

2015

An Evaluation of Military Education Assistance Programs From Participants Perspectives

Ella Bolling-Harris
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Ella Bolling-Harris

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2015

Abstract

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Perspectives

by

Ella Bolling-Harris

MS, Capella University, 2008

MS, Capella University, 2004

BS, Park University, 2000

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

August 2015

Abstract

Military education programs exist to assist military members in completing their college education prior to exiting the military. At a southwestern United States Army Installation, members have expressed dissatisfaction with the education programs. The purpose of this case study was to examine the education programs from the participants' perspectives. Mezirow's transformative learning theory was used as the framework for the study. The research questions elicited program participants' perceptions of various aspects of the programs, the potential for conversion of a basic skills program to a 2-year degree program, and suggestions for leaders for implementation of programs. The sample of participants included 15 military members stationed at the Army Installation who were enrolled in college and exiting the military within 12-24 months, were serving on active duty at the Installation, had been on repeated deployments, were 18 years or older, and had been in the military 4 or more years. Data were collected through interviews and responses were coded and analyzed for common themes. Results from emergent themes were used to develop a project that included strategies for military leaders to assist military members in their degree completion. Recommendations included a timeline for leaders to implement strategies to assist military members desiring an education, converting the current Basic Skills Education Program to a 2-year general studies degree program, implementing adjustments for deployment, and creating an education buddy team for military members enrolled in college. Implications for social change include improving military education assistance programs to allow more military members to complete their education in order to assist them in entering the civilian workforce in their own communities or others after their military obligation has expired.

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Dedication

Dedicated to my husband who served in the United States Army for 22 years...Dedicated to all those military members who have placed their lives on the line to protect America and the rest of the world.... Dedicated to military members in the Army, Air Force, Coast Guard, Navy, and the Marine Corps.... Dedicated to those who have served in the past and present, and to those who will serve in the future. I too have served and I thank you all.

Acknowledgments

“In All Ways Acknowledge Him, and He Shall Direct Your Paths” Proverbs 3:6.

Thank you, Lord, for your grace and mercy.

There are so many people who have played an important role in my doctoral journey. It would be impossible to acknowledge everyone. If I forget to mention anyone by name, please charge it to my head and not to my heart. I pray that our interactions have allowed you to understand how important you are in my life. I appreciate you all for whatever role you have played.

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To my husband, Myron, thank you for your love and support throughout the years. Thank you for supporting whatever I needed to do and helping me to accomplish this dream. I could never express what your unconditional support has meant. To my children, April, Joicemonique, and Junious, thank you all for your love and understanding.

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Finally, to all my classmates, I hope that in some way I helped your journey to be a little easier as we all went through this process. Your courage and determination truly inspired me and kept me going. Thank you all so much and I wish you all the very best in all your endeavors.

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Table of Contents

Section 1: The Problem.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Definition of the Problem	2
Rationale	6
Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level.....	9
Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature.....	10
Definitions.....	16
Significance.....	17
Guiding/Research Question	21
Review of the Literature	22
World Wars I & II.....	23
The Vietnam War.....	24
The Gulf War	24
Post-9/11 GI Bill.....	25
Veterans with Disabilities.....	27
Veterans and the Campus Environment.....	28
Theoretical and Conceptual Framework.....	29
Implications	31
Summary	32
Section 2: The Methodology.....	36
Introduction.....	36
Research Design.....	37

Qualitative Methodology	37
Case Study	37
Participants.....	42
The Interview Site.....	43
Methods for Conducting Ethical Research	43
Role of the Researcher	44
Data Collection Procedures.....	44
Field Notes	48
The Demographic Survey	48
Interview Procedures	49
Data Analysis	50
Coding Data	51
Validity	52
Reliability.....	53
Discrepancies	53
Findings.....	54
Assumptions.....	55
Delimitations.....	55
Limitations	55
College and Military Members	56
Theme 1: Time.....	58
Theme 2: Lack of Support	63
Theme 3: Deployments.....	68

Theme 4: Nonavailability of Courses	70
Theme 5: Instructors Who Do Not Provide Support	72
Theme 6: Create New Policies Dealing with the Withdrawal of Classes	77
Theme 7: Create a College Atmosphere That Promotes Diversity.....	79
Theme 8: Balancing it All Military, College, and Family Life	81
Theme 9: Transferability of Existing College Credits.....	84
Theme 10: Create an Education Program for Military Members	85
Conclusion	88
Section 3: The Project.....	91
Introduction.....	91
Description and Goals.....	91
Rationale	93
Review of the Literature	93
Program Evaluation	94
Implementation	102
Project Evaluation.....	103
Recommendations for Future Research	105
Potential Resources and Existing Supports.....	105
Potential Barriers	107
Proposal for Implementation and Timetable.....	107
Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others	108
Implications Including Social Change	109
Local Community	109

Far-Reaching.....	110
Conclusion	110
Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions.....	112
Introduction.....	112
Project Strengths	112
Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations.....	113
Scholarship.....	113
Project Development and Evaluation.....	114
Leadership and Change.....	115
Analysis of Self as Scholar	115
Analysis of Self as Practitioner.....	116
Analysis of Self as Project Developer	117
The Project’s Potential Impact on Social Change.....	117
Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research.....	118
Conclusion	119
References.....	121
Appendix A:.....	133
Chapter One: Recognizing the Problems/Recommendations	135
Chapter Two: Timeline	144
Chapter Three: Making Problems Better for Military Members	146
Recommendations to Implement the Converted BSEP Program	148
Recommendations for Other Education Programs Assisting Military Members.....	148
Requirements for the Education Buddy System Participants	150

Recommendations for Learning Institutions to Support Military Members	150
Conclusion	151
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form for Participants.....	154
Appendix C: Demographic Survey for Participants	157
Appendix D: Participant Interview Questions	159
Appendix E: Confidentiality Agreement for Data Transcriptionist.....	161
Appendix F: Confidentiality Agreement for Peer Reviewer	162
Appendix G: Interview Protocol Briefing.....	163
Appendix H: Letter of Cooperation	164

Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

An estimated 190 military members transition out of the United States Army from Fort Hood Army Installation monthly. Many exit the military before completing their degrees, which can place obstacles in their paths when attempting to obtain employment. On Fort Hood Army Installation, over 80% of military members have dropped out of their degree programs for various reasons (G. Primas, personal communication, July 6, 2012). Military members working towards their degrees before exiting the military often face challenges that include a lack of support from their military leaders and also from the universities they chose to attend. These military members often deal with compelling stressors, including multiple deployments and training rotations which often places their dreams on hold of obtaining a degree.

According to McCain (2008), many individuals enlist in the military with dreams of completing their education while serving on active duty. In many cases, however, the specialized training military members receive does not transfer into the civilian sector, which can cause problems when they leave the military. Time is permitted for specialized training and education offered by the military. Unfortunately, due to military obligations, often time is not permitted for the completion of a civilian education. Included in this study is a program evaluation of the Army's Basic Skills Education Program (BSEP), which is used to increase military members' knowledge of words, reading comprehension, and arithmetic reasoning. The program is offered to military members at no cost. The purpose of evaluating the BSEP program was to determine if it has the

potential to be converted into a program that offers military members a two- year general studies degree, which could lead to a bachelor's degree. Since the purpose of this study was to determine what can be done to assist military members stationed at Fort Hood Army Installation complete their bachelor's degrees prior to exiting the military, evaluating and redesigning the current BSEP program could help those military members desiring a college degree. According to Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010), program evaluation determines if a program has the potential to assist program participants or if there is a possibility for program failure. Findings can be used for a short period of time to make decisions about program changes. Formative or summative feedback can be used in program evaluation (Lodico et al., 2010). If the conversion of the program is successful, it will offer military members the opportunity to complete their degrees before leaving the military and possibly provide better job opportunities in the civilian job market.

Definition of the Problem

Many military members are unable to reach their education goals before exiting the military because they face challenges while pursuing a college education due to multiple deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, along with other military and family obligations. Often, when military members attend college, they face challenges because school officials cannot offer many of the services they need. Some military members do not receive help when transitioning into college because many education officials are unsure how to assist them with the process. According to Shackelford (2009), not only is it frustrating for the military members transiting into college, but it is also frustrating for

university faculty members, administrators, and other staff because of unanticipated challenges faced by military members on campus.

Tan (2009) found that after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, soldiers, marines, and airmen (more than 1 million total) have been deployed to war zones. Further, most of those military personnel were not just deployed once but multiple times. Often, deployments hinder military members' chance of completing their degrees because some of them must withdraw from classes for several terms. Some deployed military members have decided to attempt to complete their degrees online, but even that can be challenging. Those challenges can include work schedules, different time zones, and lack of technology. Thus, addressing the problem and creating strategies can help to ensure military members who desire a college degree before leaving the military have the opportunity to complete one.

Some university leaders have been working to ensure that military members have the resources needed to complete their degrees online or in a traditional classroom before exiting the military. Since September 2001, several institutions of higher education began to redesign their programs to better service military personnel seeking undergraduate degrees. Rumann and Hamrick (2010) argued:

Distance learning is currently being offered by universities to support military members who are unable to attend classes. Universities working to ensure they are able to offer online courses, courses in a traditional classroom setting, and other services to military members are proving that they are serious about being veteran friendly (p. 46).

Policies created to prove that military members will have every opportunity to complete their degrees, such as refunds for courses dropped due to military assignments, must be created by all universities and colleges offering classes to veterans. The creation of policies to assist those military members who must withdraw from class will help universities and college show that they are military friendly.

One participant in this study stated sometimes when military members are forced to withdraw from school; they are left with the expense of paying for the courses. Thus, university and college officials must work to ensure that military students completely understand the school's withdrawal policy before enrollment. The Department of Defense (DOD) promotes education, and the Army's BSEP program is a recognized Army program; therefore, military leaders may be more willing to promote a change to the current program to assist military members complete their degrees.

The Army's current BSEP is a commander's program, which means company commanders must approve attendance before military members can enroll in the program. The current program helps military members increase their general technical score (GT). However, once military members complete the program, there are no long-term education benefits. Hence, a new BSEP program offering a two-year general studies degree could have a lasting effect on those military members who complete the program. Converting the BSEP program into a program offering military members a two-year degree to be applied towards their bachelor's degree would assist university leaders to better serve this population.

Most military members are familiar with the current BSEP program; therefore, they have basic knowledge of the program. The converted program will also prove to military members that their leaders support their educational goals and are willing to help them be successful. Those military members who complete their bachelor's degrees before leaving the military will have a better chance to obtain employment and help to decrease the unemployment rates in the area.

Other programs that are in place to assist military members complete their degrees include the Service Member Opportunity Colleges, which offer degree programs through different universities. Only colleges and universities that are accredited can participate (<http://soc.aascu.org>). Military members can transfer college credit if they have to transfer to another college due to a new military assignment without losing any of the credits that they have earned.

Another program is the College Level Equivalency Program (CLEP), which allows military members to take standardized tests to measure their knowledge in different areas. Military members can take the CLEP test, reducing time spent in the classroom. Those military members who have gained knowledge outside the traditional classroom can opt to take the CLEP test; however, they must score at least 50% on the exam in order to receive credit (<http://clep.collegeboard.org/military/veterans>). This is a good program for some military members, but for those who may not test well, taking a class in a traditional classroom may work better for them.

The Vet Success program offered by the University of Maryland assists military members enrolled in college. The purpose of the program is to ensure military students

receive the education support they need (<http://umuc.edu/active-duty-military/about/vetsuccess-on-campus/cfm>). The program assists family members of military members as well. For example, resources are available to help military members find employment after the completion of their degrees. Moreover, counselors are readily available to answer questions about benefits offered to military members by the Department of Veteran Affairs. The programs are flexible, and military members can transfer college credits, which reduces tuition cost.

Rationale

The purpose of this study was to determine what could be done to assist military members stationed at Fort Hood Army Installation to complete their bachelor's degrees prior to exiting the military. To meet this purpose, it was necessary to address issues associated with military members not completing their education prior to exiting the military. Creating possible solutions can improve present and future opportunities for those pursuing an education while on active duty. Receiving an education on active duty can be very beneficial once military members leave the military. Policies have also been established to assist those military members interested in completing their education. Additionally, federal policies mandate that full education benefits be provided to military members on active duty as well as to veterans.

Research is needed to help inform Congress of the educational needs of military members as they work to make changes to the Post 9/11 Education Act created in 2008, ensuring that military members and veterans will be able to easily receive education benefits. Congress should also work to support the Veterans Administration and the Department of Defense to collect data on enrollment, retention, and the number of military members and veterans who graduate from college. A state policy pertaining to educating military members recommends that every state support programs to help military members complete their college degrees. The American Association of State Colleges and Universities has made public statements in support of military students having a right to an education (<http://aascu.org/policy>).

Funding for education is not an issue; however, time constraints associated with military obligations are a main reason many military members are not obtaining their degrees prior to leaving the military. Policies are in place to educate military members; however, more support is needed from military leaders to ensure these policies are enforced. Army Regulation 621-5 states that:

Each installation is responsible for providing educational services to active duty soldiers either assigned to or supported by that installation under provisions of intra-service or inter-service support agreements. Each installation is also responsible for providing educational services to members of other services assigned for duty at the installation. The Department of the Army will provide tuition assistance for its own members. (September 6, 2009, p.12)

Over 65% of veterans start using their GI Bill benefits, but less than 10% utilize all of the benefits awarded to them for their military service (Ackerman, DiRamino, & Mitchell, 2009). Therefore, it is important for military members to complete their education while serving on active duty. Completing a degree while on active duty can eliminate many obstacles associated with finding employment after leaving the military and can help with transiting from the military to the civilian workforce.

Educational benefits offered to military members are sometimes confusing because the benefits constantly change, making it difficult for veterans and school officials to understand which benefits are available to veterans and how these benefits can be utilized (Redden, 2008b). Often, educational benefits provided are not an incentive for military members to complete an education while serving on active duty, even though many of them join the military for education opportunities. Some military members who would like to complete their education may be unable to because they do not have the time required to complete their degrees. Military deployments, other military duties, family obligations, and sometimes a lack of support from military leaders make it impossible for some military members to complete their degrees.

Since 2000, the unemployment rate in the Fort Hood area has continued to rise. Military members who exit the military and remain in the area must compete with the civilian population for employment. Having an education can provide more opportunities and lead to more earning potential. According to the United States Department of Labor Bureau labor statistics show a steady increase in unemployment within the Fort Hood area over the last 12 years. It also supports the fact that unemployment rates in the area

did decline, but the increases were more significant. In 2000, the unemployment rate in the Killeen, Temple, and Fort Hood area was 4.5%; by 2003, the unemployment rate increased to 6.5%; the unemployment rate decreased to 5.2% in 2006; and by 2009, the unemployment rate increased again to 7%. Since 2010, the unemployment rate has continued to increase in the area.

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

Unemployment rates for veterans who served since 2001 have risen over 10 times as much as they have for civilians (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). When active duty personnel leave the military before completing their college degrees, they often face many challenges while trying to obtain employment. Financial hardships can occur if they are unable to obtain employment because they lack the education needed. A large number of military members who exit the military at Fort Hood Army Installation remain in the area and seek employment. However, many professional jobs in the area require the applicant to possess a degree. The job market is fierce because there are so many others competing for the same positions.

Those military members who are able to complete their degrees could use them to help with transitions into the civilian workforce. Degrees could widen their employment opportunities and advancement in the job market after leaving the military. If veterans are unable to obtain employment due to a lack of education, they will have little or no chance to contribute to globalization on the micro or macro level.

The BSEP program's main goal has been to assist military members to increase their GT score. Increasing this score can assist those military members who are interested

in changing their military occupational specialty, the job they perform in the military. Some military members increase their GT scores but do not change their military jobs. Meanwhile, some military members enroll in the program to receive promotion points while others are directed by their company commanders to enroll in the program (M. Owens, personal communication, February 21, 2014). However, the program could better serve military members if it is converted into a two-year degree program that could lead to a bachelor's degree and provide military members with a better incentive to enroll in the program.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

According to Ruh, Spicer, Vaughan, and Rockville (2009), "The number of veterans with disabilities has risen to over 5 million and over 650,000 of them are out of work." In addition, many of those veterans are working in positions they are for which they are overqualified. It was reported in 2008 by the Department of Labor that each year, over 150,000 veterans who are disabled attempt to join the work force. These individuals may face obstacles obtaining employment because they did not complete their education. Bauman (2009) argued that, "Often soldiers attending college must drop out for several semesters and sometimes are unsure when they will be able to re-enroll in courses" (p. 15). As a result, many universities must deal with military members who withdraw from courses, and in many instances, they do not officially withdraw but instead stop attending classes because of military obligations. This presents many challenges for university officials.

Ford et al. (2009) argued that offering educational services to soldiers can create challenges for school officials. For example, soldiers' military duties create burdens for students, including last minute deployments and short term missions that can hinder their education success. Therefore, soldiers' many responsibilities can sometimes make it difficult for them to pursue postsecondary education (Ford et al., 2009). A soldier who is a student can be required to participate in a short or long-term deployment at any time; therefore, it is important that college officials ensure they are willing to support the needs of military members prior to them enrolling in educational programs.

Furthermore, Ackerman et al. (2009) stated: "Combat veterans require support from both school officials and policy makers because they are a special population, with special issues and often require special services" (p. 6). The military often gives short notices regarding deployments and other military obligations, which does not leave military members or university leaders much time to react. Therefore, military and education leaders should work harder to assist military members desiring an education.

Lokken, Pfeffer, Strong, and McAuley (2009) stated that, "Universities that work to prove they are friendly towards veterans are those universities working to support the needs of veterans, creating solutions to their unique problems, and anticipate difficulties faced by veterans who are students (p. 45)." Universities such as these have worked to erase barriers that challenge the educational goals of veterans while working to make the individual's transition from a military member to a college student as smooth as possible.

Dervarics (2011) found that military members who employ the new Post-9/11 GI Bill receive three years of educational benefits. The new bill offers military members and

their families the opportunity to complete their education without any out-of-pocket expense. Another cost-saving option for military members to pursue an education is the electronic Army university, an online program created by the United States Army (Halligan, 2007). stated, The goal of the program was to provide all soldiers the opportunity to take college courses. Through the program, soldiers had the ability to choose between 140 degree programs at accredited colleges and universities. As part of the program, the Army offered a free laptop to students, paid the entire cost of tuition and book fees, and 24-hour technical support was available. However, the program was ended in October 2007 so that finances could be shifted into war-fighting accounts” (Halligan, 2007).

According to Lorenz (2009), distance learning is a great opportunity for anyone who wants to finish their education but is unable to attend a conventional college or university. “Distance learning is often the only option for many military members stationed away from their regular duty assignment” (Lorenz, 2009, p. 61). In order for military members to succeed in taking online courses, university leaders must ensure that education centers are equipped with the correct technology needed to meet any immediate needs of military members serving in remote areas (Lorenz, 2009).

Deployments and relocations are major factors in the lives of military personnel and can cause hardships, particularly for those military personnel who are working on their degrees. Over the years, distance education has become popular amongst military members. Through distance learning, even if a military member relocates to another duty station or deploys, he or she can still have access to his or her classes.

Rumann and Hamrick (2010) noted that military veterans are a part of complicated education situations in which they could simultaneously be considered students, veterans, and members of the armed forces. These situations are the result of “multiple activations and deployments for service in both Iraq and Afghanistan that cause military members to withdraw in the middle of an academic semester followed by subsequent re-enrollments” (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010, p. 434).

Rumann and Hamrick (2009) argued that:

“It is critical for representatives of colleges and universities to assist individuals who are on active duty as well as those who are veterans obtain an education. It is also important for those representatives to work to understand the experiences of members of the Armed Forces. School representatives should also attempt to learn about the life of a military member and how they deal with being in a combat zone. A pledge made by colleges and universities will prove they are committed to providing the best education they can to those who have served” (p. 31).

Similarly, Bauman (2009) believed that university leaders should work to eliminate various problems that cause military members to stifle their motivation to achieve their educational goals (p. 45). Eliminating problems faced by military students will allow them to feel more comfortable in the education arena. Military members bring diversity and experience into the classroom. This allows for transformative learning in the learning environment.

