - so I began doing the research on how that needs to be funded in with the process I need to go through to have the military pay for the training and the classes that I wanted to take, and I found that to be a somewhat cumbersome process R2 - But I learned that it was tricky on the financing side to make sure the funds from the VA state ahead of the class I am ready to take.
VS 5	R1 - I could not get my GI bill; she could not find my paperwork; and I can get my GI bill, and I can get school paid for

Theme 11: They Felt prepared for the transition from military service to the first year of college.

The next theme related to change is the veteran student's preparedness while transitioning from military service to the first year of college. Five out of ten (50%) Veteran students felt they are prepared for the transition. Further analysis indicated that their feeling of preparedness was related to their awareness of their separation ability to establish a plan for their transition, shown in Table 15.

Table 15

Theme 11: They felt prepared for the transition from military service to the first year of college

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 2	R1 - So it is that kind of transition was it was easier because I was able to able to focus on what I am there for and not so much like I felt like though they are like how much can I learn from my other students if you know they are 18 1920 years old. From the standpoint of how much life I had lived so.
VS 5	R1 - So, my decision to leave was pretty much the family situation, there was a death in my family, and I wanted to help because my sisters were younger. My dad was now left as a single dad, so I was like, well, I should probably help raise them, so my go-to call it to the College that I went to is because it was around the corner from my parents' house and Community College, Evergreen Community College, but so that was my decision I wanted to go someplace that was close that was flexible with my schedule, so if I needed to take them to school or you know to be there when they had like a project to do or needed some help I would be there, so my decision to go to Community college was that, instead of going to a state school because you have like night classes and that kind of stuff, yeah I feel like it is more convenient for people with like outside lives to go to so or for old maybe older people because I will so yeah That was my decision.
VS 6	R1 - I am fell, I am going to use a better word, but it felt great for me
VS 7	R1 - The exciting part about my story is that In my unit, it was who was discussed, there was encouraged it was shared was there was a camaraderie that was going on for continuing education R2 - I say, and so it was something that we would encourage and promote within our ranks
VS 9	R1 - I was in a pretty good head space because I knew what my next step was

Theme 12: College Experience Prior to Military Service.

The next theme related to change concerns the Veteran student experience in

college prior to military service. Four out of ten (40%) Veteran students indicated they

had prior college experience before joining the military. Additionally, these college

experiences were related to their decision to enroll in college following military service,

shown in Table 16.

Table 16

Theme 12: College Experience Prior to Military Service

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 3	R1 - prior to joining the military, I was a full-time college student
VS 4	R1 - so I tried to go to school, and I made it to the first week, and I was like this is not it, and so I did, you know add-drop just went ahead and dropped and started working
VS 8	R1 - I needed to continue my education to eventually get back to where I would feel comfortable with a career that I was aspiring for. And so it was essentially just a matter of when, where, and finances, and once I got that all settled and was able to return to School
VS 9	R1 - I already had obtained my bachelor's degree
	R2 - Yes, um, so prior to the military, I was already heavily involved in, Anything that pertained to psychology or the mental health field,

Theme 13: Wanted to attend college prior to the military.

The final theme related to change focuses on the veteran student's motivation to

attend college prior to entering military service. Two out of ten (20%) Veteran students

indicated a desire to enroll in college before entering the military. Additionally, this

desire was described similarly, stating "they always knew" they wanted to enroll in

college, as shown in Table 17.

Table 17

Theme 13: Wanted to attend college prior to the military

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 5	R1 - I always knew that I wanted to go to college,
VS 6	R1 - I knew I wanted to pursue school because it was what I wanted to do before I had joined the military,

Overall, Participant feedback offers an insight into the veteran students'

experience transitioning from the military to college. The emergent themes related to

research question one provide insight into veteran students' ability to manage change

through the transition. Their data focused on change and the feelings associated with

leaving the military. The themes suggest commonality in their decision to enroll in

college to develop new skills and opportunities outside of the military (Table 9). They

also indicate their commonality in their situations exiting the military with a planned

separation, assisting them in establishing a college enrollment plan (Table 6).

Furthermore, veteran students experienced commonality in feeling uncomfortable as a

student and unconfident about this transition, even when participating in military-

sponsored transition assistance programs (Table 12).

Emergent Theme 2: Veteran Students are not new to

Cocurricular/Extracurricular/Nonacademic Program Involvement

The second group of interview questions (4 – 6) focused on the Veteran Student's

involvement in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs. Analysis of Veteran

student responses indicated a common emergent theme related to the desire to participate

in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs during the first year of college and

a history of participating in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs before

joining the military (Table 18).

Table 18

Emergent Themes of Involvement: First Year of College

Category	Subcategories	References
Involvement: First Year of College	Participated in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs before military service	10
	Involved in veteran cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs during the first year of college	11
	Involved in non-veteran cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs during the first year of college	8
	Joined Cocurricular/Extracurricular/Nonacademic Program Involvement for Support	7
	Enjoyed cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic program involvement	4
	Felt isolated/alone/lost of community and support during the first year of college	6
	Cocurricular/Extracurricular/Nonacademic Involvement was uncomfortable	3
	No Cocurricular/Extracurricular/Nonacademic Program Involvement before military service	2
	Did NOT feel cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic program involvement helped	1

Note. N = 10

Theme 1: Participated in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs before military service.

The first theme related to involvement was focused on Veteran student

participation in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs before joining the

military. Seven of the ten (70%) Veterans Students' participated in

cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs before joining the military. Further

analysis of the data indicates that high school was a primary venue for this participation,

as shown in Table 19.

Table 19

Theme 1: Participated in cocurricular_extracurricular_nonacademic programs before military service

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 1	R1 - Yeah, oh OK, so I am in high school, then I had run track for a year or semester
VS 3	R1 - I was also there as an athlete
VS 4	R1 - In high school, I was very involved with, you know, football
VS 5	R1 - Yeah, um, well before, so before joining the military, and in high school, yeah, I played many sports
VS 7	R1 - Yeah, high school was a lot different, and in high school, I wrestled. R2 - I met a [high school ROTC] marine corps recruiter, where the conversation started. The inspiration for that type of career and transition out of high school came about, and, you know, they were flat out there, like there you have to do much work, this is not going to be easy you are buying and high and school. You are going to have to get out after it in terms of, you know, getting your GPA done and getting your path retaking repeating some classes, I had to do summer school had to do nights or so, our work ethic started building, and that kind of like you know I guess that that passion that eagerness to learn, you know and catch up and make up for lost opportunities and last time was starting to take root even that early when I was like 15/16 years old.
VS 8	R1 - Sure, so in high school, the primary source of involvement was my first and second year, where I eventually did different marching band symphonic bands; I left that just due to waning interest. R2 - Senior year, I was involved in marine Jr ROTC. R3 - And that was probably about it for my high school involvement as part of my associates in my later.
VS 10	R1 - part of the Student Council. During the last couple of years in high school and senior year, I was the class president.

Theme 2: Involved in veteran-based cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs during the first year of college.

The next theme related to involvement is focused on the Veteran student involvement in veteran cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs during the first year of college. Six of ten (60%) Veterans Students' reported involvement in veteran-based cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs during the first year of college. A deeper dive into the data reveals this involvement was via a student

club/organization and included spending time in Veteran Student recourse centers, as

shown in Table 20.

Table 20

Theme 2: Involved in veteran cocurricular_extracurricular_nonacademic programs during the first year of college

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 3	R1 - Once I was retired, I did get involved with the military student association. R2 - collaborating with many vets in the military student Association, which was, you know it was, invaluable. There were many things that we all shared with these each other, R3 - after being away from it for so long and then having that comfort zone of okay, other students are experiencing the same things that I am
VS 4	R1 - wanted to be able to have the opportunity to give back to other veterans and make it not so complicated and make them feel like they were not alone R2 - You know veteran clubs and then become a VA representative for the College R3 -you have you feeling like you are not alone anymore and it is kind of like the whole like you know embrace the suck you know your bond by you know crawling with each other type deal but, It makes you feel involved in a Community of other people that have gone through the same thing, just like if you are you know for me,
VS 5	R1 - With, yeah, um, so my first year of college, um, I did use some cocurricular um well in my Evergreen [experience] in my Community college like we had it was the veterans' program like I had to meet with a veteran counselor
VS 6	R1 - I am part of this VA club because it is kind of like a granted being a veteran of Valencia; student veterans of America are just the club where they used to be, but since depending on advocates, everything has changed, as you know, SBA clubs you used to hold meetings, and you know you would eat together and surround yourself with other veterans
VS 9	R1 - I went to the University of Southern California, this was a virtual format, um and it is costly so many of us are our veterans, or some of them were actively still on were still active duty, So many of us had an understanding of the military culture, so that made it comfortable because it felt like we are all trying to do the same things, And we had all had a similar experience in that camaraderie, so that was one beneficial aspect,
VS 10	R1 - I was not involved in a lot of groups here during my first-year college; after being ex-military, the veteran who served in the local college was very helpful, able to talk to students going through similar classes getting support for problems I was having in class and be able to talk with people in the Community was about it is the veteran service Center at the College.

Theme 3: Involved in non-veteran cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic

programs during the first year of college.

The next theme related to involvement was focused on Veterans Students' involvement in non-veteran cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs during the first year of college. Six out of ten (60%) of Veteran students reported involvement in non-veteran cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs during the first year of college. Furthermore, this analysis indicated this involvement was primarily experienced through the Veteran student's participation in student support resources such as academic advising, counseling, and tutoring, as shown in Table 21.

Table 21

Theme 3: Involved in non-veteran cocurricular_extracurricular_nonacademic programs during the first year of college

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 1	R1 - test scores put me into getting an email to get involved with five beta Kappa.
VS 3	R1 - I went back and volunteered on quite a few campuses doing various things,
VS 5	R1 - so that when I had to do um as for like utilizing tutors, I did do that a lot
VS 6	R1 - I had to, you know, set up a zoom meeting to speak to an academic advisor or my pro for the program I am trying to pursue. I usually try to get in contact with an advisor that's in that area um I have used Tutoring a couple of times,
VS 7	R1 - every cocurricular or you know which is, in a word, it is using the profession or nonacademic, you know, the experience came out of need, so I needed to go to Tutoring before even registering and my first course you know I needed to brush up on, you know, basic math and reading or writing skills, R2 - That involvement, just hanging out on campus, you know, when I got out, and I had the ability I am like wow fresh air no pressure, you know, a place to explore something you know something new to explore, it was about studying in the library or a place on campus and not going home, you know to do that I am spending much time in around learning support services, and you know Tutoring services R3 - I would, you know, try to, you know, build relationships or make connections with students veteran or not, and in try to do study groups

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 9	R1 - I think a few times we may have had peer groups where we were just swapping and brainstorming information for papers and group work

Theme 4: Joined Cocurricular/Extracurricular/Nonacademic Program Involvement for Support.

The next theme related to involvement was focused on the Veteran student's choice to join cocurricular/Extracurricular/Nonacademic Program Involvement for Support. Six out of ten (60%) of Veteran students indicated a desire for support when joining cocurricular/Extracurricular/Nonacademic Programs. Additionally, the Veteran student's need for support was based on frustration with "dealing with civilians," as they searched for peer groups with members with similar experiences, as shown in Table 22.

Table 22

Theme 4: Joined Cocurricular_Extracurricular_Nonacademic Program Involvement for Support

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 3	R1 - Um, it was one of those when I was doing a lot of my VA paperwork. The military student success Center also how is the military student association,
VS 5	R1 - I have to, I have to go to tutors like I have to, so when they had like open labs where there was a tutor there, I would use those because I just knew I would fail if I didn't
VS 6	R1 - Like my work for the veterans' department, It is, it is nice to be around veterans with similar experiences because I do not have any friends, so it feels somewhat comforting to know that there are other veterans around you I do not know; it is just definitely something I cannot describe unless a veteran knows, but it is, comforting to know that there are people that you know served alongside with you and have their personal experiences is, this is an excellent atmosphere, to be in and, but that is just the SBA like student body of those events in America, But yeah, that is all. R2 - Um, So, Okay, so when, When all that was happening, Like the academic advisor and stuff like that, I was not necessarily part of the SBA at that time so, It was a little and shortly after is when I decided to be a work-study and then under the VA and then I just stuck with it, and you know it was exciting to know the benefit the VA benefit educational benefits in and out the ins and outs, But
VS 7	R1 - every cocurricular or you know which is, in a word, it is using the profession or nonacademic, you know, the experience came out of need, so I needed to go to Tutoring before even registering and my first course you know I needed to brush up on, you know, basic math and reading or writing skills,
VS 9	R1 - thank God I had some of those peer groups because some information was not as clear to me as it was to others, so Those are two aspects I want to say that helped me to be okay in that first year
VS 10	R1 - It was beneficial to find other people's experiences and talk to them about what it was like getting back into classes and being in classes with kids who are still in high school. Type stuff like that, you know what I mean; it is a significantly different environment; talking with other cats going through that was very helpful.

Theme 5: Enjoyed cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic program involvement.

The next theme related to involvement was based on Veteran students' enjoyment of their cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic program involvement. Four out of ten (40%) of Veteran students reported enjoying their involvement in

cocurricular/Extracurricular/NonAcademic Programs Involvement. Additionally, they related their involvement in helping them navigate challenges experienced during their first year of college, as shown in Table 23.

Table 23

Theme 5: Enjoyed cocurricular_extracurricular_nonacademic program involvement.