Sander (2012) found that some veterans who could not find the information they needed about military benefits in person used Google and other Internet search engines to

locate information. However, the information they found was often very confusing. To assist with problems associated with the Internet, some universities have created Internet pages specifically for veteran information (Sander, 2012). An Internet page on a school's website can often help military members locate needed information and resources.

Cook and Kim (2009) found that the military provides information on education benefits when military members return from deployments; however, many of these military members only want to get home to their family members, whom they have not seen in months or years. Therefore, they do not pay close attention to the information being provided. Consequently, some military members become confused about their education benefits and do not apply for them (Cook & Kim, 2009). Furthermore, Basks (2012) suggested, "Educational benefits that go unused by military members might cause higher learner institutions not to have a military population (p. 2).

Vichy (2012) believed, "Veterans who attend college could be taking the biggest leap of their lives. Many campuses are not structured for military members, and many students who have never been in the military are not ready for the independence that comes with attending college" (p. 18). Serving in the military often prepares individuals for challenges that attending college presents, such as the need to develop a higher level of responsibility and self-discipline. Additionally, Francis (2011) stated that military students share some of the same characteristics with nonmilitary students; however, they bring many personal experiences and challenges into the classroom. Students serving on active duty must manage their military obligations, school obligations, and family obligations.

Sander (2012) noted that the military draft in the 1970's, college benefits were an incentive to join the military. When the draft ended in 1973, money for college was offered to recruit individuals into the military” (Sander, 2012).

Bellafiore (2012) found that:

Military members who trade combat for the classroom find themselves in intense situations. Some are in classes with students who have never serviced in the military or understand how the military functions. Some military members find it hard to adjust to the classroom because many of their classmates act as if the military is not important and many issues faced by military members are not real. Some nonmilitary students fail to realize that many of their military classmates suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder” (p. 2).

Higher learning communities should work to prepare for the retention of military students and veterans, as this population will soon increase on colleges' and universities' campuses (Field, 2008; Lewis, 2008; Lewis & Sololow, 2008; Palm, 2008; Pulley, 2008; Sachs, 2008). Alvarez (2008) stated that many individuals actually end up joining a branch of the military in order to help pay for their educational expenses. Colleges, universities, and other programs claiming to support the needs of military students must work harder to attract this population and help them to complete their degrees (Lederman, 2010).

Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughely, and Harris (2011) found that post traumatic stress disorder and other conditions could affect these military members scholastically. “Some wounds that military members receive are invisible. School counselors should understand

that many military students who have served in Iraq or Afghanistan will return with wounds that can be seen” (p. 59).

Zinger and Cohen (2010) found that combat veterans are working towards their degrees in both vocational colleges and in four year degree colleges to create a better and more successful future for themselves after they leave the military. Therefore, it is important that any military members who are interested in furthering their education be made aware of the many opportunities available. Bertoni (2011) asserted that, “Even though the Veterans Administration (VA) has numerous programs to reach out to military members and veterans who are eligible for education benefits, the VA still finds it hard to attract those who can receive benefits for education” (p. 2). Scott (2011) found that it is important for the Department of Defense (DOD) to oversee colleges and universities that military members attend to guarantee that these schools provide military members with the education they desire.

Definitions

Army Continuing Education System (ACES): In the context of this study, this is a program that provides learning opportunities for those serving in the military (myarmybenefits.us.army.mil).

Battalion commanders: In the context of this study, this is a senior-commissioned officer responsible for three to five military units (Schoomaker, 1999).

Commissioned officer: In the context of this study, this is a personnel member authorized by the President of the United States to assume responsibility of leading or commanding military members (Schoomaker, 2006).

Fort Hood Army Installation: In the context of this study, this is an Army Installation located in central Texas. With over 45,000 service members stationed there, the installation also services family members, retirees, and civilians. It is called the Great Place, with large training areas. Service members at Fort Hood train on state-of-the-art equipment, and thousands of service members can be deployed at any given time. Over 40 universities and colleges are located in the Fort Hood area (www.hood.army.mil).

Noncommissioned officer: In the context of this study, this is an enlisted person serving in a direct leadership position and is in charge of the management and care of lower enlisted military members (Schoomaker, 2006).

Post/911 GI Bill: In the context of this study, these are educational benefits awarded to military members who have served on active duty for three months or more after 9/11.

Tuition assistance program: A program that pays for active duty military members' education.

Veteran friendly: In the context of this study, these are universities or colleges working to support veterans and reduce barriers hindering their educational goals (Lokken et al., 2009).

Significance

This case study is of value on both the micro and macro levels. It focuses on military members stationed at Fort Hood Army Installation and their perceptions about the obstacles preventing them from completing their degrees prior to leaving the military. The purpose of this study was to determine what can be done to assist military members

stationed at Fort Hood Army Installation complete their bachelor's degrees prior to exiting the military. Significant strategies created within this study could assist military members complete their education, making this study valuable. Military members can benefit from recommendations suggested within this study to assist them complete their education. Addressing problems associated with military members not being able to complete their college education before leaving the military will help military and education leaders better understand that military members leaving the military will be better prepared to enter the civilian work force.

A degree can help military members who are preparing to leave the military broaden their opportunities for employment and advancement in the job market once their military contract expires. Merriam, Courtenay, and Cervero (2006) stated, "Veterans who are unable to obtain employment due to a lack of education will have little or no chance of contributing to globalization on the micro or macro level. Globalization is important because it allows change and growth of individuals and communities" (p. 56).

The evaluation of the BSEP program was significant in that it helped to provide information necessary to convert the program into one with increased potential benefits. The evaluation was completed by collecting information that a) helped frame a conversion of the program and b) allowed for a better understanding of the effectiveness of the program. This information was then shared with relevant military leaders, and then funding could be made available for implementation of the converted program. Throughout the evaluation process, it was determined that if military members participate in the converted BSEP program, they should receive credit for military training and

courses they have already taken. The research is also significant because the findings will provide information to Fort Hood military leaders on the best ways to assist military members to obtain their degrees before exiting the military.

Fort Hood Army Installation has been successfully used as a pilot site for military training over the years, and the trainings have been implemented at other Army Installations (D. Williams, personal communication, December, 2013). Converting the BSEP program into a program that allows military members to earn a two-year degree and piloting the converted BSEP program at Fort Hood has the potential to be a successful program for military members desiring an education.

The research is also significant because many military members are leaving the military with injuries that will not allow them to continue working in jobs the military trained them to perform. A college degree will provide these military members with training that can assist them in finding new job opportunities. Finally, the study is of value to prove that more has to be done to encourage them to complete their degrees before transitioning into the civilian sector. Deployments and a lack of support from military leadership should not stop military members from completing their degrees.

Johnson (2009) found that:

When military members had to drop out of school due to military deployments or reassignments, they became discouraged and it was inconvenient for them. When military members deployed in 1990 and again in 1995 many were forced to drop out of school. Another major deployment took place in 2003 and military

members have been deployed since to Iraq or Afghanistan. Many members have been deployed more than three times (p. 55)

Deployments are a part of military life; that probably will never change. However, providing military members with the assistance needed to complete their degrees could be an incentive for them to return to school after a deployment.

According to Branker (2009), many higher learning institutions have been working to accommodate military members completing their degrees by allowing them the opportunity to withdraw from courses at no additional cost and the opportunity to continue their education once they return from deployments. Hopefully, if military members understand that there are no penalties for their early withdrawal from school due to military duties, they will be encouraged to return to school. Currently, many military members believe returning to school is a waste of time because they could be deployed at any given time with only days to prepare.

Since the Army's BSEP program is a military program, military members may feel more comfortable returning to the program if forced to withdraw. Others believe that applying for their educational benefits requires too much time. When military members fail to return to school after a deployment, they often leave the military without earning their degrees. Winston (2010) believed that, "Providing veterans with help and resources to pursue a higher education is a challenge for any college. For some military members the processes of applying for education benefits is too complex and often support is unavailable" (p. 34). Military leaders as well as education leaders should fully understand all education benefits offered to military members. An understanding of these benefits

will help to eliminate some of the obstacles hindering military members working to complete their degrees.

This study addressed obstacles faced by military members on active duty station at Fort Hood Army installation who are working to obtain a college degree. In order to eliminate obstacles, military leaders must offer military members the opportunity to attend school no matter where they are stationed. The Army's BSEP program was chosen to evaluate to determine if military members could benefit from the program being converted into a two-year degree program. The research questions listed below were asked to determine what could be done to assist military members serving on active duty earn their degrees.

Guiding/Research Questions

1. What factors affect the academic success of military members completing their degrees?
2. What steps might be implemented to assist military in achieving academic success by completing their bachelors' degrees before exiting the military?
3. Does the Army's BSEP program have the potential to be converted into a two-year degree program?

In this case study, I explored military members' perceptions stationed at Fort Hood Army Installation of the problems associated with not being able to complete their degrees before leaving the military. Discernments based upon the study participants' experiences assisted in developing effective strategies to help military members complete

their degrees prior to leaving the military. Completing their degrees could improve their chances of finding employment.

Review of the Literature

Research material pertaining to educating military members and what can be done to assist them reach their goals were found. Moreover, information about different educational institutions pledging their support towards military members is included. The literature review begins with a review of scholarly journals and articles on educating military members. Some journals only reported information on combat and educating military members, while others presented information on how learning institutions can assist this population. Information on military history was also discussed, along with the research conducted to develop strategies to be used to help educate military members.

Key words used to conduct a search on information pertaining to educating military members included *transformative learning, constructivist learning, educating soldiers, military students, college and military members, combat and education, education and the military, soldiers and education, veterans and college, post-traumatic stress disorder, and veterans as college students*. The databases included ProQuest Database, Academic Search Premier, EBSCO Databases, Educational Resource information Center, Dissertation and Theses at Walden University, and the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics 2011.

Since the purpose of this study was to determine what can be done to assist military members stationed at Fort Hood Army Installation complete their bachelors' degrees prior to exiting the military, it is necessary to look at the historical context of

educating military members starting with World War I. This chapter provides information on (a) benefits offered during both World Wars I and II, (b) benefits offered during the Vietnam War, (c) benefits offered during the Gulf War, (d) benefits offered to veterans of today, (e) veterans with disabilities as students, (f) veterans and the campus environment, and (g) obstacles faced by veterans in education. The section also includes the theoretical and conceptual framework for this study.

World Wars I & II

The United States Government has always compensated those who placed their lives in harm's way to support the nation, even when money was limited. When World War I ended, the U.S Government created a plan to compensate those who served in the military. In 1945, those individuals started receiving compensation. The government rewarded those who served or their family members with land. The amount of acres received depended on the military member's rank. (Chiodo, 2011, p. 33) Between World War II (WWII) and the Korean War, education benefit programs have helped veterans achieve socioeconomic success over those individuals who were not veterans.

President Delano Roosevelt believed that after WWII, it was important for military members returning from war to feel welcomed back into society. In one of his speeches in 1943, Roosevelt stated, "Those who have served should not be forced into a society where inflation and unemployment will affect them, they should not have to stand in bread lines or on corners selling apples. We must this time have a plan in place" (p. 43).

The Vietnam War

Military members who served between 1955 through 1975 faced many obstacles because some Americans did not support the war in Vietnam. People protested against veterans while attending college because of their involvement in the war. Many Vietnam Veterans worked hard to fit into the college environment but later found it easier not to let people know they have served in the war (Summerlot, Green, & Parker, 2011). Vietnam Veterans received fewer benefits than veterans of World War II, forcing them to work full time while attending school. A large percentage of Vietnam Veterans suffered from mental illnesses. Many school programs offered to Vietnam Veterans were reduced, causing their attendance at learning institutions to decrease (Summerlot et al., 2009). Military members have always been present in higher learning institutions. Serving in a war places those individuals in a different category than those who have never served. Military members can be deployed at any time during the school year. A deployment can result in class time being lost, and often two to three semesters may pass before military members return to school (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009).

The Gulf War

Many individuals joined the military after the Vietnam War for educational benefits offered by the government. However, the benefits often did not cover their entire cost of attending college. Military recruiters use the new GI Bill to attract men and women to the military, promising them a free education. Even with all the money the military provides for education, only a small percentage of military members will utilize all their benefits. Benefits for education are available, but many military members fail to

take advantage of them. Radford (2011) found that, “Many military students took seven or more years to complete their undergraduate degrees, compared to their civilian counterparts who usually took less time to complete the same degree” (p. 3). Therefore, converting the BSEP program into a two-year degree program leading to a bachelor’s degree could decrease the time necessary for military personnel to complete their degrees.

Post-9/11 GI Bill

Iraq, Afghanistan, and Veterans of America Executive Director and Founder Paul Rieckhoff (2008) reported that the new Post-9/11 GI Bill provides more benefits than any GI Bill has in the past. This bill covers the entire cost of a four-year degree. The Post-9/11 GI Bill allows the government to provide educational benefits to soldiers as well as their family members. The new 911 GI Bill also gives veterans more than 10 years to use their education benefits once they leave the military. The number of benefits received by individuals who served depends on how many months they served under the new GI Bill. Those members of the military who served part-time also qualify for the same benefits as those serving on active duty. The bill pays for attendance at all universities, and the amount paid depends on time served in the military since 2001. It also covers full payment of tuition, fees, provides a housing allowance, and covers moving expenses.

Furthermore, McMahon (2010) stated that, “The payoff of education other than money that impacts society and the individual are better health, longevity, and greater happiness” (p. 26). Military members contribute to society; therefore, they deserve to be educated if they desire. They decide to attend college for many different reasons, but

even with all the financial support provided, without support from leaders and family members, their educational journeys will be harder to complete.

According to participants in this study, the new GI Bill could help them reach their education goals because it offers more money for school. In a 2009 report on Military Members and Veterans in Higher Education written by the American Council on Education, it stated that it was important to encourage additional access in order to help the over 1.4 million military personnel to be successful in higher education. The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 was created to promote education for military members. Several other programs were created to support military students enrolled in college. For example, the Yellow Ribbon Education Enhancement Program allows colleges and universities to work with the Department of Veterans Administration to help cover the cost of educating military members by waiving up to 50% of the cost of tuition.

Branker (2009) found that many veterans view college as a chance to create a new beginning after the military helped prepare them to be respectable and productive individuals. Unfortunately, military members often realize that the job the military trained them to perform does not prepare them for working in the civilian sector. “For many military members and veterans, the self-discipline taught in the military can help make them better students. For others, taking college classes and learning a new skill can be difficult, as well as stressful when there is a lack of support” (Branker, 2009, p. 6).

Support from a military member’s family and their military leadership can make a difference. Leaders working closely with educational officials to support military

members pursuing their education can help eliminate some of the stressors. Sometimes, military members may find it hard to focus on coursework because they may worry that they are unable to handle the course load and some school administrators do not understand their needs. According to Brown and Gross (2011), veteran students start college with financial benefits from the military and usually have earned college credits due to their military education and experience. “It would be a mistake for college administrators to underestimate them; instead, college administrators should work to understand and meet their unique needs” (Brown & Gross, 2001, p. 47). Embracing this group of students and providing them with the educational support needed will only enhance the education environment.

Veterans with Disabilities

According to Madaus, Miller, and Vance (2009), veterans who return from combat injured should also be eligible to start or continue an education. “Many who are wounded in combat, depending on their injuries, will be forced to leave the military sooner than they planned. Without their degrees, finding employment may be even more difficult for this population of veterans” (Madaus, et al., 2009, p. 12). Some universities are not able to accommodate disabled veterans; however, other universities are striving to assure that they are capable of providing services to all students enrolled in their institutions (Madaus, et al., 2009).. Those universities that work hard to meet the needs of all students demonstrate that they support the success of a wide variety of students.

The number of military members leaving the military due to injuries received in Iraq and Afghanistan is overwhelming for the Veterans Affairs Office. Many veterans

will qualify for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, which is a program that pays for disabled veterans to attend college. They also receive a stipend to assist with the cost of living (Ruh et al., 2009).

Veterans and the Campus Environment

Hassan, Jackson, Lindsay, McCabe, and Sanders (2010) argued that, “As veterans transition from the military to full time students on college campuses, many people have mixed views about their presence. Some people have negative or stereotyped views about the military because it is often portrayed negatively in the media” (p. 30). Veterans who attend college are a unique group of individuals – many have medical problems, which often include posttraumatic stress disorder. Baechtold and DeSawal (2009) argued that, “The life of an active duty military member is far more complicated than that of a student who has never served on active duty” (p. 14).

Even today, transitioning from a soldier to a college student creates barriers, and many colleges are working to eliminate those barriers. Burnett and Segoria (2009) stated, “Veterans complained about their experiences in the classroom; reporting some fellow classmates and professors created problems for them and hindered their academic success” (p. 56). Specifically, according to Burnett and Segoria, some veterans noted that many of their classmates did not approve of their military association, and some professors made insensitive comments in the classroom about the military. Hassan et al. (2010) suggested, “Civilians should not be so judgmental when looking at the lives of military members. Instead, civilians should get to know them as classmates rather than as military members” (p. 32).

The Bachelor Degrees for Soldiers System (BDFS) was created in 1986 to assist noncommissioned officers and warrant officers earn their degrees. This system was created to go along with the occupational specialties in which the Army trained military members. Military members had to have a degree plan explaining their education goals. Within the BDFS system, military members were awarded credit for training and education they received in the military. The BDFS assisted those military members who did not complete their degrees while on active duty or obtain their degrees after leaving the military (Clinton, 1987). The system is no longer available to military members, but many still work to accomplish their education goals. Some military leaders work to promote education within the ranks of their soldiers. Due to time constraints and military obligations, some military members are still finding it impossible to complete their degrees.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This case study used Mezirow's transformative learning theory as a framework. Transformative learning is the process of transforming an individual's current perspectives into those that are more inclusive (Mezirow, 2000). This process of transformation leaves individuals able to make more inclusive and discriminating reflections so that ultimately they are able to generate beliefs and opinions that are better aligned to justify a more true action. The theory is focused on how adults view themselves and their environment. Mezirow's theory is comprised of four components: experience, critical reflection, reflective discourse, and action.

In transformative learning, collaborative groups are formed: each learner is the creator of their learning, and they are liable for their learning (Swartz & Triscari, 2011). The knowledge adult gain throughout their lifetime can help promote transformative learning in the classroom. Transformative learning was the best theory to employ for this study because as military members who attend college are transformed, they gain and share knowledge. They also create better opportunities for others as well as for themselves.

Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) argued that, “Adults acquire knowledge and experience over the years, which can be used to promote learning” (p. 84). Therefore, the knowledge military members bring into the classroom can contribute to transformative learning. Loomis and Rodriguez (2009) explained that if someone is to learn and be successful in the classroom, one must be the director of his or her own learning, create opportunities for self, gain knowledge, and develop. Furthermore, Swartz and Triscari (2011) suggested that, “Transformative learning is considered collaborative group learning but goes farther to say that learners are liable for their learning” (p. 326). Additionally, Hodge (2011) attested that the transformative learning theory “is an assertive method to understand adult learning. The theory addresses how the world is perceived” (p.498). Additionally, education can lead to an increased number of relationships, and thereby, increasing social support. Field (2011) stated, “Learning also appears to strengthen people’s support networks” (p. 19).

Implications

Educating military leaders about the educational benefits that could possibly assist them in promoting education would allow them to show their support. A lack of support from military leaders, especially from noncommissioned officers, will often hinder those military members desiring an education and stop them from reaching their education goals. An example of support that leaders can provide includes limiting additional duties given to military members who are enrolled in college courses to allow them more time for classes and studying. Counselors can also play an important role in helping to educate military members by ensuring they understand their needs. This case study was conducted to evaluate the Army's BSEP program offered to military members and to provide additional strategies to be used to help educate them. The results of the study are presented in a white paper located in Appendix A. The white paper provides information to assist military leaders supporting those military members desiring an education and will be presented to military and education leaders. The results of the study can help foster effective communication between Fort Hood military leaders, education leaders, and military members.

Education counselors should develop and administer a proper assessment tool to determine the wide scope of a military member's skills, educational background, interests, and future plans within and after leaving the military. Military leaders and education counselors can help sustain individual motivation by establishing honest communication between military students and schools. Military leaders can also promote strategies that offer training on how to use the online course room for military members

who have never taken online courses. Another way military leaders can promote education is within military units while improving localized marketing about education opportunities offered on Fort Hood Army Installation. The Fort Hood Education Center should also work closely with all local universities in the Fort Hood area as well as with universities that only offer classes online to ensure military credit is transferable into the military members' degree programs.

The Army Career Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) Program, which offers all NCOs in the military the opportunity to complete their degrees, should be reevaluated and offered to all military members, regardless of their rank or time served in the military. This gesture would suggest to all military members that the Department of Defense is serious about education and values every military member. The current BSEP program is offered to all military members, and the converted BSEP program should be offered to all military members as well. The program evaluation of the BSEP program for military members desiring an education could help establish a program that assists military members to complete their education prior to leaving the military. Fort Hood military leaders could show their support by working with Central Texas College to implement the new BSEP program at Fort Hood Army Installation.

Summary

Section 1 addressed military members stationed at Fort Hood Army Installation and the problems associated with them not being able to complete their education before leaving the military. On Fort Hood Army Installation, the college dropout rate for military members continues to increase. Over 80% of military members who were

enrolled in classes have dropped out of college for different reasons. Deployments, other obligations, lack of support from leadership, lack of support from family members, and university officials who are unaware of the needs of those who serve the U.S. are a few of the reasons military members are not successful in the education arena. (G. Primas, personal communication, July 6, 2012). Moreover, there is a lack of knowledge by leaders about educational benefits offered.

Nevertheless, even with all the benefits offered for education and education leaders working to ensure the needs of military members are met, without the support of military leadership, the education that many military members desire is often unattainable. Without an education, it will be harder for those ending their military careers to obtain employment because they lack the education required by many employers. Successful conversion of the BSEP program into a program that allows military members to complete a two-year general studies degree will assist military members who would like to complete their degrees to have the opportunity to do so.

In section 2, the qualitative case study design is explained. Also included in this section is the population the sample was taken from, instruments used, and how data were collected, analyzed, and verified. Assumptions, delimitations, and limitations are also included in this section. Research questions and the study's purpose are restated. Strategies to assist military members complete their degrees while on active duty are identified. The goals of the study included gaining insights into the experiences of the active duty military members' working on their education station at Fort Hood Army installation. The military offers many benefits to be used towards an education; however,

those benefits can be meaningless if military members are not given the opportunity to use them. The study was conducted to help Fort Hood Army leaders understand the needs of military members working to obtain an education before exiting the military. See Appendix D for interview questions. The evaluation of the Army's BSEP program was conducted to determine if the program could be converted in a program that offers a two-year degree in general studies, which could lead to a bachelor's degree.

Due to multiple deployments and other obligations, military members stationed at Fort Hood Army Installation are leaving the military without completing their degrees. The study presents a holistic account of experiences faced by military members working toward the completion of their education while serving on active duty. The results of the study can be used as a benchmark to assist military members stationed at other military installations complete their degrees before leaving the military as well.

Within Section 3, the description and goals of the project are discussed, the rationale for the project study is restated, and another review of literature is conducted. Potential resources, potential barriers, and the timetable for implementation of the project are also included in Section 3. Furthermore, the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved in educating military members are presented. Finally, how the results of the study can impact social change locally and on a larger scale are also included in this section.

Section 4, the last section in this paper, includes the project's strengths and limitations, and the researcher as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. The

impact on social change and suggestions for future research is included in Section 4 as well.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

In this section, the case study design is explained, including the population the sample was taken from, instruments used, and how data were collected, analyzed, and verified. Also included in this section are assumptions, delimitations, and limitations. Research questions and the study's purpose are restated. Strategies to assist military members complete their degrees while on active duty are identified. The study included discernments based upon the study participants' experiences while on active duty, stationed at Fort Hood Army installation, and working on their education to help evaluate Army's BSEP program.

The military offers many education benefits; however, those benefits can be useless if military members are not given the opportunity to use them. This study was conducted to help Fort Hood Army leaders understand the needs of military members working to obtain an education before exiting the military. The research questions included the following:

1. What factors affect academic success of military members completing their bachelors' degrees?
2. What steps might be implemented to assist military members in achieving academic success by completing their bachelors' degrees before exiting the military?
3. Does the Army BSEP have the potential to be converted into a two-year degree program?

Research Design

Qualitative Methodology

A qualitative case study was the most effective for this study because the actual words of the participants helped to paint a picture of a military member's experiences and how they see the world around them. The research was exploratory in nature. Military members' perspectives on problems associated with them not being able to complete their degrees were explored throughout the study along with the effectiveness of the BSEP program. The evaluation of the BSEP program was chosen to gain the perceptions of participants about the program and allow them to help determine if the program has the potential to be converted into a two-year degree program.

An understanding of the study's participants is crucial to the effectiveness of the study. Merriam (2009) argued that researchers seek to understand the experiences of their research subjects, how their subjects define their surroundings, and how they interpret the world around them. Merriam (2009) also stated that "qualitative researchers want to learn how their study participants explain their experiences, how they interpret the world, and the meaning of their experiences. Participants are explored in their natural settings and their points of views are important" (p. 15). Therefore, in this study, participants were allowed to speak openly about problems associated with not being able to complete their degrees while serving on active duty.

Case Study

The strategy of inquiry for this study is a qualitative case study. The case study allows researchers to understand complex social problems and allows a mixture of

different methods to examine a problem. Yin (2003) and Stake (1995) both suggested that case studies have particular value to contribute both theoretically and pragmatically to educational research. They indicated that a more holistic approach used in the case study allows more in-depth data to be collected regarding the educational environment of a complex social endeavor (Yin, 2003; Stake, 1995). Case studies are a way researchers examine a program, event, activity, process, or one or more people. Cases are bounded by time and activity. In cases studies, researchers collect detailed information continually over a certain period of time (Creswell, 2009).

Stake (1995) and Yin (2003) explained that the case study approach relies on the constructivist paradigm. They went on further to explain this as true because constructivists view truth in data as relative and dependent on the participant's perspective. Constructivists believe in the importance of the subjective human creation of meaning, but they do not object objectivity (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). Qualitative methodology was used to gain a clearer understanding of the experiences faced by military members leaving the military from Fort Hood Army Installation without completing their education. The research design of the study was exploratory in nature and, true to qualitative paradigm, relied on constructivism to view the data collected with a wide lens. This allowed my observations to be integrated into the larger context into which the study results (Willis, 2007).

Ultimately, as the reality of the study participants' educational experience was subjective, the behavior observed must be contextualized. Again, this made the qualitative inquiry approach particularly well suited for this study. Johnson and

Christensen (2007) helped substantiate this by indicating that the qualitative approach allows for contextualized richness of the data collected and interpreted.

This study was interpretive in nature because it sought to discover the participants' perceptions of the obstacles hindering their education success and the support needed for them to complete their degrees before leaving the military. Willis (2007) stated that, "A goal of interpretive research is to understand a situation or context. Qualitative paradigm does not hold exclusive rights to interpretive research, as interpretivists claim that research on human behavior can never be objective" (p. 99).

The process of completing this study was consistent with the characteristics of qualitative research, as described by Creswell (2012), Stake (1995), and Yin (2003). I was the instrument to collect data and the analyst of the data collected. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) stated that when managing qualitative research, the researcher is the research instrument since data relates to the researcher involvement in the setting". According to Lodico et al. (2010) researchers interview individuals impacted by the problem to evaluate how they perceive or interpret a problem. "A case study is a form of qualitative research used to discover meaning, investigate processes, to gain an in-depth understanding of an individual, group, or situation to be studied" (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 246).

The design requires a reflective, holistic, and in-depth exploration method. Yin (1994) stated that, "A researcher would use the case study method when attempting to uncover contextual conditions which could be very important to the phenomenon of study" (p. 13). Leedy and Ormrod (2005) believed it would be a good idea to use the case

study approach when the researcher knows little about the situation” (p. 135). Creswell (2012) stated that, “Case study research should be conducted when a problem is explored within a bounded system.” He believed a case study to be an in-depth analysis of a bounded system. Important characteristics of the case study method, as described by Creswell (2012), were important to the design of this study: (a) the focus of this case study was a single case, (b) the case study provided an in depth understanding, (c) the data were collected from structured interviews and field notes, and (d) the data were analyzed by case description (coding) and discovering commonalities of the written case (themes).

Merriam (1988) stated that, “A case study is an examination of a specific phenomenon such as an institution. The bounded system or case might be selected because it is an instance of some concern” (p. 9). For this research, the problems associated with Fort Hood military members leaving the military before completing their education were examined. The data produced insights into the perspectives of the military members who participated in the study to help themes emerge through data analysis. This research integrated Merriam’s four delineated characteristics of qualitative case study:

Particularistic, descriptive, heuristic, and inductive. . . . Particularistic means that case studies focus on a particular situation, event, or program. The case itself is important for what it reveals about the phenomenon and for what it might represent. . . . Descriptive means that the end product of a case study is a rich, [thick] description of the phenomenon under study. . . . Hueristic means that case studies illuminate the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study.

They can bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader's experience, or confirm what is known. . . . Inductive means that, for the most part, case studies rely on inductive reasoning. Generalizations, concepts, or hypotheses emerge from an examination of data – data grounded in the context itself.

(Merriam, 1988, pp. 11-13)

The case study method allowed the researcher to explore the phenomenon of military members leaving the military from Fort Hood Army Installation without completing their education, and it was a one bounded case. The data analysis approach of case study for this research is holistic, as it searches for threaded themes (Creswell, 2007). This research adds to the body of knowledge and provides insights of military members stationed at Fort Hood desiring an education and the evaluation of the BSEP program from the participants' prospective.

Participants in the study agreed that evaluating the Army's BSEP program to convert it into a program offering a two-year degree would benefit more military members than the current BSEP program. Participants not only believed the new program could benefit military members stationed at Fort Hood, but military members Army-wide as well. There were some concerns about converting the program from the participants' perspective to include: How long would it take to link the new converted BSEP program with a local college or university? How can college credits that military members have already earned be transferred into the new BSEP program and how can components of the current BSEP program be revised?

The study took place in the community where the participants experienced the problems discussed in this study. Data were gathered using standardized open-end questions that were asked in a specific order. Military members were interviewed one at a time, each interview lasted 45 minutes to an hour, and the researcher recorded each interview using a tape recorder. Once interviews were complete, a transcriptionist transcribed the tape recordings verbatim. The data collection methods used in the study included interviews and field notes which are appropriate for qualitative research. The researcher referred back to the field notes for information observed during the interviews. A demographic survey was used to obtain information about the participants in the study, which is located in (Appendix C).

Participants

Participants included 15 military members stationed at Fort Hood Army Installation. These individuals (a) were enrolled in college and exiting the military within 12-24 months, (b) were serving on active duty at Fort Hood, (c) had been on repeated deployments, (d) had been in the military four or more years, and (e) were 18 or older. Using only 15 participants allowed the researcher to spend more time with each participant. Of the 15 participants in the study, 14 had been enrolled in the current BSEP program, and 10 were enrolled in the program at the time of the study. To gain access to participants, a flier was created inviting military members to participate in the study. Fliers were distributed at the research site and throughout the community by the researcher requesting participation in the study. The flier included the purpose of the

study, the research questions, the location, the time required to participate in the study, and how to contact the researcher.

Research participants were selected based upon their shared experiences in the military. Purposeful sampling was utilized. Leedy and Ormond (2005) stated that, “Purposeful sampling is used to choose participants for a particular purpose” (p. 206). Participants did not have a personal relationship with the researcher. They were not clients, subordinates, or students of the researcher. All participants were enlisted military members in the military ranks grades E4 through E8. Each participant completed an interview on obstacles hindering a military members’ completion of an education while serving in the military. The interviews were conducted at the Killeen Community Center.

The Interview Site

The Killeen Community Center is located 10 miles from Fort Hood Army Installation. The center is open daily from 9 a.m.-8 p.m. and offers a variety of services to community members to include meeting rooms and educational programs. Meeting rooms are available for a variety of activities and events. No cost was incurred to utilize the meeting room for interviews. Reserving a meeting room to conduct the interviews became problematic due to the fact that there was no cost and the rooms are reserved on a first come basis. The privacy provided while utilizing the meeting rooms enabled ethical research to be conducted.

Methods for Conducting Ethical Research

Ethical research was conducted by protecting the privacy and rights of those involved in the study. First permission was granted to conduct research from Walden

University Institutional Review Board (the IRB number is 05-21-13-0229967).

Participants were made aware of any rights they have under copyright or data protection laws. To ensure participants' identities remained confidential, each participant was assigned an interview number for identification the day of the interview. The informed consent form was the only document that included the participant's name. All participants signed informed consent forms before starting their interview, and the researcher provided each participant a copy. The form included the study's purpose, the risk level to participants, that participating in the study was voluntary, and that participants had the right to withdraw from the study at anytime. The role of the researcher was made very clear to all participants.

Role of the Researcher

I ensured that I had no preconceived notions or biases relating to educating military members. I asked probing questions and listened carefully to participants as they spoke. As a retired soldier, I have seen firsthand how many military members have left the military without earning their degrees. I have friends who served over 20 years in the military and I have witnessed their struggles after leaving the military due to a lack of education. Some of these individuals have completed their degrees while others have not.

Data Collection Procedures

The collection technique included interviews. Triangulation was achieved by using the data collected from multiple participants in the study. Before conducting interviews permission was granted from Walden University Institutional Review Board. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) stated that, "Researchers must be careful when gathering and

analyzing data, if not, an incomplete picture of the problem could form. Incomplete data is accepted in qualitative research because everything that could have an effect on the topic would be hard to consider” (p. 145). All data collected from participants was included in the study. Stake (1995) went on to say “everyone will not see the findings. Qualitative researchers take pride in discovering and portraying multiple views in a case” (p. 64). Creswell (2012) noted that qualitative researchers use general interviews or observations to ensure that the perspectives of participants are not restricted. “Qualitative researchers will not use another researcher’s instrument or closed ended information as in quantitative research; instead, opened questions designed by the researcher will be used” (p. 205). Leedy and Ormrod (2005) suggested that the sources of data are only confined by the researcher’s imagination and how creative he or she can be.

Summative data was used for the project evaluation. The data obtained during the interviews with participants served as summative data. The research questions were written to obtain data summarizing what the participants have gone through and what they hope to overcome.

A letter was received from the Killeen Community Center manager stating that she would act as the gatekeeper for the study. The study was conducted to create strategies to assist military members complete their degrees before exiting the military. Each participant completed a demographic survey that asked questions about their service in the military. The individual interview process included standardized open-ended questions, which were asked in a specific order. Those questions included:

RQ 1: What factors affect academic success of military members completing their college degrees?

To answer research question number one, the following questions were asked:

1. What are your immediate needs as an active duty military member working to obtain a college education?
2. What problems have you faced while enrolled in your courses?
3. In your experiences, what programs and services have been beneficial to you while working on your college education?
4. In your experiences, have college officials at the college you are attending worked to assist you in completing your college education?
5. Reflecting on the question above, what have college officials at the college you are attending done to assist you in completing your college education?

RQ 2: What steps might be implemented to assist military members in achieving academic success by completing their college degrees?

To answer research question number two, the following questions were asked:

1. Is there more college officials can do to assist active duty military members complete their education?
2. What difficulties have you encountered when dealing with your chain of command pertaining to attending college?
3. Does your chain of command promote education within your unit?
4. Have your military duties interfered in your ability to attend classes?

5. How do you balance military life, college life, and family life while working on your college education?

RQ3: Does the Army BSEP Program have the potential to be converted into a two-year degree program?

To answer research question number three, the following questions were asked:

1. Have you ever been enrolled in the Army's BSEP program?
2. If so, was the program helpful to you?
3. Do you believe the BSEP program has the potential to be converted into a two-year degree program offering a degree in general studies?
4. If you are enrolled in the program at this time, why are you enrolled?

Military members were interviewed one at a time, each interview lasted 45 minutes to one hour, and the researcher recorded each interview using a tape recorder. Stake (1995) believed "the interview to be the main road to many realities in research" (p. 64). Creswell (2007) stated, "The uses of interviews allow researchers to gain a perspective from participants that they will not be able to get using any other method. Interviewing and observation should be given special attention as they are used in all qualitative research approaches" (p. 132). After the completion of all the interviews, a transcriptionist transcribed the tape recordings verbatim. Once all the interviews were transcribed, collected data was analyzed. Data was read and coded by the researcher to create themes. Ten themes emerged from the collected data. The data collection methods used in the study was appropriate for qualitative research. The strategies to assist military

members obtain a college education while facing deployments and other military obligations can be found in Appendix A.

Field Notes

Field notes were hand written and the researcher kept track of the notes by writing them on the interview questionnaire. The researcher analyzed the field notes throughout the study. The notes provided information to assist in developing the themes within the study. Lodico, et al. (2010) suggested that:

Most qualitative researchers use field notes to explain their observations while collecting data. Since it is important to reduce researcher's bias, qualitative researchers commonly write down all their notes. Descriptive field notes include time, date, location, the list of participants, detailed descriptions of people, interactions, activities, and the observed setting. Reflective field notes describe thoughts and feelings the researcher may have about their observations. These notes allow researchers to increase their recognition of their feelings, beliefs, and thoughts that might impact their observations (pp. 119-121).

The Demographic Survey

According to Lodico, et al. (2010), demographic surveys supply in-depth information needed for a study. Demographic information collected depends solely on the type of study conducted. The following demographic information was collected from participants in the study: (a) gender, (b) branch of service, (c) age group, (d) number of deployments, (e) number of years served in the military, (f) number of college courses

completed, (g) military exit date, and (h) if they will complete their degree before leaving the military.

Interview Procedures

Creswell (2012) stated that when conducting qualitative research, the use of open-ended questions allows participants to share their experiences without the views of the researcher or the use of previous research findings. Open-ended questions allow participants to produce their own responses. In addition, Creswell (2012) found individual interviews to be a popular approach in individual interviewing. This type of interviewing is ideal for participants who are not shy and can comfortably articulate their ideas.

Interviews were recorded and notes were written down. All information was stored in a file cabinet labeled “research study” and tracked by the date collected. Research material was stored with the participant’s identification number on the file. Notes were written on the research questionnaire sheet of each participant.

Turner (2010) stated that interview preparation is very important because it allows the researcher the opportunity to prepare for the interview. “The preparation phase prior to the actual interview can either alleviate or exuberate any problems that may occur once the interviews begins” (Turner, 2010, p. 756). During the interview preparation stage, the researcher constructed effective research questions. McNamara (2009) suggested that the wording of research questions should be open-ended, which encourages participants to use their own words to respond. Further, McNamara (2009) stated that questions should be neutral, the researcher should only ask one question at a time, all questions should be

worded in a way that they can be understood by all participants in the study, and the researcher should avoid using questions that begin with why.

A week prior to the interviews, participants were telephoned, reminding them of the study. Additionally, participants were sent an email that included: the consent form (see Appendix B), a demographic survey (see Appendix C), and the interview questions (see Appendix D). Study participants were asked to read and sign their consent forms, complete their demographic surveys, and familiarize themselves with the research questions before attending their interview. The researcher and participants agreed upon a time and date for each interview. All consent forms were collected before the interviews began.

The researcher worked to maintain control of the interview and provided transitions between subjects. After each interview was completed, participants were asked: (a) would they like to add any further information, (b) if they have any other questions, and (c) to contact the researcher if they had any other questions. Each participant was given a business card with the researcher's contact information on it.