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 3	R1 - It made the transition a lot easier; I think it helped me transition while I was still in uniform helped as opposed to; let us say, I had fully transitioned out, and I moved away to an area that did not have that much military or veteran support.
VS 5	R1 - it was helpful
VS 7	R1 - I think good; how it breaks down that barrier that the fence that I had I was, you know, very, for lack of better word,
VS 10	R1 - I was not involved in a lot of groups here during my first-year college; after being ex-military, the veteran who served in the local college was very helpful, able to talk to students going through similar classes getting support for problems I was having in class, and just be able to talk with people in the Community was about it is the veteran service Center at the College.

Theme 6: Felt isolated/alone/lost of community and support during the first year of college.

The next theme related to involvement was focused on Veteran student feeling of isolation/alone/loss of community and support during their first year of college. Three out of ten (30%) of Veteran students indicated feeling isolated/alone/a loss of community and support during the first year of college. Furthermore, their reported feelings are similar to the reason for their feeling related to "not fitting in" with their non-veteran student peers, as shown in Table 24.

Table 24

Theme 6: Felt isolated_alone_loss of community and support during the first year of college

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 1	R1 - I was the only service Member, so I was surrounded by people who had no idea what I had experienced or lived or could not even fathom its idea, so it was very isolating. R2 - The civilian world is just so different from military service R3 - In the military service, having that common bond, and you were all in the ship together. R4 - having each other's back even if you did not like each other or didn't, you know, have anything else in common, you do not have that in college, or I did not have that in college. So it was indeed a transition to be around a bunch of people to go from being around a bunch of people that you had something in the column, with two going around people that there was visible I guess you know the uniform the being on base that kind of thing. To then go into an environment where people were just all out for themselves in a way that's very different from the military service so it was jarring
VS 2	R1 - That created this. I am a bit of separatism because you are already in this environment where whoa, hey, it is not too many of us older folks here, and then all, by the way, they seem like they want to be left alone.
VS 4	R1 - Being in the House 24 seven, yeah that that got me got me wanting, To do something else other than just school,

Theme 7: Cocurricular/Extracurricular/Nonacademic Involvement was uncomfortable.

The next theme related to involvement focused on the Veteran student feeling that their cocurricular/Extracurricular/Nonacademic Involvement was uncomfortable. Three of ten (30%) Veteran students indicated that their experiences related to cocurricular/Extracurricular/Nonacademic Involvement felt uncomfortable. These experiences were described using "conflict, confusion, and comfort zone," as shown in Table 25.

Table 25

Theme 7: Cocurricular_Extracurricular_Nonacademic Involvement was uncomfortable

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 3	R1 - they would bring in kids for Tutoring. I helped in elementary school with that, which was out of my comfort zone because I did not feel comfortable with elementary school students after dealing with adults for 20 years, but it would do the experience was great; it groomed me, for you know what I am doing now works in special education. It was like a good segue kind of gave me that middle ground. To kind of get out of my comfort zone, which is something that I was already accustomed to, while in uniform, but it is, you know, a little different when you are dealing with children, as opposed to dealing with adults,
VS 5	R1 - The things you see when you are deployed and just all that kind of stuff, so I was like I am going to see a counter it is free, but the health suit at the health Center like let us see if I can I went once, it was a wreck, like I was wrecked, like, I cried the whole time, I was just like, it, I had the worst headache when I was done speaking with her, and I never saw her again,
VS 6	R1 - How my career was going, or my college career was going because again, going from the military and going into college like that was a very, Confusing part because I did not know what to like I had no one in the like telling guiding me that this is what I need to do, I kind of figured it all, on my own,

Theme 8: No Cocurricular/Extracurricular/Nonacademic Program Involvement before military service.

The next theme related to involvement was based on Veteran student involvement in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic program involvement before college. Two out of ten (20%) of Veteran students indicated not participating in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs involvement before the military. While the additional context was not given, one of the Veteran students reported "not having time" for this type of involvement, as shown in Table 26.

Table 26

Theme 8: Cocurricular_Extracurricular_Nonacademic Program Involvement before military service

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 2	R1 - Oh, I would, I would say. None
VS 6	R1 - Um, so I did not have any type of extracurricular life or lifestyle

Theme 9: I did not feel cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic program involvement was helpful.

The final theme related to involvement is focused on Veteran students who did not feel cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic program involvement was helpful. One out of ten (10%) reported that their involvement in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs was not helpful, and the Veteran Student indicated this in a single sentence shown in Table 27.

Table 27

Theme 9: I did not feel cocurricular_extracurricular_nonacademic program involvement was helpful.

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 1	R1 - It did not enhance it at all

Overall, responses to research question two offered an understanding of the veteran students' experience with involvement (described as cocurricular, extracurricular, and nonacademic programs). It identified a dominant respondent theme indicating that they had previously been involved in cocurricular, extracurricular, and nonacademic programs before the military (Table 20) and sought involvement during their first year of enrollment. Additionally, it helped identify how the veteran students' preference for

involvement, favoring connections with other veteran students over non-veteran students (Table 19)

Emergent Theme 3: Veteran Students are Effectively Adapting to College

The third and final interview questions (7 – 10) focused on the Veterans Students' adapting effective and ineffective strategies during their first year in college. Veteran Students' responses to the questions indicated several emergent themes related to forming effective adaptive strategies from their involvement in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs during their first year of college. Furthermore, emergent themes are related to establishing a sense of community (Table 28).

Table 28

Emergent Themes of Adapting: Effective & Ineffective Strategies

Category	Subcategories	References
Adapting: Effective & Ineffective Strategies	Being involved in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs helped veteran students adapt during their first year of college	27
	Found support/sense of community from participating in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs	14
	Wished they would have made more of an effort to connect with other people	6
	Reflected on the initial transition to college as difficult	7
	Wished they would have contributed more time and effort to their studies	5
	Felt like they waited too long to go to school/too old for school	4
	Was able to develop/establish a personal relationship with peers via cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic program involvement	4
	Used skills/behaviors learned in the military to succeed	3
	Wished they would have participated in more cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs during the first year of college	3
	They used the first year of college to develop a better understanding of self and explore different career paths	2
	If given a chance, I would not have done anything differently	1
	Involvement with non-veteran groups was difficult	1

Note. N = 10

Theme 1: Being involved in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs helped veteran students adapt during their first year of college.

The first theme related to adaptation experienced during the first of college was focused on the Veteran Students' involvement in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs during the first year of college. Ten out of ten (100%) of Veteran Students reported that being involved in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs helped them adapt during their first year of college. A deeper dive into these responses indicated that their involvement

consisted of student support resources (academic advising, counseling, and tutoring) and

student-based clubs and organizations, as shown in Table 29.