Data Analysis

The inductive approach to data analysis was utilized, which according to Lodico et al. (2010), is often referred to as a "bottom-up" approach to knowing when the researcher uses different observations to paint a picture of the phenomenon being studied. Inductive reasoning often leads to inductive methods of data collection where the researcher (1) systematically observes the problem under investigation, (2) searches for patterns or themes in the observations, and (3) develops a generalization from analysis of

those themes. According to Johnson and Christensen (2004), “An inductive approach involves the researcher working back and forth until themes are identified” (p. 39).

The researcher was the instrument to collect data for the study as well as conduct interviews with study participants. Using interviews to triangulate data collected ensured the trustworthiness of data. Once all data was collected, it was analyzed, read, and coded into themes. All coding was done by hand. A peer review was conducted during the study to ensure accuracy and credibility of findings.

Coding Data

According to Creswell (2012), researchers who use the qualitative research method will first evaluate collected data by reading through it in order to comprehend the data. Most qualitative data has to be coded, which is done to reduce a text or image database to certain descriptions and themes. “The text must be examined one line at a time, the researcher must understand the participants words, and then label the text with a code” (Cresswell, 2012, p. 261).

Data was analyzed during collection, and once all data was collected, it was coded. Open coding was initially used to create descriptions and themes within the data. Brackets were placed around text that could be potential codes and themes as well as key sentences. Spaulding and Voegtle (2010) explained that, “Coding can be used to find portions of data that explain relationships between data” (p. 305). Creswell (2012) stated that, “The researcher bases categories on data collected using interviews, observations, and notes written down by the researcher doing the collection of data” (p. 425).

Axial coding was later used to find a correlation between codes, to find similarities amongst those codes, and to establish connections between collected data. After conducting all the interviews, the researcher read over the transcripts multiple times to identify codes within the data. Codes included uncertainty, military cultural, fair treatment, military obligations, and understanding military students. Some of the codes were expected, while others were not. Stake (1995) stated that data can be analyzed at any time once collected. “By analyzing the data, researchers are giving meaning to their first impression. The data is simply being broken down and taken apart for a better understanding of it. Analyzing data is never ending” (Stake, 1995, p. 71). Within the study, data was analyzed from start to finish of the study.

Validity

Creswell (2012) stated that, “When collecting and analyzing data, the researcher should ensure that findings and interpretations are accurate” (p. 259). According to Merriam (1998), in order for research to have an impact, the studies conducted must be believed and trustworthy. The studies must foster insights as well as conclusions so that those who read the studies can trust the findings. If readers are to feel comfortable with research results, they must believe the study is valid and trustworthy (Merriam, 1998). To ensure the findings were accurate, a member check was incorporated into the study by allowing study participants to read the findings developed from data collected from them. I also told each participant that if they had any questions about the findings or needed to speak with me about the findings, they could do so at their convenience.

Reliability

To ensure reliability, the peer reviewer performed an audit. The audit ensured findings were grounded in the data by examining entries pertaining to data collection, interviews, transcribing, coding, and data analysis. Yin (1994) believed, “Research should be conducted as if someone is always looking over the researcher’s shoulder; this will allow the research procedures to be repeated by an auditor if need be” (p. 37). During the audit, the peer reviewer had the responsibility of ensuring that the research process was being conducted ethically. The result of the audit was that the research process was being conducted as it should be. The peer reviewer discovered that there was a discrepancy in the way participants felt their former instructors had treated them. The discrepancy is explained in this section of the paper.

Discrepancies

A discrepancy was discovered when the first participant interviewed stated each of his college instructors had been supportive and worked to assist him any way they could. The other 14 participants all stated their instructors were not supportive and often made it hard for them to complete their assignments when their military duties caused them to miss classes. When I informed the participants that participant number one stated the opposite of what they stated, each participant told me that they could only speak of the experiences they had in the classroom and no one else’s. When I informed participant number one of what the other participants stated, he said that he believed most military members who are students do not work as hard as they should when working on their

college education. He also stated that he believed some military members would like for college instructors to give them grades instead of earning their grades.

Findings

A program evaluation was conducted to examine the Army's BSEP program to determine if it could be converted into a two-year general studies degree program. In speaking with participants who participated in the study, it was determined that military members stationed at Fort Hood are in need of a way to complete their education before leaving the military. Converting the Army's BSEP program into a two-year degree program would provide military members the opportunity to leave the military from Fort Hood with their degrees.

The findings suggest that military members face many obstacles while working on their degrees. They do not have enough time to complete their education, they do not receive enough support from their leaders, deployments hinder their completion of college courses, and courses are often unavailable. The findings also suggest that military members who attend college often have instructors who do not support them in the classroom. New findings suggest that policies should be changed affecting how military members are treated when they withdrawal from classes due to military deployments. Military members often find it hard to balance their military obligations, family obligations, and college life.

The findings were merged in the themes and created an understanding of problems associated with military members not being able to complete their education before leaving the military. The data collected from participants provided a clearer

picture of what military members seeking an education must endure, which contributed to this study. Future research is needed to ensure that military members are educated if they desire to be.

Assumptions

It was assumed that military leaders and educators at Fort Hood Army Installation would provide assistance to eliminate obstacles faced by military members working towards their degrees. It was also assumed that military leaders on Fort Hood Army Installation were aware of the need for military members to complete their degrees prior to leaving the military. The final assumption was that military members would be willing to participate in this study.

Delimitations

The researcher was the only person who conducted interviews. All interviews were conducted at the Killeen Community Center and lasted 45 minutes to an hour. All participants met the criteria outlined in the flier, and no exceptions were made. Only 15 participants were chosen for the study. Participants were asked the same questions in the same order.

Limitations

Limitations include military leaders refusing to provide support to military members seeking an education, some military members may not be interested in attending college, and military leaders and education leaders may ignore the study's findings. Another limitation included the program evaluation was limited to the perceptions of the participants involved in the study and not being able to speak with

education leaders or others who may have provided more information about the current BSEP program. The final limitation included gaining access to a meeting room was sometimes difficult because the site is a community center and meeting rooms were assigned on a first come basis at no cost.

College and Military Members

Research questions were designed to focus on the needs of military members pursuing an education. Questions were asked specifically to gain knowledge about their experiences while working on their education and serving on active duty. Their experiences, perceptions, and beliefs were important in the development of 10 major themes:

1. Lack of time for classes and assignments.
2. Lack of support from military leaders.
3. Multiple deployments.
4. Non-availability of courses.
5. College instructors' lack of support.
6. Difficulties when withdrawing from classes.
7. Feeling unwelcome in school.
8. Balancing military, college, and family life.
9. Transferability of existing college credits into the new program.
10. Creating an education program that works for military members.

Responses to Research Question 1. What factors affect academic success of military members completing their bachelors' degrees?

Interview Questions:

1. What are your immediate needs as an active duty military member working to obtain a college education?
2. What problems have you faced while enrolled in your courses?
3. In your experiences, what programs and services have been beneficial to you while working on your college education?
4. In your experiences, have college officials at the college you are attending worked to assist you in completing your college education?
5. Reflecting on the question above, what have college officials at the college you are attending done to assist you in completing your college education?

These interview questions related to the study because each question allowed participants to describe their perceptions of what hinders their success in the education arena while on active duty. The questions allowed participants to reflect on problems they face while working to complete their degrees. The questions also allowed participants the opportunity to share their perspectives about converting the Army's BSEP program. Evaluating the Army's BSEP to determine if the program could be converted into a program offering a two-year general studies degree could provide military members with another alternative to work on their degrees. Approval from military leaders to convert the program would prove that they support those military members pursuing their education while serving on active duty.

Theme 1: Time

This theme relates to military members not having enough time to attend classes and complete assignments. Each participant stated that time was a major factor preventing him or her from completing his or her education prior to leaving the military. In this context, time is seen as the opportunity for military members to apply maximum efforts toward accomplishing their educational goals. Participants stated that when leaders fail to provide time for education, it results in frustration, resentment, and incompleteness of educational goals. Some military members are not released early enough to attend all their classes.

Time constraints and military obligations are not the only obstacles in the way of military members completing their education. Clinton (2002) interviewed 92 military members who stated that two major factors affecting whether they attended college or not included a lack of motivation to attend classes and a lack of interest in courses offered. They also stated two major barriers included where they were assigned and a lack of support from their chain of command. Even today, military members who work to obtain a college degree must deal with those same challenges faced by military members many years ago.

When discussing factors affecting academic success of military members, time was the number one problem. Participant 05354 stated his schedule is often complicated and very busy. They must be on duty 24 hours a day seven days a week. A lack of time is a serious issue for the participants in the study. Even when some military members are

granted permission to enroll in class, participants stated often they have to miss classes when duty called. Participant 05354 offered this perspective about time:

My immediate need is I need more time. It is harder for a military police; I mean because I normally work, I can work today from 06:30 and get off at 16:00.

Tomorrow they will put me on mid shift, so I'm working from 10:30 at night until 8:00 in the morning, and even if I have a scheduled day off, it is not necessarily guaranteed that I will have the day off. I have to answer the phone if duty calls.

Even if I am in class, calls cannot be ignored. I might work a week of days, a week of nights, and holidays. As a military police officer, I work a week of days and a week of nights all the time plus holidays. It is not a matter of what holiday, no matter what day of the week, we as military police are always working. School is not important for the most part. Even while enrolled in school, there have been times when I could not complete my classes because I did not have time for work, sleep, and class. Sometimes I can complete a class, and sometimes it is impossible. A lack of time is the problem. I really do not have too much time to do homework, go to class, and stuff like that, so my schedule is really hard. I need more hours in a day.

It is important for a military member's chain of command to support those who desire an education. The chain of command can work to provide more time to military members completing their degrees by being more supportive. One military unit allowed their soldiers to take classes in a Gauntlet classroom. Taking classes in the Gauntlet classroom requires the student to work at a fast pace, but they earn many credits in a short

time period. Not many military members know about the Gauntlet classroom. Participant 05354 explained how his unit gave him time to attend classes within the unit:

My chain of command can start by offering more classes at the unit level. I once took a class in a Gauntlet classroom; it was nice because I was on platoon duty not working on the road. My place of duty was in the class, and it was pretty amazing. I received two credits for one week of class work. I believe it was through our brigade. A teacher from Central Texas College came into the unit to teach the class. I took political science and government and it took one week, yes, a one-week class! Our company supplied the books. After we completed the class, we took a test. If you passed the test, you received two credits. It was great, and tuition assistance covered the cost of the class. It was a very fast pace and lots of studying. It was worth it because had I not taken the class, I would not be closer to completing my degree. Taking Gauntlet classes saved time.

Participant 05348 often works nights and weekends, which makes it difficult to complete her degree. Working in a military hospital is just like working in any other hospital: the hospital never closes. Sometimes class work has to wait while the mission is completed. For the most part, the mission controls every aspect her life. Her immediate needs as a service member working on her education are no difference from any of the other study participants. She has to face challenges and many obstacles, but her biggest obstacle is a lack of time to attend classes and complete assignments. Participant 05348 angrily made these comments:

Time, time, and more time that is what I need to complete my studies. Military students do not have the same challenges as those students who have never been in the military. Our challenges are greater, and we deal with much more. We have to work harder and face more obstacles in order to obtain our degree. Sometimes I have to leave in the middle of class to report to the hospital for a last minute assignment. The time that I lost from class usually cannot be made up. If I work the late shift when I come home, I am too tired to work on assignments. My chain of command knows that I am enrolled in classes. I cannot enroll in classes without then knowing about it. They must approval almost everything, but the mission is always first. I can easily take classes when I am not pulling military duty, but for the most part, I am always on duty. I am on duty when I should be in class. Even if I am able to attend a class for a whole semester, I still might not get all my assignments complete, which will affect my grade. Time is not on my side, or for the most part when it comes to school, it usually is not on any service member's side. Leaders can show that they support my efforts in working towards my degree by giving me time. They can stop putting me on overnight duty when they know I have classes. My leaders should know everything about educational benefits just in case I need assistance from them. Sometimes they are confused when you ask about education benefits.

Participant 05344 added:

For the most part, the chain of command will act like they support education when it is time for soldiers to reenlist. They want trained soldiers to remain in the

Army. If a soldier is reenlisting for the first time, commanders will offer then the school option, which allows time off for school. What gets me is that even when soldiers are given the school option for reenlisting often they are not allowed to attend school. They still might have to go to work for something. Giving me the school option to get me to remain in the Army is not supporting my educational needs if I still have to work during this time.

Military leaders working towards their degrees face problems as well. They must find time for classes and take care of those military members who are assigned to them. Obtaining a degree comes after mission accomplishment. Participant 05349 is fully committed to military members who want to complete their degrees. He works as a leader in his unit but still finds it hard to work on his degree because he has military obligations, even more than military members who are not serving in leadership roles. As a leader, he is responsible for the wellbeing of military members, and he takes his job very seriously. He wanted to complete his degree before he left the military in 2014.

Participant 05349 believes:

The unit needs to get more involved in educating service members and give them more time off for school. At this time and probably always, the mission will determine what service members will and will not be allowed to do. School is just not important enough too many unit commanders and leaders. If we could get more time for classes, so many more service members could complete their degrees. I wish I could give them more time off, but the unit commander has to approve it. I can only work to get approval, but I do not make any promises.

Many times it just depends on what is going on in the unit when a service member requests time off for school.

The participants all agreed that more time is what they need the most. When unit commanders and leaders refuse to provide time off for classes and assignments, it is nearly impossible for military members to complete their degrees. Those unit commanders and leaders who support education are proving that they care about the well being of their military members. Not only do military members believe they need more time for school; they also believe they need support from their military leaders.

Commanders and leaders who want to support military members working on their degrees can do so by giving them an hour or two off during the duty day to work on class assignments without any interruptions. They can ensure that military members who are enrolled in school do not receive night duty on class nights. There are numerous things that can be done by unit commanders and leaders to show their support. The participants stated that they do not receive enough support from their unit commanders in reference to education because they always have to work or go to field trainings. Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell (2009) stated that, "Combat veterans require support from both school officials and policy makers because they are a special population, with special issues and often require special services" (p. 6).

Theme 2: Lack of Support

This theme relates to military members not having the support from leaders. Some leaders continue to assign additional duties that interfere with evening classes. They often have late formations or overnight training. According to the participants, their leaders do

not take into consideration the needs of military members working on their education or support their future goals. They face many problems while enrolled in school. Not only do military members not have enough time for classes, but they also believe that their chain of command lacks support for them. Participant 05341 explained,

When I work evenings and nights it is hard for me to attend classes. The unit commander knows that I am in school; he gave me permission to go, but still often I am still working when I should be attending classes. I wish my military leaders would act like they care about me as a person and not just as an individual who they can send off to war. Once I leave the military, I still have to support my family. Without a degree, that will be hard to do.

Participant 05342 when on to offer:

I need support from my chain of command to complete my degree. They need to act like they understand what we go through. Officers come into the military with their degrees so they do not have to worry about going to class and their military duties. I believe that for the most part, officers take care of one another. I believe that more support is needed for enlisted service members working to complete their degrees. We are the worker bees of the military. We deserve to be educated and get support from our unit commanders and leaders. Their support will help make it just a little easier. Some of my leaders knew I was enrolled in a class that might start at six in the evening, instead of letting me leave after the evening formation I have to stay late to complete a detail that I am more than sure they knew about before the end of the day.

Participant 05342 talked about military life but also spoke about life after the military:

These leaders have to understand that enlisted service members will not be in the Army always. Sure some of us will stay 10, 15, or even 20 years. Once our time is over serving this country, we should at least walk away from the military with a four-year degree if that is what we came into the military for. Without support from our chain of command, we cannot complete our degrees.

Participants 05341 and 05342 both believe that military officers support one another and that enlisted military members desiring an education do not receive the support they need. Participant 05342 does not believe that enough support will ever be given and that most enlisted military members will not complete their degrees before leaving the military. He believes that leaders just will not support educating enlisted military members.

Participant 05346 has been serving on active duty for the past 18 years and does not believe he has received the support he fully needs to complete his degree. He went on to explain:

I realized early on in my military career that as an enlisted service member, I am not completely valued. After 18 years in the military, deployments to Hungary, Bosnia, and Iraq, I finally realized that if I want to complete my degree before I leave the military in 2015, I just have to get it done. I have a year left to complete my degree. I am going to finish it up because I have to look out for myself. These young soldiers coming behind me are going to have to work harder to complete

their degrees. If the unit commanders and noncommissioned officers such as myself does not help these young soldiers, they will have to help themselves. Support will not always be available, but you have to get out and get what you believe is yours. You have to fight for what you want and need.

Participants in the study have been working to complete their degrees for years. Even though it has been a battle, for the most part, they all agreed that they will continue to fight to reach their goals. These military members not only fight on the battlefield, but they also fight to obtain the degrees they so badly deserve. Leaders working to support those military members fighting for their degrees must work to get more leaders involved in the fight.

Participant 05346 went on to explain:

Some leaders will go out of their way for service members enrolled in college; I am one of those leaders. Some of us give these service members extra time to complete their assignments and suggest that they remain behind when we go on field trainings. If they cannot remain behind, I do all that I can to bring them in from the field training on the night they have classes. Leaders like me are so few and far in between. We cannot do it all alone; other leaders must get involved, push these service members, and allow them the time need for classes and assignments. I am doing what I can to ensure that at the end of the day I have made someone's life better than it was when I met them. As a leader I am responsible for those service members who work for me. I can make their problems worse, or I can be a part of the solution that makes things better for the

soldiers. Education is important and most of us came into the military to get an education. When service members leave the military and have not completed a degree, some feel so let down. They feel like the military has failed them.

Participant 05341 responded by saying:

Understand that I am not saying all leaders are unsupportive. Education centers at Fort Irwin and Fort Polk Army Installations work around the service member's training schedule. Leaders at these installations push their soldiers to go to school when they are not training. I was stationed at both of these installations; I took classes and allowed those service members who wanted to take classes the opportunity to so.

Participant 05345 stated:

Sometimes I stay over when the class ends to speak with the instructor. If I take a class that is from 5:30 p.m. to 10:00 p.m., by the time I make it home, it is almost 11:00. Sometimes I do homework and then I go to bed. I am in the bed by maybe 2 a.m. I need my chain of command to understand that I am tired after working all day and attending school. I need them to excuse me from staff duty so that I can get to class, work on assignments, and turn them in on time.

Support from leaders is needed to support those military members who would like to complete their degrees. Military members need their leaders to understand that their education is important and completing their degrees is necessary. Deployments also cause some military members not to complete their degrees. Cook and Kim (2009) found that the military provides information on education benefits when military members return

from deployments. However, when they return home, many military members only want to spend time with their families and do not pay close attention to the information being provided. Therefore, “some military members become confused about their education benefits” (Cook & Kim, 2009, p. 25).

Of the 15 participants in the study, 13 had deployed at least once. Some have deployed three or more times. Often deployments caused them to withdraw from classes in the middle of the semester. Many of the deployments are planned well in advance, but there are times when military members find themselves deploying at the last minute with only a week or two to prepare.

Theme 3: Deployments

This theme relates to military members being forced to withdraw from classes due to upcoming deployments. Often, they must miss classes to prepare for deployments. Along with leadership, deployments cause a significant impact on military members working on their college education. Deployments offer a different set of challenges, including: a lack of time for classes, materials unavailable for course work, and a lack of technology. Some military members believe that education is secondary.

As the war in Iraq took center stage, funds allocated for educating service members through eArmyu were set aside for the war. Those military members who were enrolled in the programs withdrew, and many did not complete their degrees (Halligan, 2007).

Participant 05343 stated:

Deployments are a way of life for service members. The deployments have slowed down, but we all know that we can be deployed to another country at any time. It is what we do. Often school has to take a back seat to our military duties. For the most part, we know, and we understand it. I came into the military to serve my country, but if I can complete my education as well, that would be great. Education is not the main focus for most service members. I am glad people like you are doing this type of research; it might make a difference in the lives of service members. I hope the military pays attention.

Bricker (2013) found that the uncertainty of not knowing if and when orders will be given to deploy at any given time is a major factor in the lives of military members. “It is a factor which could lead to a disruption in participating in class or receiving orders to deploy could cause military members to stop attending class months before the deployment” (Brickler, 2013, p. 42).

Participant 05349 talked about a deployment that took him away from online classes he was taking. Once he started taking his classes while being deployed, he started having problems with the technology. He explained:

I went on a deployment in 2003 and could not finish my online class. There were computers where we were located, and the technology was horrible. Sure, nowadays, technology is better, but even now, I sometimes have problems completing online classes when deployed to remote locations. Before the unit arrives to their location, the unit commander should make sure we have some type

of Internet already available. Being able to complete my classes while deployed gives me something to look forward to.

Deployments will always be a part of the military; there is no way around it.

While deployed, military members would like to continue taking classes. A lack of technology could cause problems for them. Sometimes remote locations make it harder to take classes online. Another problem is non-availability of classes. Sometimes, military members must wait for the next semester to take a class. Only one instructor may teach the class during the semester. When military members have to wait on classes, it delays the completion of their education.

Theme 4: Non-availability of Courses

This theme relates to the non-availability of courses. Often, when a course is unavailable during the semester, a military member either sits out for the semester or takes another class that sometimes does not pertain to their degree. Participants stated that courses should be offered every semester, making them readily available. In order for military members to complete their degrees in as little time as possible, universities and colleges must offer the same class with multiple instructors teaching the class during the semester. Participant 05341 complained about classes being offered when it is inconvenient for military members. He explained:

These colleges offer classes when they want to, and sometimes the classes are only offered once a year. How can you complete a degree like that? You can't finish your degree taking a class once a year. The colleges in this area are surrounded by military and family members. Deployments play a major factor in

everything at Fort Hood, and local education leaders know all this. Offering classes more than once a year can help me and other service members get closer to the completion of our degrees. Sometimes when the class is only offered once a year, I have to wait for months to take the class. So not only do we as soldiers need support from our chain of command, we need the same support from the colleges we attend. University representatives should also work to ensure that degree plans are in place and they match the degree program a service member is in. This will ensure that only the classes needed are taken.

Taking classes online could be an option for some military members. Those military members who cannot attend traditional classes should seek their degrees through distance learning.

Brotherton (2002) found that distance learning became a large part of the Army in 2001, when over 10,000 military members explored opportunities offered within the eArmyu program. “The program was not offered Army wide and only a few military bases participated in the program. Many military members participating in the program where not planning to work on a bachelor degree until the eArmyu program was created” (Brotherton, 2002, p. 2).

Participant 05350 explained:

Some instructors believe that most military members are looking for a free ride. I believe that for the most part, we are looking for a little understanding to be able to complete our degrees.

Responses to Research Question 2: What steps might be implemented to assist military members in achieving academic success by completing their bachelors' degrees before exiting the military?

Interview Questions:

1. Is there more college officials can do to assist active duty military members complete their education?
2. What difficulties have you encountered when dealing with your chain of command pertaining to attending college?
3. Does your chain of command promote education within your unit?
4. Have your military duties interfered with your ability to attend classes?
5. How do you balance military life, college life, and family life while working on your college education?

Theme 5: Instructors Who Do Not Provide Support

This theme relates to a lack of support from instructors. Some refuse to provide military members the opportunity to make up course work missed due to mandatory military duties. Some instructors do not understand the impact of preparing for a deployment. The preparation for a deployment is actually more stressful than the deployment itself, according to the some participants.

Participant 05352 spoke about teachers who have been very supportive of him. His friends have complained about their teachers, but for the most part, his experiences have been positive. He explained:

Most of my teachers have been helpful and understand that I am military. But I have friends who complain about their teachers not helping them when they cannot turn assignments in on time. Some of my instructors have given me extra time to complete class work. I have had other instructors who did not care why my assignment was late, and I failed the course. Sometimes they understand and give extra time for assignments. Overall, I believe that all instructors teaching military students should understand that service members have different responsibilities than those students who are not in the military.

Participant 05355 explained that as a service member, he just would like to work hard in school and complete his degree. He went on to explain:

Other service members told me a lot of their instructors act like they do not care and will not go the extra mile to help them when they are late with assignments or have missed classes. Some people say we want special privileges, but we do not. We want our instructors and fellow students to understand that we have different challenges. We have military duties, deployments, field trainings, and other responsibilities that come with being a service member. Special treatment is not what we want. We just want to work hard and get our degrees, but we need instructors to be supportive just like we need our leaders to be. We come with special circumstances.

Participant 05354 stated:

Instructors know I am serving this country; I am not asking for anyone to give me a grade that I have not earned. If I have to miss class for training, I should be

allowed to come back from training and make up the work. My job will always come first – I have no choice in the matter, but I need my education for life after the military and to help me get promoted. Other instructors have worked around my schedule to assist me. I believe that as long as college officials and instructors work to understand our schedules, then everything else is on us. Instructors cannot do the work for us, and they cannot give us the answers. We must be willing to at least do our very best to succeed in the classroom with or without their help when we find ourselves missing classes.

Participant 05345 stated:

I wish more of my instructors would act like they care about what service members face daily. I have had instructors – as a matter of fact, I have an instructor now who could care less if I pass or fail. I explained to her that I would be going to training and would be missing two classes. The instructor explained to me that if I missed two classes, I would fail, and there is nothing she could do to help me. The class lasted eight weeks. I understand missing two classes could cause me to fail, but I am willing to make up all my work, do extra work, and turn in my project. She still might not help me out. I will wait and see what she says. I asked her if she ever served in the military, and she told me no. I have only had one instructor in three years who served in the military. That instructor was so helpful – she encouraged us, and she pushed us to complete our classes. Some instructors who have never served in the military often do not understand what we face. Universities should hire more teachers who have served to teach those of us

who are serving. I believe instructors who have served and understand what we face will be able to assist us better in the long run.

Participant 05352 stated:

Sometimes when I take a class I listen very carefully to the introduction given by the instructor on the first night of the class. If they do not say anything about supporting military students, I know that I am in for a rocky ride. They must understand that we are fighting for them, so they can sleep at night, and so that they can come to work and not be shot at in their back yards. Helping us complete our degrees is a very small price for them to pay for our military service.

Participant 05349 stated:

My military duties have interfered so many times in my ability to complete a class, but instructors have really hurt me when they refuse to understand that I missed class because I had no choice. I do not sign up for a class with the intentions of missing it. I never know what will happen in my military life from one day to the next. Some of these instructors are so mean-spirited when dealing with military students. My grandfather is a Vietnam Veteran, and he tells these stories about how badly they were treated after the war. Sometimes I feel his pain when dealing with these instructors. Some of them make comments about deployments and they really do not know what they are talking about. I get support from some instructors, but not from many, and not very often. Prior military instructors should be hired more often.

Participant 05347 stated:

Usually I work hard not to miss any classes or assignments, but being a soldier often makes it very difficult. I do not expect to be treated special in the classroom. I expect the teacher to understand and support my educational needs. Once, I made a mistake and called one of my teachers Mrs. instead of Doctor. That small mistake determined the whole semester for me. She was nasty towards me; she spoke negatively about the military and the deployments we go on. I worked in a group on a project and received a “D” for the class while everyone else in my group received “A”s and “B”s. I tried to fight the “D”, but had to retake the class. Another instructor who had served in the military allowed me to take the class over with him. He did not require that I attend classes, but I had to pay for the course out of my pocket and write a reflection paper for each chapter in the book. At the end of the course, I earned an “A”. Thank the Lord for that instructor who had served in the military and cared about students. I believe that instructors who have never served in the military should be made to take classes on the military when they are hired. They need to understand what is involved in a service member’s life.

Participant 05348 stated:

Some instructors do not support military students or any students, for that matter. I must confess the instructor is not always the blame, so let’s not just place the blame on them. Students must let their instructors know what is going on. They should not wait until the last minute to inform their instructors they will miss classes or need more time to complete their assignments. Students must

communicate effectively, and if they do not know how, they should learn. It will require work on everyone's part.

Participant 05351 stated:

Being a student who is serving on active duty is so hard. I am not looking for a handout. I am looking to complete my degree so once I leave the Army I can support myself. Support from my instructors would only make the road to my degree a little easier. Some instructors just do not understand the life of service members, and I do not believe that they are trying to make things hard for us; they just do not know how to make things better. They need training on how to properly assist service members in their classes.

Theme 6: Create New Policies Dealing with the Withdrawal of Classes

This theme relates to military members having to withdraw from classes due to military obligations. More time should be allotted for the withdrawal of classes. Each participant had taken a class paid for using tuition assistance. When a military member does not complete a class paid for using tuition assistance, the military member must reimburse the government for the class. Most military members withdraw as an absolute last resort, and paying for classes they were unable to complete can cause financial hardships.

Participant 05355 stated:

I had to withdraw from class because I received orders to deploy at the last minute. Once I was deployed because a fellow soldier's wife became very ill and he had to come home, so I went to take his place. When I enrolled in the class, I

was under the impression that I would be able to complete it. After I withdrew from class, I had to pay the government for the tuition assistance that was used to initially pay for my class. It was not fair because I was forced to deploy after I thought I would not go on the deployment.

Participant 05345 stated:

When commanders approve tuition assistance, they are giving service members permission to attend school. If I have to withdraw from school because I have to work late, the commander should make sure I am not held accountable for the cost of the class.

Participant 05344 stated:

There have been times I know for a fact that service members know they should withdraw from a class, but they wait until the time has passed which allows them the chance to withdraw without any problems. The student has to take responsibility as well and do what they have to do the minute they know they must drop a class. Waiting until the last minute to drop a class only costs more money.

Participant 05342 stated:

I have dropped three classes, and each time, I had to pay out of my pocket. One semester, I missed too many classes to pass, so I stopped going. I withdrew, and the school did nothing to help me. I went to the National Training Center (NTC) in Fort Irwin, California. I enrolled in the class because I had the school option. The commander told me that I could have six months to go to school. I was only

supposed to go to work for the first formation for accountability. I ended up at NTC for a month during the semester.

Participant 05352 stated:

Withdrawing from a class is one of the last things I want to do, but sometimes you just do not have a choice. These schools do not always make it easy. The timeframe to drop a class is too short. I believe you must drop a class within the first two weeks or something like that. I think you should have at least a month to withdraw from a class.

Theme 7: Create a College Atmosphere That Promotes Diversity

This theme relates to military members not feeling welcome in the classroom. Some of their fellow classmates treat them differently after they return from combat, and some instructors make rude remarks about the military. According to Sargent (2009), military members should form support groups where they can talk about problems associated with their classes and create solutions to reduce or eliminate problems they are experience in academia.

Participant 05346 stated:

There have been times when classmates who have never been in the military will ask me questions about the military; they will ask if I have killed someone in the war. Some classmates act like my military service does not matter. They act like the military is just some organization that promotes war and killing people.

Participant 05352 stated:

Often, when I am in class I feel like I am unwelcomed because I am in the military. It is like I am from another world just because I am a military man.

Participant 05345 stated:

The teachers sometimes act like they do not understand our jobs as service members. Some teachers and classmates who have never served in the military do not understand the military cultural. Let's face it: the military is a cultural in its own right. If our teachers and nonmilitary classmates are going to understand our cultural, they must be taught about it. Once they learn about it, then they will understand who we are as military members and not ask stupid stuff.

According to Brown and Gross (2011), students who serve in the military belong to a subpopulation of adult learners. They are different, have money for college and experience, and have credits that are often transferrable into degree programs because they have served on active duty.

Participant 05349 stated:

Sometimes I hate to let classmates know that I am in the military. I try my best not to wear my military uniform to classes off base. After being in a class off base for almost a month, I was running late and I went to class in my uniform. During each break, I was asked questions about the war, the military, and why I decided to join the military. Some of my classmates kept telling me that they could not believe I was in the military. Throughout the rest of the semester, I had to deal with craziness because I am serving in the military. I wish somebody would give these people a class on the military, show them what we do, and why we do our

jobs. We do what we do for them – so they can sleep at night. The college should promote military awareness, host trainings that showcase the military, and make every instructor and student attend.

Participant 05352 stated:

I was in a class once, and the teacher asked me questions about my military service. I thought some of the questions he asked were not appropriate, but in a way, I understood why he was asking so many questions. He was curious about the military. His questions took time away from the class. The school should offer military seminars to these people. We have sensitivity training in the military; it would be a good idea to offer sensitivity training to these nonmilitary people.

Some of the questions they ask are crazy. Some things you just do not ask people whom you do not know well.

Military life requires those who are serving to meet all their military obligations.

Military members desiring an education must realize that their military duties will always come first and everything else comes afterwards. Working on an education while serving in the military can often be a hard task, but it is not impossible to complete with hard work and support. Family members must also understand what challenges military members face.

Theme 8: Balancing it all: Military, College, and Family Life

This theme relates to balancing college life, military life, and family life. The military mission takes priority over everything in a military member's life. Long work hours are one reason why military members are unable to complete their courses and

spend adequate time with family members. Balancing course work and military obligations, along with obligations at home, often causes additional stress, which can cause some military members not to be successful in other areas of their lives.

Participant 05349 stated:

It is a struggle to balance it all. Sometimes I do not know how I am going to do everything. Family time suffers, sometimes my classes suffer, but my military duties are always covered. Balancing military, college, and family is so hard. I do what I can because I know that my military duties must be taken care of and for the most part I should be committed to school even when my military duties make me want to drop out of school. As for family life, well, they get in wherever they can fit in.

Participant 05350 stated:

Service members can get a degree on active duty if they really work hard; however, many are not where they should be because they do not work hard enough. Any free time and weekends that I am off go towards my school and the completion of my assignments. The family has to understand. Plus, classes do not last forever. My family knows that I am trying to make life better for them. Family time suffers, but it will be over soon. Some soldiers receive the college option and instead of spending the time on classes, they waste it playing around. They are not balancing anything.

Participant 05344 stated:

It is very hard to balance the three. What time the Army does not take up, class takes up. Really, there is no time for family. It is very difficult at times; I have to calculate the time it takes me to for my family and how much time I need to complete assignments with the time I have left over after my military duties are fulfilled. Sometimes I have to get permission to leave work early to get to class on time. I have used my vacation leave to ensure that I make it to class on time.

There is no other way for me to complete my degree. For the most part, I have spent many late nights trying to complete homework.

Participant 05353 stated:

I carefully try to handle it all, but it is very hard. Luckily for me, my family does not live here in Texas. They are in Maine. I still work late on assignments. I have not seen my family in months. Even when they visit me, I do not have time to spend with them.

Responses to Research Question 3: Does the Army BSEP program have the potential to be converted into a two-year degree program?

Interview Questions:

1. Have you ever been enrolled in the Army's BSEP program?
2. If so, did the program help you?
3. Do you believe the BSEP program could be changed into a program that offers a two-year general studies degree that could lead to a bachelor's degree?
4. If you are enrolled in the program at this time, why are you enrolled?

Theme 9: Transferability of Existing College Credits

Participant 05344 stated:

It is important that all college credits service members have already earned be taken into consideration. Many of us have earned many college credits but no degree. We cannot keep starting over when we enroll into new programs.

Participant 05342 stated:

I need to transfer my credits into a program and not have to start from scratch. It will not benefit me to lose any credits at this point. Each time I have deployed or dropped out of college because of a military move, I was on the losing end of the stick.

Participant 05345 stated:

I would enroll in the program if I were guaranteed that courses that I have already taken could be used towards the new degree program. The college credits that I already have must be evaluated before I would enrolled in the program. I could probably stand to lose three to six credits, but no more than that. It is to hard trying to obtain enough college credits to graduate when you are serving on active duty.

Participant 05351 stated:

If I can transfer any college credits that I already have, I would be willing to enroll in the program if it will get me closer to finishing my degree. Maybe it is time to add something to the BSEP program that all military members can benefit from.

Participant 05348 stated:

Transferring credits into the program would give me a head start towards my degree, which would probably allow me – well, not me because I will leave the Army in a year – but other service members could leave the military with their bachelors' degrees.

Theme 10: Create an Education Program for Military Members

Participant 05349 stated:

Creating a program that is geared towards service members is good and all, but what type of command support will we be given? Will they actually support this new BSEP program? I know that as a soldier, there have been times when I was told that I could enroll in school and was later told to drop out because I had military duties. Who is to say that will not happen with this program as well? It must be for military members and supported by all leaders.

Participant 05352 stated:

I am enrolled in BSEP at this time and I will be leaving the Army in about 13 months. The program will not do me much good. Had the program offered college credits, then it could help me. Converting the program could work and it might help other soldiers.

Participant 05355 stated:

The BSEP program has been around for as long as I have been in the Army, and I do not remember anyone ever considering changing it into a program that could lead to a two-year degree. Your question is can it be converted into a program that

offers a degree to help service members complete their four-year degrees before leaving the Army? I believe that the Army or any branch of the military can make whatever they want to happen. All that is needed is support from higher up. With the correct support, hell yes, it can be done without a doubt. Many things have to be considered. How will the program be implemented to attract service members? Where will the first class be offered, and will leaders really support those service members who enrolled? Once you get all that stuff out the way, I believe it will be a good program because it is already a military program.

Participant 05347 stated:

Does the program have the potential? Well, it could happen with the right marketing of the program. What is the incentive for enrolling in the program? It would be gaining a degree, so that alone will get service members enrolled.

Participant 05343 stated:

Anything that could help us complete our education is worth a try. Even if it fails, at least someone tried to help us graduate from college before leaving the ranks of the military.

Participant 05345 stated:

As I stated before, some service members do not want to work hard. They want teachers to give them credit for work that they did not complete. I believe that if this program is converted, there will be those who want a free ride. Of course, you will have individuals who will work their butts off and earn every credit, but there will be those who just want a free ride.

Participant 05350 stated:

I have been trying to complete a degree since I came into the military. I wish something like this was around years ago. I am working to finish up the BSEP program and complete college classes before I leave the Army. I am thinking about extending for 12 months just to complete my degree. Converting the program will have its ups and downs. Maybe it could work, maybe not.

More programs should be offered just to military members. We work hard and we do not ask for much. At least we could leave the military with an education. If the program is for us, then I think it would work if you get the correct support to make it work. It would be a military program, and offering a degree would be great.

Participant 05341 stated:

There are programs already in place for service members; some take advantage of them, while others do not. The main thing is how many units are really going to support this new program and allow their soldiers to attend classes offered during the duty day? If the leaders give their full support, I think it could work.

Participant 05346 stated:

Even if I believe the program could be a success, what I believe probably does not matter. It only matters for your study; therefore, I would say yes. Yes, it could be converted; however, there are things to think about: 1. Will the unit pay for the classes? 2. Will we be able to use tuition assistance to cover the cost? 3. What happens if we have to drop out of the program for any length of time?

Yes the program can be converted, I mean why not? It is a military program, and they can do with it whatever they want to. You will need the program to be offered by a college that is accredited.

Participant 05342 stated:

Possible, sure, but will the Army do it? Will it be cost effective for the military? I believe that the new program could be an investment in service members. Does the Army believe that we are worth the investment? If they believe we are, then this program could have a great impact for those service members who really would like to complete their degrees before they go back into the civilian world. Plus, a two-year degree often leads to a four-year degree. Sure, why not? With hard work, anything is possible. All the military has to do is say yes, they will convert the program, and it is a go. Just because the program is converted successfully does not mean that service members will enroll in it. Will it be forced upon them, or will they be able to decide if they want to attend? I believe that if they make the decision to enroll in the program, they will work harder to complete the program.

Conclusion

The literature review clearly highlighted the findings within the case study and substantiated that the topic was worth investigating. The literature review in Section 2 explained problems associated with military members being unable to complete their college degrees prior to leaving the military and other problems associated with serving in the military. The review did uncover an enormous amount of past and current research

on education military members; however, more research is needed in the future to help understand the problems associated with military members not being able to complete their education and to create more strategies that will assist those who serve in the military complete their education.

Also included in Section 2 is the methodology used within this study. The purpose of the study was restated. The design, population, sample, instruments used, methods for collecting data, and how information was collected were analyzed. A qualitative case study design was the research method used. Information about the research location how participants were recruited was identified. The Army's BSEP program was evaluated to determine if the program could be converted into a program offering military members a two-year general studies degree leading to the completion of their bachelors' degrees.