Table 29

Theme 1: Being involved in cocurricular_extracurricular_nonacademic programs helped veteran students adapt during their first year of college

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 1	R1 - In a way that I would correlate a little bit to the military, that was helpful, it helped me to adapt because it gave me a focus, and it gave me a place where I could apply my talents and my energies to in that those students who were there.
VS 2	R1 - I was in a study group, but I never used other support mechanisms, only the study groups. Those are the only ones. They helped me adapt to that first year of college
	R2 - Oh, uh, I would say. As with anything that I have ever been involved in. With is OK, you, you went through the so, so this is difficult right, and you get to the difficulty and then as anything else you learn how to navigate it and adapt to the environment and the obstacles. Alternatively, what may seem like optical obstacles?
VS 3	R1 - I noticed by that second semester, you know, I picked everything up, and I was in a good routine. I was able even to get a 4.0 that the second semester, you know up from a like a think I had a 2.8 that first semester so
	R2 - As I said, I did it because, with me, it gave me more confidence on it put me in a more of a confidence owner to say It kind of I look forward to coming to campus because I when I was not a class I would hang out in the Student Center where the military student association was housed, so you know there were lots of vets because like I say we sat around we shared many our stories we kind of help each other out, you know which classes to take which professors, to take you to know we all shared experiences. We had a few that we are actually in the process of graduating. They were the most significant help; they helped us navigate through everything.
VS 4	R1 - start looking at it is not until you ask the question of hey, you know I I am like struggling in this calculus class I need somebody to help me, And then, all of a sudden your advisors like, oh yeah, why don't you get Tutoring it is free for you and you are like wait, excuse me, Like, Oh yeah no veterans get free Tutoring well why wasn't that disclosed to me in the first place well you know it is if you need it
	R2 - I think it has helped me, Not only fit in like what we talked about before but also, either you are in a club, or you are doing work-study or whatever, have you whatever you are doing, and it kind of gets you back in or in a rhythm
	R3 - Pushing you a little bit and getting you ready for those more challenging, those more intensive level courses that you will be taking, so it does prepare you
	R4 - I think that the best thing about the first year of college is that even the first two years of college is getting you into that workflow, that college

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
	mindset of you get used to how assignments are due to how quizzes are done. You got to go to a test lab. Are you taking it with honor law? Are you submitting a discussion post this week? All professors are different, but they all follow the same structure.
VS 5	R1 - Yeah, they were beneficial, like obviously meeting with the veteran counselor was helpful because. She kept me on track was not taking these bullshit classes
	R2 - Tutoring was beneficial
	R3 - It did show me that, like nobody is going to, I am like there are certain things where you have to be like an advocate for
VS 6	R1 - Um, I guess, I think it was more of, you know, getting the hang or the, what it has called, Like the I guess the hang of things like how things are structured in classes and when you know specific deadlines assignments like being on that time frame and being able to, Take the time, and you know study for a couple of hours at home or wherever you know your preferred study environment is
	R2 - Oh man, it is a journey; I definitely, like I said, like in the beginning, I did not know many things, but now that I am in, and I see everything, and you know the path is clear, I am like okay, so this is what I am going to be doing [, You know, I have to get a good GPA for a particular program or specific prerequisites.
VS 7	R1 - I guess you can say, and it helped me kind of temper myself and help my communication skills help my understanding, skills, so I was had many kinds of like, preconceived notions and different perspective
	R2 - you know by learning those like soft skills, really and even some like study skills and like different whole different time management kind of approach and a different like um habits study habits and just regular life habits and can even how I structure, like a semester
	R3 - and then hopefully that will work out, so it started building my confidence
	R4 - I think that is what, you know, anything outside of the classroom that that experiences outside of the classroom then helped me do it helped me survive, you know help me kind of have a survival kit have was to build skills and to manage and set myself up for, you know, the that the timeframe that semester set myself up for success, maybe another building block to you know, to put it to put down.
	R5 - I was able to turn that corner, you know, that once I was able to say, oh wow, you know I am a quarter of the way, or I am halfway to finishing this degree or reaching or achieving an educational goal.
	R6 - I might be able to, you know, prove myself wrong even, you know, so I think what it prepared me for that first year or so, you know, collectively those experiences what it would have prepared me for was, you know, being able just kind of to see the light at the end of the tunnel.
VS 8	R1 - And much understanding that the things that I had ingrained in my head through basic training and tech school were no longer applicable.
	R2 - it can vary; one class can be heavier than the electric bass another can be discussion-based. Thus, those are things that I never got to experience, or at least never experienced within the military, and make sure you have a better appreciation for how you can learn. Moreover, how some of those ways will be more effective than others.

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
	R3 - but then, through opportunities through experiences with students and the responsibilities, I had those started to go away because my focus was no longer the military; it was what was ahead of me.
	R4 - But it had a lot of meaning and purpose, so through my different experiences and the different roles I have had in my current office. I grew a lot.
VS 9	R1 - Well, so yeah, two parts one it was helpful and aspect that I went to the University of Southern California, this was a virtual format, um. It is costly, so many of us are our veterans, or some of them were actively still on they were still active duty; so many of us had an understanding of the military culture, so that made it comfortable because it felt like we were all trying to do the same things. We had all had a similar experience in that camaraderie, so that was one aspect that was helpful, um and returning to Grad school and then that the other aspect is that we were able to help each other when it came to like work in regards to our paperwork and like better in our grades, I was able to graduate with a 4.0 GPA um., And, thank God, I had some of those peer groups, because some information was not as clear to me, as it was others, so Those are two aspects, I want to say that helped me to be okay in that first year or throughout my entire graduate career.
VS 10	R1 - So, changing that mindset going into college and learning how to study appropriately, how much time I need to dedicate, and that things do not always come smoothly was a big transition.
	R2 - A part of the way it helped me adapt was kind of being an; I want to say space necessarily, but like an environment where I could go and actually drop some curse words, share some stories, and generally unwind from the class and study the stress that comes with all that that was very helpful in and of itself and also having. Other students, there are other veterans specifically who are going through some of the same class and can share some of the things that have not worked for them was very helpful.

Theme 2: Found support/sense of community from participating in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs.

The next theme related to adaptation was based on veteran students finding support/sense of community from their participation in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs during their first year of college. Eight out of ten (80%) Veteran Students reported finding support/sense of community from their participation in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs. Additionally, their responses positively identify this involvement with words describing

their experiences, such as "thankful and appreciative," and credit their involvement with

helping navigate difficult situations and not feeling alone, as shown in Table 30.

Table 30

Theme 2: Found support_sense from the community by participating in cocurricular_extracurricular_nonacademic programs

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 1	R1 - They could focus on a common goal that was the closest that I had seen or experienced. To that kind of military camaraderie of people working towards a common goal. R2 - I was fortunate to have people invested in helping their students reach their goals, so having that support from the individual professors.
VS 3	R1 - As I said, I did it because, with me, it gave me more confidence on it put me in more confident owners to say It kind of I look forward to coming to campus because when I was not a class, I would kind of hang out in the Student Center where the military student association was housed, so you know there were lots of vets because, like I say we sat around we shared many our stories we kind of help each other out, you know which classes to take which professors, to take you to know we all shared experiences. We had a few that we are actually in the process of graduating. They were the most significant help they kind of helped us navigate through everything. R2 - try to help as many vets I can with you know whether it is me, you know hey you can call me I will help to you I help you through the process, you know it is just having the, just not quitting now you know, being able to finish that that was the big thing with me that first year, the experience everything I had that helped keep me motivated to keep going.
VS 4	R1 - Um, it gives you, A gave me at least a kind of like a sense of like Community like you feel like you are a part of something you are not just one lone person going through R2 - you have you feeling like you are not alone anymore, and it is kind of like the whole like you know embrace the suck you know your bond by you know kind of crawling with each other type deal but, It makes you feel involved in a Community of other people that have gone through the same thing just, Just like if you are you know for me, R3 - Thankful, I am very, very appreciative for, The benefits that you get and the type of reinforcement and all the perks as a veteran student that you get, That you can that not even a lot of people can take hold of it is amazing
VS 5	R1 - In my first year, some of the tutors taught me about, like, what is that YouTube is fantastic! YouTube has many things that help you learn stuff, um, and also, I forgot that one supposed to show how long I have not used it but oh God, me using I mean they told they taught me about that, so it is like. I can look up videos to help me with chemical equations, or I can look at how to teach me math, so that was also helpful to teach me how to; being my tutor was almost very helpful.

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 6	R1 - I started to, you know, be a part of the Community.
	R2 - I guess it felt somewhat relieved that, as I said, I have been around other veterans, That they influenced me better.
VS 7	R1 - I had some good friends and family support, so from that standpoint, there were the ones that we could help me and hold me up through that process because I was also going through some medical situation, and then obviously, you know and trying to figure out all the logistics, you know and steps and then what would that may look like and what my opportunities would be like and what you know my finances would look like plus what my benefits look like, and so, in dealing with all of that and also filing for the right benefits and making sure that all my documentation was an order in that process was taking place or was also a priority.
VS 9	R1 - Well, so yeah, two parts one it was helpful and aspect that I went to the University of Southern California, this was a virtual format, um. It is costly, so many of us are our veterans, or some of them were actively still on they were still active duty; so many of us had an understanding of the military culture, so that made it comfortable because it felt like we were all trying to do the same things. We had all had a similar experience in that camaraderie, so that was one aspect that was helpful, um and returning to Grad school and then that the other aspect is that we were able to help each other when it came to like work in regards to our paperwork and like better in our grades, I was able to graduate with a 4.0 GPA um, And, thank God, I had some of those peer groups, because some information was not as clear to me, as it was others, so Those are two aspects, I want to say that helped me to be okay in that first year or throughout my entire graduate career.
	R2 - Well, I was able to realize that some people in that peer group actually lived in North Carolina and not just lived in North Carolina; they, Lived maybe an hour for me and worked with one of my relatives, so it is being able to build relationships outside of the school setting and see people face to face um, and you know, some of them have similar, Situations like household situations, they were parents as well, they may not have been married. However, they were single parents at the time, which that ended up being my dilemma as I went into my second year of graduate school; I became a single mother And going through a divorce, so I am just being able to connect with people who face at that time, made it a lot easier for me to feel like a human or give myself some grace.
VS 10	R1 - share some stories, and generally unwind from the class and study the stress that comes with all that was helpful and helpful. Other students, there are other veterans specifically who are going through some of the same class and can share some of the things that have not worked for them was very helpful.

Theme 3: I wished they would have made more effort to connect to other people.

The next theme related to adaptation was based on Veteran Students who wished

they would have made more of an effort to connect to other people during their first year

of college. Five out of ten (50%) Veteran students indicated they did not attempt to connect to other people. A deeper dive into the data shows that when reflecting on their first-year experience, these Veteran Students acknowledge their avoidance of establishing relationships with others, as shown in Table 31.

Table 31

Theme 3: I wished they would have made more of an effort to connect to other people

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 2	R1 - I would certainly talk with more veterans who went through that and gather their feedback.
VS 5	R1 - I would probably tell myself to be more open to meeting the people you are in classes with
	R2 - You can build that camaraderie with people in your classes; you do not have to be an island and be like, I am going to power through this, um, you could have found a better support system, probably if you had made more like connections with your classmates.
VS 7	R1 - I wish I would not have had such a front and such like, you know, put up a wall for understanding and accepting and, you know, including people in my life, I think I hide you know I think I I missed out on some crucial relationships and friendships or connections, because of that, you know isolation.
VS 8	R1 - I could have been involved with and gotten more growth opportunities out of what would have happened if I had a better relationship.
VS 9	R1 - I was not part of some peer groups. I do wish I would have engaged more with stuff that was provided by the school, like really being a part of the school.

Theme 4: Reflected on the initial transition to college as complex.

The next theme related to adaptation focused on veteran students' reflection of the initial transition to college as tricky. Five out of ten (50%) Veteran students reported experiencing a difficult transition to college. However, this reflection was accompanied by a description of learned adaptive behaviors related to their experiences, as shown in Table 32.

Table 32

Theme 4: Reflected on the initial transition to college as difficult

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 3	R1 - It was a challenge because in between that time, I have done lots of online college about going back to the one sitting in the classroom going face to face; it took me that first semester, and I am not going to say so much I struggle. However, I did not I was not as successful as I wanted it to be the first semester was a challenge; there were some classes that I was kind of like, oh, you know, I have not taken math in a while, so I am you know, this is going to be a struggle for me, and I am not a person that's strong with math anyway.
VS 5	R1 - I think the first year out was like survival mode.
VS 6	R1 - initially, it was a little difficult for me to transition from the Military to college, and I was not adapting to the environment.
VS 7	R1 - at that time, I did not feel like there were many resources. I do not really recall many that were explicitly set up, or I did not even know that even existed, or it was a thing, or it could be a thing, you know, so for me, it was just like, well, I had that experience you know coming in, and this is where I am at now and, you know, it came, it was very I would say one or two words vulnerable and challenging. R2 - I mean, I mean I was struggling, you know, from everything, and I did not even know at the time, but I was struggling with mental health, I was struggling with, you know, the physical house, I was struggling financially.
VS 10	R1 - Stressful; this was the first time that I had had much care of attaining an education in high school, it was kind of just checking the boxes and doing, and I had to get through, as opposed to succeeding. R2 - The anxiety and stress that I felt going into those classes and then learning how much time was needed and how much time I needed to dedicate were very helpful for learning what my threshold is and also, pushing that threshold and being able to study longer and study more things without becoming overwhelmed. That support Center helped with that, and then just getting into the practice of developing a routine and good study habits was very beneficial that first year.

Theme 5: Wished they would have contributed more time and effort to their studies.

The next theme related to adaptation is based on Veteran students who wish to contribute more time and effort to their studies. Five out of ten (50%) Veteran students indicated they would have spent more time and energy on their studies. These responses included a desire to utilize student support resources (academic advising, counseling, and

tutoring), taking fewer courses, and taking courses in a different order, as shown in Table

33.