Study participants agreed that the conversion of the program would be a great idea, but they also shared some of their concerns. Those concerned included if the program is converted, they should have the opportunity to transfer college credits they have already earned into the program. If they enroll in the program, would their leaders really support those attending classes? For the most part, participants thought that if they were provided the chance to earn a two-year degree, they could possibly earn their bachelors' degrees before leaving the military. During the interviews, participants were allowed to provide their perspectives on how they view education while serving in the military.

Interviews were conducted one participant at a time. Participants were given adequate time to answer each question, and the interviews were recorded. When

participants were asked about the Army's BSEP program, their responses were written down. Included in Section 3 are potential resources, barriers, and time lines for implementation for the findings.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The findings are presented in a white paper to inform military and education leaders at Fort Hood Army Installation of the findings and recommendations of this study to assist military members to complete their education and how redesigning the Army's current BSEP program can help military members complete their degrees. Within Section 3, the description and goals of the project are discussed, the rationale for the study is restated, and another review of literature is conducted. Potential resources, potential barriers, and the timetable for implementation of the project are also included in this section. The roles and responsibilities of everyone involved in educating military members are presented. Finally, how the results of the study can impact social change locally and on a larger scale is also included within this section.

Description and Goals

The goals of the study were to determine what could be done to assist military members stationed at Fort Hood Army Installation complete their bachelors' degrees prior to exiting the military. Presented in a white paper are the strategies developed by answering the following questions: (a) What factors affect academic success of military members completing their bachelors' degrees? (b) What steps might be implemented to assist military members in achieving academic success by completing their bachelors' degrees before exiting the military? and (c) Does the army's BSEP program have the potential to be converted into a two-year degree program?

Evaluation of the BSEP program was chosen because it is a program offered to military members helping them to increase their basic skills in reading, math, and English. Some of the study participants were enrolled in the program at the time of their interviews, while others had been enrolled at some point in their military careers. The BSEP program is offered by the military to promote retention in the military, provide reenlistment options for military members, and increase job performance.

Participants in the study believe the program does have the potential to be converted into a two-year general studies degree program that could possibly lead to a bachelor's degree. However, changing the current program to a program that allows military members to earn 60 college credits would require local college officials to work with the military to design and implement the new program. Central Texas College is located on Fort Hood Army Installation and has a long history of supporting military members desiring an education. This college could be the first higher learning institution tasked to offer the converted BSEP program to military members.

The results from this study can be used by military leaders as well as by college leaders to assist military members achieve their educational goals while serving on active duty. The findings could also impact social change by helping military members obtain their degrees. Their degrees could help prepare them for the job market and help them obtain employment once their military obligation is completed. Putting the findings in a white paper allows them to be easily understood by both military leaders and education leaders.

Rationale

Since presenting the findings in the form of a dissertation would probably prove to be less useful for military leaders, education leaders, and other stakeholders, a white paper was the best way to deliver the findings. These individuals probably do not have time to read a 160-page dissertation, nor would many of them understand the research language presented within the paper. Presenting the findings in a white paper allowed me to introduce the main points within the study and was most appropriate for summarizing the findings of a program evaluation. The information is organized into sections, providing information needed to assist military members desiring an education. The results of this evaluation will be shared with military leaders, education leaders, military members, and other stakeholders; therefore, the white paper was appropriate and can reach a vast array of individuals in the shortest time.

Review of the Literature

This literature review provided research material pertaining to program evaluation. The literature review began with a review of scholarly journals and articles on program evaluation. Some older references were used to demonstrate that the process of program evaluation has not changed much over the years and to provide a better understanding of the process. Key words used to conduct the search included *research and evaluations*, *program evaluations*, *case studies*, and *strategic program evaluations*. The databases included ProQuest Database, Academic Search Premier, EBSCO Databases, Educational Resource Information Center, Dissertation and Theses at Walden University.

Program Evaluation

The purpose of this study was to determine what can be done to assist military members stationed at Fort Hood Army Installation complete their bachelors' degrees prior to exiting the military. It was important for effective strategies to be created to assist those military members desiring an education. Throughout the study, it was determined that the best way to assist those military members desiring an education would be to evaluate the BSEP, which is used to increase military members' knowledge of words, reading comprehension, and arithmetic reasoning. Converting the BSEP program into a program that allows military members to receive a two-year general studies degree could help them complete their bachelors' degrees and could help educate more military members. According to Spaulding (2008), program evaluation is used to examine programs. When programs are being evaluated, their worth is being determined, and recommendations are made to attempt to make the programs better (Spaulding, 2008).

The purpose of this study was to develop effective strategies to be implemented to assist military members achieve success in the education arena, whether stationed in a remote location or in a combat zone. Strategies to assist military members transition from combat to the classroom could help them become successful in the academic arena, prepare them for civilian life, and allow education institutions to demonstrate their support for military members.

Program evaluation was chosen because the evaluation could lead to recommendations to educate military members using the Army's BSEP program and other military education programs to help education military members. According to

Lodico et al. (2010), program evaluation uses either formative feedback or summative feedback. To determine if the goals of the project were met, a summative feedback approach was used.

An outcome based evaluation was conducted to determine if the converted programs were successful or not. Schalock (2001) stated that, "Outcome based evaluations should be conducted when researchers are trying to determine a program's contributions" (p. 32). However, Youg-Lyun (2011) argued that, "Program evaluation validity is depended on whether the outcome measured makes sense to stakeholders" (p. 308). Stakeholders are important to the process, and their support will be needed to complete the conversion of the BSEP program and its implementation as well as other military education programs designed to assist military members obtain their degrees. The outcome-based evaluation can help determine whether or not goals were achieved, if changes to the program made a difference, whether or not changes are needed to ensure success, and if others leaders need to become involved to make the needed changes to military programs.

Scriven (1991) stated that in the 1960s, Congress decided to fund professional evaluations of programs that were under the federal government's control. In conducting these evaluations, a conscious effort was made to follow steps in a scientific manner, and a new field of practitioners was developed. Evaluations are either formal or informal and often will have limitations that will have to be discussed while the evaluation is being conducted. How the limitations are to be addressed can often assist the researcher in

determining whether to use a formal or informal evaluation (Worthen, Sanders, & Fitzpatrick, 1997).

Conducting an evaluation can provide information to evaluators to determine if a program offers what it should and to determine if it has the potential to reach a larger audience (Usun, 2008). Yong-Lyun (2011) suggested that the use of program evaluation can provide detailed information about the improvements that are needed.

According to Lodico, et al. (2006), program evaluation can use quantitative and qualitative methods. The overall purpose is completely different from other research. When quantitative and qualitative researchers study programs, the findings are usually used for ongoing decision making purposes. A program can become better using only one program evaluation (Lodico, et al., 2006).

Program evaluations can strengthen programs as well as help make improvements to programs (Donaldson, Christie, and Mark, 2009). Improving the BSEP program could help more military members complete their degrees. Spiller (2013) stated that, “Evaluations are often done for a particular purpose” (p. 12). The conversion of the BSEP program was chosen for the purpose of creating a way to educate military members before they leave the military. The BSEP program was also chosen to evaluate because most military members are familiar with the program and understand what the program offers. Other programs within the evaluation included the Service Members Opportunity Program, the College Level Equivalency Program (CLEP), and the Vet Success program.

The Service Member Opportunity Colleges Program allows military members to obtain college degrees through different universities and college that are accredited. More

universities and colleges should be invited to participate in the program. Allowing more colleges to participate will provide military members more schools and degree programs from which to choose. The Council for Higher Education Accreditation reported that there are over 6,500 college institutions in the United States, with only 1,700 being a part of the Service Member Opportunity Colleges Program. Inviting more colleges and universities into the SMOC allows more college institutions to show that they are military friendly and will work to educate military members.

College Level Equivalency Program (CLEP) allows military members to take standardized tests measuring their knowledge in different areas. The test allows military members to earn credit for classes without actually taking the class. For military members who are not familiar with CLEP exams, information and study guides are available at a cost. If the military provides information on the CLEP and study guides to military members free upon them reporting to their first unit after basic training, they will gain an understanding of how the CLEP program works. Less than 3,000 colleges and universities grant college credits to military members who pass a CLEP exam. The number of colleges and universities granting credit for CLEP scores is too low. An increase in the number of universities granting credit for CLEP test will give military members a better opportunity to complete their college education. Also, military members can take one exam per subject at no cost; if they fail the exam, they must pay to retake. If military members are allowed to retake at no cost, then there is the possibility that they will be encouraged to complete their educations before exiting the military.

The last program included is the Vet Success Program offered by the University of Maryland to assist military members to complete college degrees. Military members enrolled in the program also receive assistance finding employment once they have completed their degrees. Other universities should consider offering the Vet Success Program to military members. Those colleges and universities that are enrolled in the Service Members Opportunity College should be required to offer a program similar to the Vet Success Program, providing resources needed by military members working to complete their degrees. The resources offered could profoundly impact those military members who would like to complete their college education before exiting the military.

Researchers conducting evaluations should choose the evaluation that is the best one to meet the needs of the stakeholders and not the evaluation that is simplest to conduct (Chen, 2005). O'Leary (2010) stated that, "Evaluation research can be defined as research that makes an attempt to determine if a program has value or not" (p. 138). If the courses that are offered in the current BSEP program can add value to the converted BSEP program, then those courses should remain a part of the program. Mertens (2009) believed that, "Program evaluation is needed to improve education programs, but can have limitations such as the sample size could be too small" (p. 89).

Involving education leaders in the process will be important because their input will be needed to determine which courses should be added to the converted BSEP program. Cellante (2013) stated that, "Throughout the program evaluation process, educators should be involved in developing courses and presenting the courses" (p. 7).

Evaluations should always be planned and developed without wasting time to offer the best results (Usun, 2008).

Christie and Fleisher (2010) suggested that, “Most evaluations that are conducted on programs and policies use the mixed method design, then qualitative design, and lastly, the quantitative design” (p. 12). For this study, a qualitative method was utilized. Donaldson, Christie, and Mark (2009) stated, “The collection of trust worthy data is often a challenge when conducting evaluations, and if the evaluation is conducted properly, it can help make positive changes within society” (p. 24). Evaluations should be conducted in the same manner as any other research, and researchers should provide honest results (Scriven & Coryn, 2008). Stull, Varnum, Ducette, and Schiller (2011) argued that, “Taking on the task of performing evaluations are good for the evaluation as well as for those who the program will help” (p. 9).

Spaulding (2008) stated that, “Program evaluation is used for decision making purposes and examines programs to determine if the program is worth being offered. Recommendations are made to keep a program the same, to change a program, or to eliminate a program all together” (p. 5). The converted BSEP program must attract military leaders who will be responsible for implementing the program as well as military members desiring to complete their education prior to leaving the military. The Service Members Opportunity College Program has the potential to offer so much more than it offers to military members because the program works closely with almost 2,000 colleges and universities. College and universities that are associated with the program must follow guidelines developed by the program. A conversion of the Service Members

Opportunity College Program should include all colleges and universities associated with their program, including developing a Vet Success Program, accepting College Level Equivalency Program test scores, and allowing military members who need to retest a CLEP test at no cost.

Converting the BSEP program has the potential to make the current BSEP program better for military members. The current program offers three courses, which does not lead to a college degree. The new converted BSEP program will offer 60 college credits and a two-year general studies degree. Yuksel (2010) argued that, "Program evaluation can be a process which contributes to making programs better for those who are being served. Decisions can be made about the program through evaluation and the current status of the program can be determined" (p. 78). Study participants all agreed that a new converted BSEP program offering a two-year degree had the potential to be a huge success within the military community.

Evaluating Army programs associated with military members obtaining their college degrees will allow any problems within the programs to be showcased. According to participants in the study, the current BSEP program only helps military members increase the general technical score. Some military members take advantage of the increase in their score by changing their military jobs, while others do not. Creating a program that offers a degree could make a larger impact on military members than the current BSEP program is making. According to participants in this study, the current BSEP program does not offer the opportunity for them to receive a two year degree at the completion of the program. Mohamadi (2013) stated that, "Program evaluation focuses

on problems that are present within a class, a program, a learning institution, or in a community” (p. 3). Focusing on creating programs that can provide military members an incentive to enroll can have a scientific impact on military members.

Young (2012) suggested that a program evaluator who understands the program being evaluated and problems associated with the program can assist create strategies to make the program better, and will have an understanding of what type of research the evaluator will need. While Yong-Lyun (2011) believed that, “Education programs have numerous aspects of assessment; to include implementation, administration, and goal achievement, the effectiveness of the program should be evaluated by the quality of the components and activities” (p. 305). Guskey (2000) suggested that, “There is a system that should be followed when performing program evaluations. It includes the collection of data, then data is analyzed, and finally, a report is created to report the findings” (p. 8). Those steps were utilized to complete this study.

According to Loots (2008), it would be a waste of time to evaluate a program that does not have objectives and goals. Spaulding (2008) believed when one evaluates a program, it should only be done to make the program better for those who the program is offered to or to determine if the program should be eliminated. Elimination of the current BSEP program is not the objective; creating a program which offers more to military members is the objective. Some military members may only be interested in increasing their general technical scores; however, for those who are interested in completing their degrees before leaving the military, the converted program could offer that to them.

Participants in the study stated that the current BSEP program has some problems that should be addressed, including that enrolling in the program was a waste of time if their military's general technical score was not increased. Creating a BSEP program that offers a two-year general studies degree may not eliminate every problem associated with the current program; however, it will allow military members the opportunity to work towards the completion of their educations. A new BSEP program could also provide an incentive for military members to enroll into the converted program. Fitzpatrick, Sanders, and Worthen (2010) stated that, "Program evaluation will not correct everything that is wrong with all programs, and evaluations assure end results that often cannot be achieved" (p. 55). Evaluation of the BSEP program could possibly help to improve the program; however, ongoing evaluations of the program will be needed.

Implementation

The study's findings will be shared with military and education leaders at Fort Hood Army Installation in a white paper (see Appendix A) to assist in ensuring that those military members who would like to complete their educations have the opportunity to do so. Once the above mentioned individuals are briefed and permission is granted to disburse the information, it will be made available to all military members and the general public. The goal is to convince military and education leaders to provide their support in converting the BSEP program into a program offering a two-year general studies degree, which could possibly lead to the completion of a four-year degree by military members.

Project Evaluation

Education leaders can assist with the evaluation process by providing the percentage of military members enrolled in the new program after the program is implemented to military leaders. Military and education leaders can evaluate the converted program to determine its success or failure. It will also be important to evaluate if the changes in the program were effective or not, if the desired outcomes were achieved, if there were any outcomes that were unexpected, and how can the program be made better.

To evaluate the project's long-term effects, it is recommend that three years after the white paper has been distributed, an evaluation be conducted. The evaluator should request that the Fort Hood Education Center provide the number of military members who have graduated and how many military members have enrolled in the program since the conversion. It will be important to know how many military members graduated within the first 24 months of the program. A survey should also be distributed to military members who are enrolled in the program asking if their chain of command encouraged them to attend college. It will be nearly impossible to use the participants who participated in this study to evaluate the programs because they all will have already left the military.

An outcome based evaluation will be used to determine the success of the evaluated BSEP program. Schalock (2001) stated that, "Outcome based evaluations are needed so that researchers can attempt to understand what can contribute to a program and make it better" (p. 32). The new program will be evaluated by looking at the number

of military members enrolled in the program, how many dropped out before completing their degrees, how many military members actually completed their two-year general studies degree, and how many military members completed their bachelors' degree after enrolling into the converted program. The demographics of those enrolled in the program will provide information about military ranks of those individuals enrolled in the program. The number of military members who complete their degrees will be used to convince leaders that the program could be successful at other military installations as well.

Using an outcome based evaluation will help determine if education leaders and military leaders utilized the findings presented in the white paper to help military members complete their education before leaving the military. The outcome based evaluation will also help to determine what factors affect the attrition rate. The overall goals are to evaluate the system in which military members are educated, revise policies within military units on education, and strengthen support for military members who desire an education. The key stakeholders include all military members, military leaders, and education leaders. To determine if the strategies in this study are working, a monitoring system should be in place.

It will be necessary to monitor implementation of the strategies developed in this study over time. Working with education leaders at Fort Hood to determine if more military members have enrolled in classes will help determine if the information presented in the white paper made a difference and if the converted BSEP program is successful. Future research will be needed to ensure that the program's strategies have

been implemented and are reaching a larger audience. Listed below are recommendations for future research.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Apply findings within this study to other military installations and offer the converted BSEP program to military stations worldwide.
2. Request that all military members who are registered for courses sign a release of information form at the education center allowing other researchers to access information about classes they have taken, how long they have been working on their education, and how their military command has either hindered or assisted in their pursuit of an education.
3. Examine the educational needs of military members preparing to exit the military.
4. Examine how completing an education benefits military members after they exit the military.
5. Examine those universities that claim to be military-friendly to determine what they are actually doing to support military students and the conversion of the new BSEP program.
6. Examine the effects military students have on non-military students in the classroom.

Potential Resources and Existing Support

The Army's BSEP program is already being offered to military members; therefore, many of them are familiar with the program. One participant in the study suggested that since military leaders are familiar with the BSEP program, they might be

more inclined to help convert the program. Another participant believes that support can be gained from leaders who are willing to work to support those military members desiring an education prior to leaving the military. Education leaders at Central Texas College must be willing to support the new BSEP program as well. Central Texas College is located on Fort Hood and has worked with the military community for many years supporting those who serve in the military.

Fort Hood has served as the first military installation to introduce many new trainings to military members, and those programs have been successful not only at Fort Hood but at other military installations as well. Many of those programs are now permanent within the military communities. Piloting the converted BSEP program on Fort Hood Army Installation would require the support of both military and education leaders.

While conducting research for the study, potential supporters were identified. Locally, some military leaders have voiced their support in educating military members to prepare them for their futures after the military. Those military leaders who are willing to provide support must work with the education leaders on Fort Hood Army Installation to help design the curriculum for the new BSEP program. Courses totaling 60 credit hours must be chosen for the program by education course designers. Central Texas College will play a major role in making the program a success. Once the program is offered to Fort Hood, military members will have 24 months to complete the program.

Potential Barriers

Presenting the program evaluation in a white paper could have barriers because there is the possibility that no one will be interested in reading the paper. After military leaders read the white paper, they still might not support the new converted BSEP program. The cost of converting the program may be too expensive, and there could be a problem in implementing the new program on Fort Hood Army Installation due to deployments. Central Texas College may not have enough instructors to teach courses associated with the converted program.

Another barrier includes different attitudes towards education. Some military members may feel that getting an education is not a priority and will not be interested in completing a two-year general studies degree, there may not be an interest in the study's findings, and some military members may lack the motivation needed to pursue an education. The benefits of receiving an education prior to leaving the military may not be truly understood by some leaders or military members. Another barrier could be how and when to present the study's findings. Determining if the findings should be presented daily, weekly, monthly, or quarterly could become a barrier as well. Another barrier is it will be impossible to conduct follow-up interviews with the participants of this study because they will have left the military.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

Once a plan to distribute the findings has been developed, it will be important to meet with the Fort Hood Post Commander and Command Sergeant Major to discuss the findings of the study 90 days prior to the planned date to release the findings. After

receiving approval from both individuals, the study's findings will be made available in a white paper. The white paper will be presented to all military and education leaders. The white paper will describe the benefits of converting the BSEP program into a two-year general studies degree program. Fort Hood leaders must support the program and agree to implement the program no more than one year after the white paper has been made available. The white paper includes strategies to assist military members complete their degrees prior to leaving the military, an overview of how many military members have left the military from Fort Hood without completing their education, and how the BSEP program will benefit military members. If possible, the white paper will be published on the Fort Hood website's homepage.

Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others

The Fort Hood Post Commander must ensure all military leaders understand that educating military members is important and leaders are expected to support military members desiring an education. He must also ensure that the converted BSEP program will be implemented on Fort Hood, make it clear that he supports education, and will encourage military members to take advantage of education benefits offered to them. Company Commanders will be responsible for ensuring other leaders promote education. Commanders must ensure all military members assigned to their units have taken time to discuss education options with a college counselor within the first 30 days of reporting to the organization. Their military leaders must work to allow military members time for college classes.

Military members are responsible for effective communication between them and their leaders. These military members must notify their leaders in advance that they are interested in participating in the converted BSEP program. They must also immediately report any problems that may arise to their leaders.

Central Texas College will be responsible for developing the curriculum for the new program. The college must ensure they are working to assist military members complete their education, instructors should be flexible, and classes readily available. The college must also hire instructors who can meet the needs of military members working on degrees. Instructors should understand that military students also have military obligations that must be considered as well.

Implications Including Social Change

Local Community

Military leaders should make it mandatory for all military members in their units to speak with an education counselor and have a degree plan created when arriving at the unit. Military leaders should also provide military members adequate time to attend classes. This will prove that leaders are serious about education and the futures of military members.

The project evaluation of the Army's BSEP program and converting the program into a two-year degree program can impact social change within the local community by providing military members the opportunity to complete their degrees before leaving the military. The conversion of the program can contribute to social change because those

military members who complete the programs and go on to complete their bachelors' degrees before leaving the military will be able to compete in the job market.

Far-Reaching

The white paper resulting from the evaluation of the BSEP program can be utilized as a model for other military installations throughout all branches of the military. The project evaluation can provide guidelines for each Army base to structure their BSEP program on a larger scale, allowing more military members the opportunity to complete their degrees. Military members who graduate from college will have a better chance of finding employment after they leave the military and will face fewer obstacles entering into the civilian workforce.

Conclusion

Evaluating the Army's BSEP program and converting the program into a two-year degree program can impact social change within the local community and within the military on a larger scale. Military members will have the opportunity to complete their degrees before leaving the military. The support of military leaders and educational leaders is essential to military members completing their degrees prior to exiting the military. The goals of the study were to determine what can be done to assist those serving on active duty complete their degrees and reduce the number of military members exiting the military without completing their degrees. Without a degree, they are at a disadvantage when competing in the civilian job market. Strategies created in the study can be used to assist military members who desire an education before exiting the military.

College officials must work to ensure the needs of military members attending their colleges and universities are met and that their experiences while working on their degrees are positive. College officials must also realize that military members bring experience and knowledge into the classroom, which will allow transformative learning to take place. Military members should be treated with the same respect as any other student and given the same opportunity to succeed in the education arena.

Many military members are unable to complete their degrees for numerous reasons, including multiple deployments, feeling unwelcomed in the classroom, lack of support from leaders, and the perception that the college or university they are attending cannot meet their needs. Education programs and organizations that work to assist military members in obtaining their degrees include eArmyU, Service Members' Opportunity Colleges, the Noncommissioned Officers Association (Ford et al., 2009). Even though assistance is available, barriers still exist, which often hinder those military members desiring an education. It is essential that those barriers be eliminated immediately. The Fort Hood Garrison Commander can help to eliminate some of those barriers. Degrees military members receive can be used as a preventive measure and help promote social change.

The next section will include information about the strengths of the study, recommendations for remediation of limitations, and how those problems can be addressed. Information on scholarship and project development is included in the next section, as well and information on leadership and change. The section also included an analysis of the researcher in different roles.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

The program evaluation and resulting white paper addressed obstacles faced by military members on active duty pursuing an education while stationed on Fort Hood Army Installation. The literature review focused on research pertaining to educating military members throughout military history, the importance of educating military members, the role education leaders play in educating military members, educational benefits offered to military members, and the importance of having a degree when exiting the military. This section includes the project's strengths, limitations, and the researcher as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. The impact on social change and suggestions for future research are included in this section as well.

Project Strengths

The project focused on educating military members and creating strategies to eliminate problems associated with them not being able to complete their degrees. The findings can help ensure there are maximum education opportunities created to educate members of the Armed Forces. The study will serve as a catalyst toward maintaining and further improving education for military members. The findings can assist education leaders at all military installations demonstrate the commitment of leaders to train and prepare military members for the present and future. The findings also reflect current and future trends of military members seeking an education and the obstacles they face.

Converting the BSEP program into a program offering a two-year general studies degree will help with promotion of those military members who decide to remain in the

military. Military members who complete the converted BSEP program and go on to complete their bachelors' degrees could possibly have more success in the civilian sector once they leave the military. The program could help build confidence of military members working to complete their education before leaving the military. This will provide a sense of accomplishment and have a positive effect on the economy because the more educated the work force is, the better quality of workers companies will have. The strengths of this study are unlimited.

Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations

To ensure that military leaders provide support to military members seeking an education, it will be important to involve these leaders in every aspect of the converted BSEP program. It will be important to ensure that all military members are given assistance to complete their educations while serving on active duty by ensuring they understand the benefits of leaving the military with their degrees. Since the study was limited to the 15 participants, it was important for their perceptions to be clear and precise within the white paper. The white paper will be presented to all military and education leaders on Fort Hood Army Installation so they will understand the strategies developed in this study. The final limitation of the study was not being able to gain access to a meeting room. This limitation was overcome by rescheduling the interviews and allowing participants to decide upon a new time.

Scholarship

Scholarship involves possessing the skills to analyze theories and data. I have learned that the best articles to use are those that are peer reviewed. Scholarship involves

the ability to understand what literature enhances a study and understanding the process in which articles become peer reviewed. Throughout this process, I have gained a vast amount of knowledge about peer-reviewed articles and their importance in research. Peer-reviewed articles are important because they offer reliable information about a subject.

I have learned how to search for literature that contains scholarly information, and that peer reviewed articles exemplify the best research practices. I have learned what terms to use to locate the correct literature. Saturation of literature would have been nearly impossible without understanding that sites such as EBSCO, ProQuest, and ERIC include scholarly material. Scholarship also involves understanding the background of research participants and working to develop information that will create social change. Finally, scholarship involves gaining knowledge, expanding upon that knowledge, and being able to relate to individuals who participate in a research study.

Project Development and Evaluation

Project development is not an easy task. It requires an enormous amount of planning, knowing the audience the project will assist, and understanding that the project's purpose is to create social change. Project development also involves understanding what data are required, why the literature review is important, understanding collection tools, and identifying all stakeholders. It was important to collect data as well as understand the data collected. Sections of the study were revised many times at the request of committee members. By doing so, I conducted more in-

depth research on the subject, allowing me to become more aware of the issues faced by participants in the study.

Leadership and Change

Leadership involves taking responsibility for what goes wrong or right. It requires taking responsibility for the well-being of others. The leader's primary responsibility is to accomplish the mission and balance that responsibility with increased awareness along with supporting the participants. In education, from a leader's perspective, positive leadership demonstrates that one is able to recognize challenges and the benefits of achievements. When challenges arise, it is important to face and overcome those challenges by developing systematic plans to remedy problems. Leadership requires collaborating with others and taking their suggestions into consideration to promote social change.

When thinking about myself as a leader, I believe that I am a leader who takes responsibility and possess the ability to clearly analyze any given situation. I am an instrument of positive influence and social change. In order to influence social change, I must place the collective needs above individual desires and work towards positive change.

Analysis of Self as Scholar

As a scholar, I am able to understand the systematic approach of the influential factors that enhance the education process. I have learned how important technology is as I work towards the completion of my doctoral journey, the importance of research, and self-discovery. The process of self-discovery will forever alter the means of delivery of

instruction in education. I will mold my educational style towards the needs of my students.

I have been able to overcome many obstacles associated with my doctoral journey to include how much time to devote to my studies, committee members' schedules, changes associated with committee members resigning from the university, and the loss of family time. Being able to overcome those obstacles has allowed me to develop endurance, the drive to succeed and bring about social change, and the completion of this process.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

As a practitioner of research, I have learned that many steps are taken to conduct research and to present accurate findings of a study. I must be constantly aware of my limitations, must know when to seek assistance, and must never use any collected information about participants for my benefit beyond that which helps others. The participants' confidence in me to express their vulnerabilities at any time will remain utmost on my mind.

I am more knowledgeable than I was at the start of this journey. As a practitioner, I am now aware of literature written on educating military members. Initially, I was unaware so much literature existed. Learning is a lifelong process, and what I have learned throughout this process reinforced that I am obligated to share my knowledge with others. I am able to research articles and understand how they pertain to my study while gaining knowledge that I am able to share with others. My project is based on a need to educate those who are willing to give their lives for this country. The theory

chosen for this study relates to educating military members, their need to be educated, and sharing their learning and personal experiences with others. Staying on task was important and required that I focus my attention on the project's results and how research can contribute to social change.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

The journey was very difficult and required a lot of soul searching. I am a stronger educator because of this process. I must work to become a stronger project developer. I understand that one size does not fit all, and each project developed will focus on the audience. Caffarella (2010) stated that, "Education and training programs for adults come in many shapes, sizes, and formats" (p. 45). As a project developer, I must understand which shape, size, or format applies to which audience.

The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

Evaluating the Army's BSEP program and converting it into a new program which offers a two-year degree to military members can impact social change because military members will have a better chance to complete their degrees before leaving the military, which will provide them with better opportunities in the civilian job market after leaving the military. The study is important because the findings will be shared with military and education leaders, providing strategies to assist military members in obtaining their degrees prior to leaving the military. The study's findings paint a picture that explains how military members view themselves in the education arena and in the world. Military members who exit the military with their degrees can have a better chance of obtaining employment.

Depending on the military's mission, helping military members who enter the military without a degree to earn one is not a priority. Often, the military mission takes precedence over education. Many military members who desire a college education must place those dreams on hold due to multiple deployments and other military obligations. Today's military leaders must adapt to the balance of mission requirements and the welfare of their military members. As a result, installations must be forced to provide additional resources to support military members' educational needs. According to the study's participants, the military awards hundreds of thousands of dollars to military members for education. A large amount of the money is unused because many military members are unaware that many education programs and funds exist to assist them in meeting their education goals.

The project's potential impact on social change includes using the strategies developed in this study to assist military leaders understand that military members who exit the military without obtaining their college degrees may face challenging obstacles. If leaders are able to understand this, maybe they will push more military members into the classroom before pushing them out of the military. The study can promote social change by assisting more military members to exit the military with their degree and into civilian jobs, allowing them the opportunity to contribute to globalization on the micro and macro level.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The research focused on educating active duty military members stationed at Fort Hood Army Installation. On a larger scale, the strategies developed within this study can

also assist military members stationed at other military installations to obtain an education as well. Timely implementation of the developed strategies will depend on military leadership. Military and education leaders must play an important role in educating military members. They should work to assist those who desire an education and to prove that they are able to meet the educational needs of those who serve in the Armed Forces. They must create new policies pertaining to military members who must withdraw from school due to military obligations. Implementation of the converted BSEP program at Fort Hood Army Installation could assist military members throughout the military if the program is successful.

According to Brown and Gross (2011), universities and colleges should work to offer a registration period that is more convenient for military and veteran students. In addition, deadlines should be adjusted to meet their needs, and counseling should be readily available to assist those military members who need it (Brown & Gross, 2011). “A system should be in place to defer the cost of classes if a military member must withdraw from classes. If a military member must transfer to another university, their credits should be transferrable. Credit should be given for military life experiences” (Brown & Gross, 2011, p. 46). In order for the strategies developed within this study to work, ongoing research must be conducted. Ongoing research could possibly uncover other strategies to assist in educating military members.

Conclusion

Program evaluation allows the researcher to determine how to make a program better. Evaluating the current BSEP program and redesigning the program to offer

military members a two-year degree can create more opportunities for them when they leave the military. The study developed strategies to help educate military members through individual interviews with multiple participants. The findings included obstacles that hinder military members in the completion of their education. The strengths of the study included the reflection of current and future trends on educating military members through a case study. The results can be utilized by military leaders as well as education leaders to assist military members achieving their educational goals. Also, the findings can impact social change as college degrees earned by military members can help them compete in the civilian job market after they leave the military.

It is important for leaders to be involved in every aspect of educating military members – their involvement could ensure success, and their support is imperative. The program evaluation will help inform military leaders about strategies to help educate military members. Hopefully keeping leaders informed will increase their interest in educating military members as well as encourage them to show their support.

The case study provided insights into the experiences of military members pursuing an education. As an educator, I am responsible for educating learners and promoting social change. The study does not suggest that military leaders neglect their military missions; it does, however, suggest that military leaders work harder to promote education within the military.

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Appendix A: The White Paper

An Evaluation of Military Education Programs Assisting Military Members

The purpose of this study was to determine what can be done to assist military members' stationed at Fort Hood Army Installation complete their bachelors' degrees prior to exiting the military. The results and strategies are presented in this white paper. This white paper is designed to provide information to military and education leaders to assist military members stationed at Fort Hood Army Installation complete their education prior to exiting the military. The results show that military members who do not complete their degrees before leaving the military face obstacles when competing for employment in the civilian job market. The strategies presented in this white paper are designed to foster communication between military leaders, those serving within military ranks, education leaders, and to prove that promoting education has to be on the forefront in the military.

Educating those enlisted military members who join the military without a degree will demonstrate that the military is serious about its members' wellbeing during and after their military service is complete, which will enhance the overall mission of individual and collective preparedness. Those military members who desire an education must be identified upon arrival to Fort Hood Army Installation. Military leaders must provide their full support to those military members who would like to complete their degrees before leaving the military.

This white paper presents (a) strategies developed to assist military and education leaders how to support military members stationed at Fort Hood Army Installation

complete their education prior to leaving the military, (b) suggestions to assist military members pursuing an education while supporting military missions. Strategies presented may be combined with strategies military leaders have already developed to assist those military members pursuing an education.

Chapter one includes 10 problems (themes) stated by study participants which hinder their educational success. Strategies to decrease or eliminate each problem are presented. Some problems required more than one strategy, while others only required one. Chapter two includes recommendations for commanders to begin working to encourage military members to enroll in college. Chapter three includes a plan for military company commanders to help convert the Basic Skills Education Program (BSEP) and how to make other education programs better to assist military members obtain their degrees. Also included in chapter three are other recommendations to assist military members pursuing an education.

Chapter 1

Recognizing the Problems/Recommendations

According to participants involved in the study, time is a major issue. They all stated they did not have enough time to attend classes or complete college assignments because their military duties often interfered. They also stated that if more courses were offered on the weekend, they probably could take classes at that time. One participant spoke about classes that he was able to take at the unit that gave him the opportunity to get closer to completing his degree. Taking classes at the unit allowed him to attend class without reporting to a college campus or spending time taking classes online. Commanders should arrange for more classes to be taught at the unit.

There were other problems (themes) discovered throughout the study that hinder the success of military members pursuing an education, which include: the belief that many commanders do not support enlisted military members pursuing an education, multiple deployments, and non-availability of courses. Other problems included a lack of support from instructors, military members feeling unwelcome in school, military members not being able to balance college, military, and family life, problems associated with the transferability of college credits, and the creation of education programs for military members.

The problems are listed below along with the strategies created to assist military leaders help military members complete their education prior to leaving the military.

Theme (1): Time: Eliminate problems associated with time constraints hindering military members' ability to attend classes.

Theme (1) included three strategies. First, leaders must understand that the problem is not static, and one strategy does not completely solve this problem; a continual advising and making leaders aware of the time needed to complete an education can help them understand how critical the problem really is. Battalion commanders, command sergeant majors, unit commanders, and unit leaders must be made aware of any problems associated with time constraints and education. These individuals must understand that time permitted to complete an education not only benefits military members; it also benefits the military by strengthening the forces and creates critical thinkers. Education also incorporates personal development, which is a key element in a military member's evaluation process.

The second strategy included education leaders providing more educational resources and making them more readily available to military members after duty hours and on weekends. Strategy three included the education center on Fort Hood Army Installation offering more classes at the unit level, which could save time and money. Theme (2): Eliminate the belief that company commanders do not support military members seeking an education.

Theme two included six strategies. First, company commanders can demonstrate their support by allowing military members more time for college classes. Commanders should make it mandatory that all military members reporting to their units register at the education center for basic courses. These courses should be completed within three

semesters. The basic courses should include reading, English, and, math. A degree plan should also be developed when military members register for courses.

Commanders should understand education benefits for military members so that they can assist them. Commanders should retain a list of military members in their units enrolled in college. Commanders should also know how many military members are not enrolled in school but would like to be and have not been given opportunity to do so. Commanders should ensure that all leaders in their units support military members desiring an education, and commanders should work closely with education leaders to promote education within their unit.

Theme (3): Eliminating problems associated with multiple deployments can reduce the amount of classes military members miss and reduce the percentage of military members withdrawing from classes.

Theme three included five strategies. First, all leaders should work with military members who are preparing for deployments to help them complete their classes before deploying. Military members should be allowed to continue attending classes even when the unit is preparing for a deployment. Military members who are taking classes should be allowed to prepare for deployments when they are not in class. They should not have to miss classes during deployment preparations.

Secondly, deployed military members enrolled in classes should be given adequate time for course work and time to complete online classes. Thirdly, company commanders should work with the education center to assign a unit representative as a proctor. The proctor could be a squad leader, platoon sergeant, or the reenlistment

noncommissioned officer. Having a proctor within the unit could eliminate problems associated with test taking while military members are deployed.

Another strategy included company commanders working with a technical support team within their units to ensure updated technology is available during deployments and assignments to remote locations. This technology will allow military members access to online classes at all times. Finally, the last strategy in theme three included military members who enrolled in college making arrangements with their learning institutions prior to deployments to complete their courses in advance through correspondence courses in the event they do not have Internet access. They should also prepare for any delays in delivery of course material through the post office while deployed.

Theme (4): The Fort Hood Education Center should ensure that courses are readily available throughout the school year and credits are transferable to other colleges as well as into other degree programs.

Theme four only included two strategies. Study participants found it hard to complete the courses required because often courses were not offered when they had time to take them. Participants stated that learning institutions working with the Fort Hood Education Center should offer classes multiple times throughout the year; credits should be transferrable to other universities, colleges, or other degree programs. More than one instructor should teach a course during a semester and more weekend seminars should be offered. Participants believed that offering classes once a year caused a delay in degree

completion. Also, participants thought it was important for military members to understand the withdrawal policy of the university prior to enrolling in any courses.

Theme (5): Higher learning institutions should work to ensure that college instructors support and understand the needs of military members pursuing an education as well as support diversity.

Theme five included five strategies to include higher learning institutions working to hire more prior military service educators and those who demonstrate that they support military members. Educators should understand challenges faced by those serving the nation while pursuing an education. It was also important to participants that educators who have never served in the military be required to attend training on the military history. The training should consist of a brief history about the military, its importance to the world, and consist of military member's experiences while serving in the military.

Participants suggested learning institutions should make it mandatory for all educators to receive a training module on military customs and diversity when hired. Educators should be willing to provide military members extra time to complete assignments if their military duties interfere with the completion of assignments. This extra time should be granted on a case-by-case basis. Military members should not assume that because they are on active duty they have the right to receive extra time for assignments. Military members will have to prove extra time needed is due to unforeseen, last-minute military obligations and missions. Also, participants stated that military members must keep their instructors informed of any military duties that may interfere with their class assignments. Effective communication will be important.

Theme (6): Military and education leaders should work together to eliminate the percentage of military members withdrawing from college due to military obligations. It is important to reduce the drop out percentage because military members who use tuition assistance to pay for their education must successfully complete their classes. If they fail to complete their classes they are responsible for paying the money back to the government.

Theme six included three strategies, including military members who must withdraw from a course due to military obligations or extreme emergencies should not incur any debt; however, all options must be considered and a plan should be in place to support these military members. The plan could consist of allowing the military member to take the class at a later date at no cost or forgiving the debt of the class or classes dropped. Another strategy included when commanders approve tuition assistance, they should do everything possible to ensure the military members has the opportunity to attend classes. Military duties should not interfere in a military member's ability to complete classes. The last strategy for theme six included military members taking responsibility as well when using tuition assistance. When it becomes evident that they must withdraw from a class, it should be done immediately after all available resources have been exhausted.