Table 33

Theme 5: Contributed more time and effort to their studies

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 4	R1 - It is challenging, though; there is much stuff that I would have told myself; I would tell myself to keep my eyes on the prize.
VS 6	R1 - I would not have done anything else different I definitely would have, do my classes in a different order.
VS 7	R1 - I wish I could not be so hesitant or anxious about opening up and asking questions in the class.
VS 8	R1 - I would not say that I would fully commit to taking a more significant load, but I think I would have made the most of the opportunity I had.
VS 10	R1 - I do not know, actually, um. If I could go back and still have the, you know, knowledge that I have now of how much time I need to do, studying stuff like that, that would be great, but other than that, I think. It was an excellent place to start. I started with chemistry and liked math classes. So it was a hefty load just right off the BAT, and I think starting at a point where I had to achieve more than I would later on was very beneficial for knowing that I could do more if I needed to.

Theme 6: Felt like they waited too long to go to school/were too old for school.

The next theme related to adaptation is based on Veteran students' feelings of

waiting too long / or feeling too old to go back to college. Four out of ten (40%) Veteran

students believed they waited too long/or were too old to go back to school. While this

feeling did not stop their enrollment, their responses were filled with context related to

concerns about their age at the time of enrollment and perceived gaps in learning, as

shown in Table 34.

Table 34

Emergent Theme 6: Felt like they waited too long to go to school_too old for school

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 1	R1 - I think that if there is anything that I could have done differently, I would have done it a little bit sooner.
VS 2	R1 - Now I am 38, and I know that. I am really at the starting line, and I have never really finished anything educationally.
VS 5	R1 - Um, it was like it was tough um I got out when I was like 29 I was just about to turn 30, so it is challenging, especially junior college, because those are young kids those are like, full so it, it was kind of like oh my God what am I doing here this like older lady around these high school children, um, so it was tough.
VS 9	R1 - Because there was a time that I had not been In school, I went from my bachelor's took a break and then transitioned into the military than after that took a break, and then I was returned to school, so the adjustment to write in, APA format papers in more than one page right in 1520 page papers and you know studying for exams, and that whole process was heavy.

Theme 7: Was able to develop/establish personal relationships with peers via cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic program involvement.

The next theme related to adaptation is focused on the Veteran student's ability to develop/establish personal relationships with peers via their involvement in curricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs. Four out of ten (40%) Veteran students indicate their ability to develop a personal relationship with peers via cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic program involvement. Additionally, the data indicates how their ability to develop relationships has positively impacted their first year of the college experience, as shown in Table 35.

Table 35

Theme 7: Was able to develop_establish personal relationships with peers via cocurricular_extracurricular_nonacademic program involvement

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 3	R1 - As I said, I did it because, with me, it gave me more confidence on it put me in more confident owners to say It kind of I look forward to coming to campus because when I was not a class, I would hang out in the Student Center where the military student association was housed, so you know there were lots of vets because like I say we sat around we shared many our stories we kind of help each other out, you know which classes to take which professors, to take you to know we all shared experiences. We had a few, that is that we are actually in the process of graduating, and they were the most significant help; they helped us navigate through everything.
VS 4	R1 - It is significant for, I think, veterans and all students to do that to bond with people and keep you moving, and that helped me; you know Trent like help the transition and helped me adapt to the new lifestyle of the amount of soldier anymore and college.
VS 7	R1 helped break down barriers for me; you know, it helped, you know, make connections to people with different lifestyles and backgrounds.
VS 10	R1 - A part of the way it helped me adapt was kind of being an, I want to say space necessarily but like an environment where I could go and actually drop some curse words, share some stories, and generally unwind from the class and study the stress that comes with all that that was very helpful in and of itself and also having. Other students, there are other veterans specifically who are going through some of the same class and can share some of the things that have not worked for them was very helpful.

Theme 8: Used skills/behaviors learned in the military to succeed.

The next theme related to adaptation is focused on veteran students' use of skills/behaviors learned in the military. Three out of ten (30%) Veteran students report using skills/behaviors learned in the military. Responses indicate that these skills/behaviors were used to navigate their first-year experience, as shown in Table 36.

Table 36

Theme 8: Used skills_behaviors learned in the military to succeed

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 1	R1 - The military service did benefit me, and I had to discipline myself to do the studying that needed to be done and arrange my life to accomplish that.
VS 7	R1 - I had to identify and go back to my instincts, you know, and some of the skills that I learned in the service to adapt.
VS 8	R1 - I still had a bit of military in me; I would still refer to things in those areas like a normal conversation because it was still fresh.

Theme 9: Wished they would have participated in more cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs during the first year of college.

The next theme related to adaptation was based on Veteran students' wish to participate in more cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs during the first year of college. Three out of ten (30%) Veteran Students wished they would have participated in more cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs during the first year of college. Their responses indicate a desire to connect to other students on campus and reference a desire to become more involved with college, as shown in Table 37.

Table 37

Theme 9: Wished they would have participated in more cocurricular_extracurricular_nonacademic programs during the first year of college

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 3	R1 - I would have leaned on some of the campus services, often more than just the program, specific events. I would have leaned on my advisor a little more, for more, you know, more guidance, more, you know, mentorship that you know I could have gotten.
VS 8	R1 - I think I want to get involved a little more.
VS 9	R1 - I was not part of some peer groups. I do wish I would have engaged more with stuff that was provided by the school, like really being a part of the school.

Theme 10: Used first year of college to better understand self and explore different

career paths.

The next theme related to the adaptation is focused on the veteran students' use of

the first year of college to develop a better understanding of self and explore different

career paths. Two out of ten (20%) veteran students report using the first year to

understand themselves better and explore new career paths. Their responses indicate a

choice to actively search these opportunities out or reflect their involvement in these

opportunities following their first year of college, as shown in Table 38.

Table 38

Theme 10: Used first year of college to develop a better understanding of self and
explore different career paths

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 1	R1 - helped me to explore more of what it meant. To look at what I wanted to do as a civilian. Moreover, to kind of out to figure out. My strengths and opportunities were, so that first year helped me examine where I wanted to go.
VS 8	R1 - It was not till I would say, maybe the past two-three years, that I fully realized that this is not just something that I enjoy, but this is something that I want to do.

Theme 11: If given a chance, I would not have done anything differently.

The next theme related to adaptation is based on Veteran students' reflection on

their first year of college and the choice not to do anything differently. One out of ten

(10%) of Veteran students reports not wanting to change their experiences associated

with their first year of college. This response is concise and expressed in Table 39.

Table 39

Theme 11: If given a chance, I would not have done anything differently

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 1	R1 - I do not think it would have done anything differently.

Theme 12: Involvement with non-veteran groups was complex.

The final theme related to adaptation is focused on the Veteran student involvement with non-veteran groups feeling difficult. One out of ten (10%) indicates they found involvement with the non-veteran student group difficult. This experience is related to frustration with a non-veteran group, as shown in Table 40.

Table 40

Theme 12: Involvement with non-veteran groups difficult

Veteran Student (VS)	Interview Responses (R)
VS 2	R2 - I learned it is; in my pursuit of this, if I have to carry your load and you are loading your load, I will do that because I am in the group, and I need to be honest with you; you are not carrying your load, but at that point that we do not have much time, the way, so the moment I recognize.

Overall, responses related to research question three were relevant to understanding how veteran students describe adapting to college following their first year. It identified a dominant theme of veteran students' involvement in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs as helpful in their ability to adapt successfully (Table 29). Additionally, it associated this involvement with developing a sense of community, another dominant theme attributed to their ability to adapt to the year of college (Table 30).

Summary

Data collected from ten Veteran Student interviews enable me to identify emergent themes related to Post 9/11 veteran students' experiences focused on change while transitioning in, involvement during, and adaptation while moving out of their first year in community college. Phenomenological trend analysis helped clarify the lived experiences of veteran students transiting from the military, their involvement in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs, and their ability to adapt to their first year of college.

The group of interview data, questions 1 – 3, represented veteran student experience focused on change while transitioning into college represented by responses related to them leaving the military. This change point was indicated by the transition from military service member to veteran student and introduced emergent themes common in all interviewed veteran student experiences. The most common emergent themes expressed by veteran students during this transition were related to their motivation to enroll in college based on a need to obtain new skills/opportunities and acknowledging that their service ended with a planned separation.

The second group of interview data, questions 4 – 6, represented veteran student experience related to involvement, represented by responses related to involvement during their first year of college. The involvement analysis was based on cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic program experiences. The most common emergent themes related to this transition were veteran students' involvement in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs before joining the military and during

their first year of college. These themes clarified veteran students' familiarity with cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs and provided context related to their experiences participating in them during the first year of college.

The final third group of interview data, questions 7 – 10, represented veteran student experiences related to developing adaptation while moving out of the first year of college as represented by adapting effective and ineffective strategies. The transition point is indicated by the veteran student moving out of their first year of college and reflecting on their experience. The most common emergent themes identified by veteran students during this transition were related to their involvement in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs being expressed and helpful in their ability to adapt during their first year of college. Another common theme was veteran students finding a sense of community from participating in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

This qualitative phenomenological study examined the experiences of post-9/11 veteran students, focused on their ability to manage change through transition, involvement/interaction with cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs, and their ability to adapt following their first year of college. In previous research, veteran students reflecting on their first year of college identified mental health, academic and career development, support, and identity as significant factors related to transition (Ghosh et al., 2020). It used three research questions to examine this transition through the lived experiences of 10 veteran students' reflection on change, involvement, and adaptation experienced during their first year of college.

Interpretation of the Findings

Humphrey (2020) examined the facts versus perceptions of veteran students entering college following military service and found that planning and involvement in the campus were primary factors related to academic success. The emergent themes identified in the data support these factors, and they also challenge common misconceptions associated with veteran students transiting to college after military service (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014).

RQ1: Managing Change through Transition

RQ1: How do veteran students describe the change of ending, losing, and letting go of the military as they transition into their first year (defined as the pre-enrollment period) of college? Focused on the veteran students' ability to manage change through

transition, this question offered them a chance to reflect on their experience and discuss how they felt navigating this period of change.

Findings support Bridges' (2000) change model as a basis for managing change. The theme of veteran students leaving the military and enrolling in college looking for new skills and opportunities, exiting the military with a planned separation, and experiencing commonality in feeling uncomfortable as a student and unconfident about this transition, even when participating in military-sponsored transition assistance programs reflects behaviors associated with the three stages of transition (endings, the neutral zone, and new beginnings). They confirmed that people experiencing an ending must say goodbye to their previous experience to enter the neutral zone to explore new opportunities and move forward to a new beginning.

With over 650,000 veteran students using military benefits to pursue higher education (The Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2021), these findings also identify the change associated with leaving the military. Referring to the emergent themes related to veteran students exiting with a planned separation and developing a plan for enrollment into college, the data indicated that most veteran students who left the military and entered college did so with a plan to transition to a new life outside of the military. However, the data also reveals that veteran students leaving the military are entering college with a disadvantage (Osborne, 2016), as indicated by veteran students who acknowledged anticipating their separation, evaluated their options, and chose separation, then admitted to feeling lost following their transition assistance program brief (VS 7). This feeling of isolation and loneliness is related to why some veterans

leaving the military struggle to reintegrate successfully into civilian life (Perkins et al., 2020).

RQ2: Involvement/Interaction during the First Year of College

RQ2: How do veteran students describe their involvement (cocurricular, extracurricular, and nonacademic programs) during their first year of college? This question focused primarily on the veteran students' involvement in cocurricular, extracurricular, and nonacademic programs before and after military service, and it also allowed the veteran student to express their feelings about their involvement experience.

Veteran student responses support Astin's (1985) college I-E-O (inputs, environment, outputs) model established within the theory of involvement by associated the emergent theme(s) of being previously involved in cocurricular, extracurricular, and nonacademic programs before the military, then searching for involvement during their first year of enrollment. The responses confirmed Astin's understanding of behavior related to involvement and its propensity to influence studying, spending time on campus, active participation in student organizations, frequent interactions with faculty members and other students, and other involvement. Veteran students' responses also defined involvement by comparing involved versus uninvolved students.

Veteran student responses identify a sense of belonging as critical for transitioning into a new environment (Alschuler& Yarab, 2018), and veteran student responses associated with this research question also identified a similar experience related to involvement where veteran students' developed a preference for involvement with other veteran students over non-veteran students. Based on a need for support from

peers and campus support personnel (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015), the respondents favored cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic program connection with other veteran students and frustration with nonveteran student peers (VS 5).

RQ3: Adapting after the First Year of College

RQ3: How does the veteran student describe adapting to college following their first year? The final research question focused primarily on the veteran students' ability to adapt to college life during their first year of enrollment. It asks respondents to examine their first year of college and indicate what experiences helped and hindered them in their ability to adapt to college life.

Veteran student responses support Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory by following the stages of a person moving in, moving through, and moving out of transition. Additionally, the themes reflected Schlossberg's understanding of the significant factors (4Ss) that influence a person's ability to cope with a transition. It identified emergent themes of veteran students' involvement in cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic veteran-based programs as helpful in their ability to adapt successfully. VS 3 spoke positively about his experience with veteran-focused cocurricular, extracurricular, and nonacademic program involvement credited this experience with his ability to successfully adapt to college life and his motivation to connect with other veteran students to assist them in their transition.

Veteran students attempting to adapt to college life can face various challenges, especially when dealing with issues related to a lack of perceived peer support (Jenner, 2017). This theme emerged as a shared experience associated with adapting to college

and identified the development of a sense of community as an effective strategy in adapting to the first year of college. This desire to connect support Falkeys' (2016) research suggesting a sense of connection is critical to veteran students effectively adapting to college.