Theme (7): Higher education institutions should work to create environments that support, respect, and welcome all students. If these institutions claim to be military friendly, they should work to promote that friendliness. Those learning institutions who

claim to be military friendly should make a commitment to be better prepared to handle challenges associated with military students.

Theme seven included four strategies. Participants felt that higher learning institutions should educate non-military students about the life of military members, offer seminars that promote military awareness for students who have never served in the military, and establish a military awareness day once a semester, making it mandatory for all students and staff to attend. Also, a diversity class should be mandatory for all students regardless of their major, and sensitivity training should be provided to college staff and students providing them with an overview about military life.

According to Brown and Gross (2011), if learning institutions claim to be military friendly, they should meet the following criteria:

1. Provide special times for military students to register for classes.
2. Make the application process simple and fast.
3. Create enrollment deadlines that meet the needs of military students.
4. Offer services geared towards military students.
5. Create a designated Internet page on the school's website for military students.
6. Develop policies that minimize the requirement for military students to transfer college credits.
7. Give college credit for military trainings and experience.
8. Hire extra staff or counselors who are familiar with problems associated with military students.

Theme (8): Balancing military, college, and family life while pursuing an education.

The two strategies in theme eight included military members developing a time management plan in which they can devote enough time to each one of the areas listed above. The plan should be realistic and be an open document subject to changes. Also, those military members who have the school option should use time during the duty day to take classes and work on assignments. Taking classes and working on assignments during the duty day will free up time for their families in the evenings.

Theme (9): Transferability of Existing College Credits into the New BSEP Program

Theme nine also included two strategies. Participants stated that education counselors must ensure that military members' transcripts are evaluated to determine if they can receive full credit for courses they have already completed before enrolling in a new program. Education counselors should ensure military members receive credit for military training and experiences they have had while serving in the military.

Theme (10): Create Educational Programs for Military Members that Work

Theme 10 was the last theme developed within this study and included three strategies to assist military leaders help those working to complete their education prior to leaving the military. The first strategy included military leaders creating a program to track how military members are doing in the courses in which they are enrolled. Also, career counselors should encourage military members to stick to their degree plans as well as the degree program they initially enrolled in. This will help eliminate military members taking unnecessary classes. Lastly, strategy three included military leaders as well as education counselors evaluating education programs that are in existence that are

unproductive for military members working on their degrees, and they should eliminate those that need to be.

Chapter 2

Timeline

This timeline is a suggestion that can be useful to military leaders. Most unit commanders have very busy schedules and may not be able to devote as much time as they would like to military members pursuing an education. It is suggested that a unit representative who is dedicated and willing to support military members pursuing an education be appointed immediately to represent the commander. The representative should be a noncommissioned officer who has already completed a college degree. Listed below are other recommendations for unit commanders to support military members desiring an education.

1. Develop clear guidelines showing their support for military members pursuing an education.

Timeline: This should be done immediately.

2. Identify those military members who do not have a degree the moment they report to the unit.

Timeline: Noncommissioned officers should identify these individuals immediately and report the information to the unit commander.

3. Ensure those military members who are interested in an education are registered at the Fort Hood Education Center and their degree plans are on file.

Timeline: This should be implemented by October 1, 2015 and should be established as an ongoing process.

4. Commanders or their representatives should meet with education leaders to establish clear guidelines for military members interested in an education.

Timeline: This should be done by October 1, 2015.

5. Make it known to all leaders in their units that educating military members is a priority and every leader will support the effort.

Timeline: This should be done immediately.

6. Arrange for education leaders to brief military members on education benefits every quarter in the units. Briefings are conducted when military members report to Fort Hood; however, those briefings often include hundreds of military members and there is not enough time for the briefer to answer everyone's questions.

Timeline: This should be done immediately.

7. Arrange for the converted BSEP program to be offered at Central Texas College.

Timeline: To be implemented in 12 months.

Commanders who allow military members to enroll into the converted BSEP program should encourage more military members to work on their degrees. Once it is determined that military leaders are serious about educating military members, hopefully more military members will enroll in classes.

Chapter 3

Making Programs Better For Military Members

Commanders should work with education leaders to offer the converted BSEP program, which will allow military members to receive a two-year degree in general studies leading to a four-year degree. The program should include 60 credit hours including 20 classes. The classes should be taken over 10 semesters, taught at Central Texas College, and paid for using the Army's Tuition Assistance Program or the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Once military members have successfully completed the program, they must agree to complete two additional years of school to complete their bachelors' degrees.

Military members enrolled in the two-year program will sign an agreement with their leaders stating that they will be dedicated to completing their college degrees. Commanders and leaders will agree to provide support, including time off for classes and assignments. Military members reenlisting for the first time should be offered the school option, which will allow them three to six months to attend classes without having to report for work. These military members will report to the first formation of the day for accountability.

Commanders who agree to the school option for military members reenlisting for the first time must ensure that leaders support the agreement as well. Military members who are given the school option will use the time to take college courses and complete their assignments. Once the school option is complete, those who were using it should be allowed to continue taking classes on their own time. However, they should not be placed

on overnight duty when they have classes. If possible, night duties should be given to them on weekends if they are not enrolled in weekend classes.

Another way commanders can show their support to military members pursuing an education is by creating an education buddy system. Battle buddies are utilized in basic training and in combat zones to provide support and protection. Using them in the education arena could provide support for military members pursuing an education. Both military members will be enrolled in classes; they will be required to provide encouragement, motivation, and work together to complete their degrees. Any problems associated with the buddy teams should be reported to unit leaders and commanders immediately. “Learning is improved when it is more of a collective effort” (Branker, 2009, p. 62). In combat, the buddy system is needed for survival; therefore, in the education arena, the buddy system could provide communication, encouragement, and peer support.

Commanders can also work with the Fort Hood Education Center to make education resources readily available to military members the moment they arrive at their military units. The education center should conduct quarterly briefings addressing educational benefits for military members. Since a lack of time is a major concern for military members pursuing an education, setting time aside to complete classes will be a task that commanders, leaders, and educators must work together to improve. Listed below are recommendations to implementing the converted BSEP program at Fort Hood, recommendations for other military programs assisting military members, and

requirements for the education buddy system. Also included are recommendations for learning institutions supporting to military students.

Recommendations to Implement the Converted BSEP Program

1. Commanders must develop a plan to monitor the success of military members enrolled in the program.
2. The unit representative should ensure military members are enrolled in courses listed in their degree plans. Their degree plan should be created when they register for classes at the education center.
3. Communication is very important. Military members, commanders, and education leaders must communicate effectively to ensure any problems that arise are resolved immediately.
4. Military members should encourage their family members to support their education goals.
5. Military members who are experiencing problems in their courses will work with a tutor to assist them.

Recommendations for Other Education Programs Assisting Military Members

Other programs that are in place to assist military members complete their degrees include the Service Member Opportunity Colleges, which offer degree programs through different universities. Only colleges and universities that are accredited can participate. Military members can transfer college credit if they have to transfer to another college due to a new military assignment without losing any college credits they have earned. Recommendations to make this program better include military leaders ensuring that all

military members are made aware that this program is available to them. Also, military leaders should understand the requirements to participate in this program.

Another program is the College Level Equivalency Program (CLEP), in which military members can take standardized test to measure their knowledge in different areas. Military members take the CLEP test to reduce the amount of time spent in classrooms. Those military members who have gained knowledge outside the traditional classroom can opt to take the CLEP test; however, they must score at least a 50% on the exam in order to receive credit. This is a good program for some military members, but for those who may not test well, taking a class in a traditional classroom may work better for them. Plus, there is a cost associated with taking each CLEP test. Recommendations to make this program better would include allowing military members to take the CLEP test at no cost to them, adding more subjects, and updating all tests as often as possible.

The Vet Success program is a program offered by the University of Maryland to assist military members enrolled in their programs. The purpose of the program is to ensure military students receive the education support they need. The program assists family members as well. Resources are available to help military members find employment after the completion of their degrees. Counselors are readily available to answer questions about benefits offered to military members by the Department of Veteran Affairs. Flexible programs are offered, and military members can transfer college credits, thereby reducing tuition cost. Recommendations to make this program better include giving more military members access to the program and other universities adopting this program.

Requirements for the Education Buddy System Participants

1. All participants will be enrolled in classes. If possible, participants should be matched by degrees programs.
2. Commanders should attempt to match participants by rank.
3. Participants will sign an agreement stating that they will work to support their education buddy.
4. Only two participants per buddy team.
5. Education buddies will agree to report any problems that arise immediately to their leaders.

Recommendations for Learning Institutions to Support Military Members

1. Ensure all staff and non-military students are aware of the experiences faced by military members.
2. Hold a town hall meeting at the end of each semester allowing military members the opportunity to make suggestions, talk about their needs as military members attending college, and create dialogue between military members, non-military students, and school leaders.
3. Hold an awareness conference once a year presenting information about the military, making it mandatory for all staff and students to attend.
4. Make it mandatory for all students and staff to attend sensitivity and diversity training.
5. Hire more staff familiar with education benefits offered to military members.

6. Hire advocacy officers to assist military members resolve issues and conflicts associated with school.
7. Keep deployed military members who are students informed about university changes through email, social media, or regular mail. This will help keep them connected to the university and encourage them to return to school after their deployment.
8. Create mentoring programs.
9. Work with the Army Continuing Education System (ACES) to assist military members.

Relationships between military members who are students, non-military students, faculty, and staff could be improved if a campus climate is created promoting diversity. Most colleges have a variety of student organizations; they should also have organizations geared directly towards supporting military members on the campus (O'Herrin, 2011, p. 16). Participants in the study stated that they need to feel welcomed back into the classroom when they return from deployments.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine what can be done to assist military members stationed at Fort Hood Army Installation complete their bachelors' degrees prior to exiting the military. Those strategies were clearly presented within the white paper of this study. Military members leaving the military will continue to flood the civilian job market. Those who have completed their degrees will be better equipped to compete with their civilian counterparts, while those military members who did not

complete their degrees may face some challenges. The findings within this study can assist military leaders to promote education within the military ranks and help to create social change. An education can assist those military members seeking employment after leaving the military. The way the military views civilian education in the coming years will depend on its leaders and whether or not they believe military members who are educated can offer more to the military and to the civilian population after their military service has ended.

New approaches to educating military members should be developed, including starting the education process while military members are basic training recruits. This process should be specifically focused on military members and be designed for their success. Offering more information about college in basic training can help military members understand what options are available to them when deciding on a degree program.

Unit commanders and noncommissioned officers will play an important role in ensuring military members pursuing an education are successful. The support provided by noncommissioned officers will often determine the success or failure of those military members desiring an education. Military leaders should ensure they are willing to work with those military members desiring an education. Military leaders should also understand education benefits and be able to explain those benefits to military members. Not only is it vital that military leaders support those military members pursuing an education; leaders of learning institutions must ensure their leaders and staff provide support as well. Learning institutions claiming to be military-friendly must work to prove

that they are. College leaders and staff must work to promote awareness about the military and welcome all students. Understanding the lived experiences of military members will help to better serve them. Learning institutions that promote military history will demonstrate they are committed to diversity amongst their students.

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form for Participants

(Page 1 of 3)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study that will take place from June 1, 2013 through July 1, 2013. This form outlines the purpose of the study and provides a description of your involvement and your rights as a participant.

I consent to participate in a research project conducted by Ella Bolling-Harris, a doctorate student at Walden University located in Minneapolis, MN.

I understand that I was selected to participate in this study because I am serving on active duty, stationed at Fort Hood Army Installation, working on my bachelor's degree, have served four or more years on active duty, and can provide insight on factors that affect academic success of service members working to complete their degrees.

I understand the study is entitled An Evaluation of Service Members Pursuing an Education. The purpose of this study is to determine what can be done to assist military members stationed at Fort Hood Army Installation complete their bachelor's degrees prior to exiting the military. This study will address the following questions: (1) what factors affect academic success of service members completing their bachelors' degrees; (2) what steps might be implemented to assist service members in achieving academic success by completing their bachelors' degrees prior exiting the military; (3) does the Army Basic Skills Education Program have the potential to be converted into a two-year degree program?

I understand that my participation will consist of an audio-taped interview not to exceed an hour.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw from the study at any time.

I understand that I will not be compensated for participating in this study.

I understand that only the researcher, Ella Bolling-Harris, will have access to a secured file cabinet in which all transcripts, recordings, and field notes gathered during my interview will be stored. I also understand that all research materials will be kept by the researcher for five years, at the end of five years all materials will be destroyed.

(Page 2 of 3)

I understand that a peer reviewer, which is an individual who is responsible for evaluating collected data throughout the study, will be used and could be exposed to my personal data. At no time will the peer reviewer disclose personal information about me.

I understand that a data transcriber will be used to write out taped recorded interviews. At no time will the data transcriber disclose personal information about me.

I understand that the results of this study could be published or turned into school officials at Walden University, the Fort Hood Education Center, the post commander, company commanders, and study participants, however my identity will remain confidential.

I understand that there are no anticipated risks to me, other than those encountered every day.

I understand that confidential information such as my name will only be disclosed if I require emergency medical care during the interview and medical personnel are called to assist me.

I understand that if I disclose to the researcher that I plan to harm myself or others the researcher is obligated to report me to the military police and the local police immediately.

I understand that if I disclose to the researcher that I am involved in child abuse, spouse abuse, sexual assault, or elder abuse the researcher is obligated to report me to the military police and the local police immediately.

I understand that if I disclose to the researcher that I have or plan to participate in any illegal activities the researcher is obligated to report me to the military police and the local police immediately.

I understand that there is no psychological stress associated with the study and during the interview I will only be asked questions pertaining to the study. No data will be collected that will result in me violating workplace policies or causing disagreements with my military leadership or anything else that could cause damage to my reputation.

I understand that in the event I need an immediate referral for any services a Military Family Life Consultant (MFLC), who is a licensed social worker hired to work on Fort Hood Army Installation to assist service members and their families will be contacted. The Military Family Life Consultant and I will discuss what services I am in need of.

(Page 3 of 3)

Since MFLC does not maintain records on service members they assist it will be up to me to disclose my name.

I understand that Ella Bolling-Harris is an employee with the Family Advocacy Program on Fort Hood, declining to participate in this study or discontinuing the study will not affect the services that I can receive from the Family Advocacy Program.

I understand that the research study is completely separate from the Family Advocacy Program. I understand that in the event I have questions or require additional information I may contact the researcher: Ella Bolling-Harris at 504-430-4746.

I understand that a copy of this consent form will be given to me by the researcher at the interview to keep for my records.

If I have any concerns or questions before, during, or after participation in the study that I feel have not been addressed by the researcher or if I have questions about my rights as a participant, I can contact a Walden representative at 612-312-1210 who can discuss this with me. Walden University's approval number for this study is **05-21-13-0229967** and it expires on **May 20, 2014**.

I understand that the benefits of participating in this study is that I will be able to assist in developing strategies to assist service members who are working to complete their degrees before leaving the military from Fort Hood Army Installation.

Participant's Signature: _____

Interview Number: ()

Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C: Demographic Survey for Participants

Thank you for completing this brief demographic survey for this study. Your time is truly appreciated. Ella Bolling-Harris

Date: _____

Interview number () to be given at the interview

Please complete the following:

1. Gender: ___ Male ___ Female

2. Please check one:

___ Marine Corps

___ Army

___ Navy

___ Air Force

3. Age Group:

18 –24 years _____

25 – 30 years _____

31 – 35 years _____

36 – 40+ years _____

4. How many deployments have you been on? _____

Please list dates, duration, and locations

5. How many years have you served in the military? __
6. How many college courses have you taken? _____
7. What is your exit date from the military? __
8. Will you complete your degree before leaving the military? _____

Appendix D: Participant Interview Questions

RQ 1: What factors affect academic success of military members completing their college degrees?

To answer research question number one the following questions were asked:

1. What are your immediate needs as an active duty military member working to obtain a college education?
2. What problems have you faced while enrolled in your courses
3. In your experiences, what programs and services have been beneficial to you while working on your college education?
4. In your experiences, have college officials at the college you are attending worked to assist you in completing your college education?
5. Reflecting on the question above, what have college officials at your college you are attending done to assist you in completing your college education?

RQ 2: What steps might be implemented to assist military members in achieving academic success by completing their college degrees?

To answer research question number two the following questions were asked:

6. Is there more college officials can do to assist active duty military members complete their education?
7. What difficulties have you encountered when dealing with your chain of command pertaining to attending college?
8. Does your chain of command promote education within your unit?

9. Have your military duties interfered in your ability to attend classes?
10. How do you balance military life, college life, and family life while working on your college education?

RQ3: Does the Army Basic Skills Education Program (BSEP) have the potential to be converted into a two year degree program?

11. Have you ever been enrolled in the Army's BSEP Program?
12. If so was the program helpful to you?
13. Do you believe the BSEP program has the potential to be converted into a two year degree program offering a degree in general studies?
14. If you are enrolled in the program at this time why are you enrolled?

Appendix E: Confidentiality Agreement for Data Transcriptionist

This confidentiality form articulates the agreement made between Ella Bolling-Harris and the transcriptionist.

I understand and acknowledge that by transcribing the audiotapes provided to me by Ella Bolling-Harris, that I will be exposed to confidential information about the research study and the research participants. In providing transcription services, at no time will I reveal or discuss any of the information of which I have been exposed.

In addition, at no time will I maintain copies of the electronic or paper documents generated. Further, upon completing each transcription, I agree to provide the electronic and paper documents to the researcher:

I understand that breach of this agreement as described above could result in personal and professional harm to the research participants for which I will be held legally responsible.

Transcriptionist's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F: Confidentiality for Peer Reviewer

This confidentiality form articulates the agreement made between Ella Bolling-Harris and the peer reviewer.

I understand and acknowledge that by reviewing the data provided to me by Ella Bolling-Harris that I will be exposed to confidential information about the research study and the research participants. At no time will I reveal or discuss any of the information of which I have been exposed that pertains to specific individuals or their position at the college.

In addition, at no time will I maintain copies of the electronic or paper documents generated for the purpose of distribution.

I understand that breach of this agreement as described above could result in personal and professional harm to the research participants for which I will be held legally responsible.

Peer Reviewer's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix G: Interview Protocol Briefing

Thank you for participating in my research study entitled An Evaluation of Serving Members Pursuing an Education. The purpose of this study is to identify strategies to assist service members' station at Fort Hood Army Installation complete their degrees prior to exiting the military. During the interview I will be asking you questions about obstacles faced by service members working to complete their degrees.

If at any time you feel uncomfortable with any questions that I asked, you can ask to move to the next question, or you may end the interview. Any addition information you can provide will be greatly appreciated and will help me better understand the needs of service members' station at Fort Hood Army Installation pursuing an education.

You will be asked to sign an informed consent form and I will give you a copy to keep for your records. Your name will only appear on the consent form and you will be given an interview number which will appear on your demographic survey. Your participation in this study will be confidential and I ask that you keep your responses to the interview questions confidential. This will help to maintain the integrity of the research.

Before we began, I have two questions. One, do you have any question for me? And two, may I record this interview?

Appendix H: Letter of Cooperation

This letter of cooperation articulates the agreement made between Ella Bolling-Harris and _____, who is a supervisor at the Killeen Community Center and has agreed to act as gatekeeper throughout the interview process for her doctorate study. I understand and acknowledge that by agreeing to act as gatekeeper for Ella Bolling-Harris study; An Evaluation of Service Members Pursuing an Education. I will allow Mrs. Bolling-Harris to recruit participants at the Killeen Community Center and allow her to place her fliers on display in our facility. I will provide Mrs. Bolling-Harris with a meeting room to conduct her research interviews at the Killeen Community Center.

In addition, at no time will I collect any data for the study or be exposed to any research material.

I understand that participation is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the study as gatekeeper at any time.

I understand that breach of this agreement as described above could result in personal and professional harm to the research participants for which I will be held legally responsible.

Community Researcher Partner Name:

Telephone Number:

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research recruitment and interviews in this setting.

Gatekeeper's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____