Limitations of the Study

During this study, the researcher identified a few limitations that impacted my research into the veteran student experience. The first limitation was my reduced sample size of 10 participants; thus, my findings were limited. Due to the onset of a global pandemic, the college that the researcher chose to collect data from was required to transition its physical campus location to a virtual campus. This transition hindered my ability to connect with veteran students on campus. The college had not yet developed an effective communication platform other than email, which enabled me to indirectly solicit the veteran student population to participate in the study. The following limitation was related to the type of data collected and my reliance on participants being able to recall/reflect on past experiences to provide a substantial data set. The final limitation was my ability to separate my personal bias from the research process. The researcher had to isolate my own lived experiences as a veteran student to focus on the participants' experiences.

Recommendations

Future Studies on Veteran Students

This research offers additional opportunities to explore the veteran student experience. One opportunity would be to assess the influence a veteran student's

involvement with social programs has on their sense of community. Research developed by Perkins et al. (2020) studied the veteran student experience. The research indicated that while one-third of their participants were intrinsically driven to participate in social programs, only a small percentage did so within the first three months of exiting the military. Using this study's emergent themes related to developing a sense of community should be used within future research focused on veteran students' motivation to engage in social programs and a sense of community's influence on their academic success.

Additional Research on Service Member Transitions

This study revealed that veteran students' transitioning from the military to college continue to experience challenges, even when the transition is anticipated. With a requirement that all exiting service members participate in their branch's transition assist program (Military.com, n.d.), one recommendation is to assess further veterans' feelings related to the transition experience. This recommendation relates to another emergent theme discovered in this study of veteran students feeling unprepared for life outside the military. Research developed by Jones (2017) indicates veteran students have mixed emotions and feelings related to "fitting in" and a loss of fixed schedule when transitioning from the military to college. Additional research should focus on helping colleges understand the influence transitional assistant programs have on veteran students' ability to navigate challenges associated with the transition.

Implications

Positive Social Change

This qualitative phenomenological study examines the experiences of Post 9/11 veteran students focused on their ability to manage change through transition, involvement/interaction with cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs, and their ability to adapt following their first year of college. Participants' responses explored the student veteran experience. They were essential in addressing the literature gap related to Post 9/11 veteran student transition from military service to college enrollment when focusing on change, involvement, and adaptation experienced during the first year in college. The research identified multiple emergent themes related to change, involvement, and adaptability, all critical aspects of the veteran students' transition from military service to their first year of college.

Practical Implications

For some, the transition from military service to college is seamless, transitioning into college and utilizing military traits to navigate their way to success. Unfortunately for others, this can be challenging, failing to navigate common pitfalls associated with their transition. This research provides colleges insight into the veteran student experience related to transition. It identifies multiple emergent themes that can be used to develop transitional/bridge programs for veteran students entering college and provide the rationale to support current veteran-based cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs. This data should also be utilized to develop training for staff members who support veteran students.

Conclusion

This qualitative phenomenological study examines the experiences of Post 9/11 veteran students focused on their ability to manage change through transition, involvement/interaction with cocurricular/extracurricular/nonacademic programs, and their ability to adapt following their first year of college. It identifies multiple emergent themes related to veteran students' experience with change, involvement, and ability to adapt. The research revealed that veteran students are leaving the military with a plan to enroll in college but still not feeling prepared, are getting connected to other veterans on campus outside of the classroom, and using this connection to adapt to their first year of college.

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Appendix A: Participant Recruitment Flyer

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Recruitment via social media platforms (Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook), Campus Newsletter, and course/class announcement.

Hey there! Are you a Post 9/11 veteran who has recently enrolled in your first year of college, a (currently-enrolled) veteran student in your first year of college, or a veteran student who has completed your first year of college? Participate in a study that examines your experiences as a Post 9/11 veteran student transitioning into college, your involvement in your first year of college, and changes that resulted after exiting your first year of college via virtual interview. Participation takes approximately 30 minutes.

Thank you!

Appendix B: Protocol

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Topic: The Transition from Service Member to Veteran student

Step 1: Introduction. Provide date, name of interviewer and role within the interview, participant identification, and thank the participant for taking time to participate in the study.

Step 2: Purpose of the Study. This qualitative phenomenological study examines the experiences of Post 9/11 veteran students experience focuses on their experiences managing change through transition, understanding a student's involvement/interaction, and their ability to adapt following their first year of college.

Step 3: Describe the purpose of the participant. Your responses will help me develop a better understanding of the veteran student experience related to transitioning from the military and completing the first year of college.

Step 4: Identify the benefits of participating in the study. Your answers

Step 5: Explain Ethics. Maintaining your anonymity is my primary concern; therefore, your name, likeness, or image will not be used just for your story and experience. This study is voluntary, and you are free to accept or turn down the invite. No one at our small state college in Central Florida will treat you differently if you choose not to participate in the study. If you decide to be in the study now, know that you can still change your mind in the future. You may stop at any time. If you reply, a researcher will contact you to notify you of your selection. Do you have any questions?

Step 6: Explain Confidentiality. As stated in the consent agreement, your answers will be anonymous and utilized within my dissertation. Ultimately, your responses will be published. However, at any given point before publishing, if you do not want your information to be shared, you can ask for it to be retracted. Once complete, I will also offer you a finished copy of the dissertation to see how your information was able to add to other veteran students' information.

Step 7: Ask the veteran student if they have any questions.

Step 8: Begin asking interview questions. Ask the semi-structured questions identified on the participant interview question form (APPENDIX C).

Step 9: Conclude the interview. Again, thank you for your time. At this time, I will check the accuracy of your responses as they relate to grammar and syntax; however, I will not change the language of your response. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me via the contact information shared with you on the informed consent form. Again, once all information has been transcribed, you will receive a copy of your responses. Please review the responses and contact me if there are any inaccuracies or if you have questions/concerns.

Appendix C: Participant Interview Questions

PARTICIPANTS INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions	Response
Q1. Could you please describe your experience ending your military service?	
Q2. What factors influenced your decision to enroll in college after leaving the military?	
Q3. How would you describe your decision to leave the military and enroll in college?	
Q4. What previous experience did you have similar to cocurricular, extracurricular, and nonacademic program involvement?	
Q5. What personal experiences led to you becoming involved in cocurricular, extracurricular, and nonacademic programs during your first year of college?	
Q6. How did being involved in cocurricular, extracurricular, and nonacademic programs influence your transition from a military service member to a college student?	
Q7. How would you describe your first-year experience transitioning from military service to college student?	
Q8. How has being involved in cocurricular, extracurricular, and nonacademic programs helped you adapt to your first college year?	
Q9. How has your first year of college prepared you to achieve your educational goals?	
Q10. If possible, what would you have done differently during your first year of college?	
Date/Time:	Participant: (Number)