2016

Transitions from Military Duty to College for United States Military Veterans

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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2016

ABSTRACT

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by

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MA, West Virginia University, 2010

BA, West Virginia University, 2008

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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June, 2016

Abstract

Some veterans transitioning from military duty to the classroom are not obtaining college degrees. The purpose of this study was to investigate student veterans' perceptions of the transition services and support systems at their college that might impact the challenges they face while pursuing a college degree. The theoretical framework for this study was Schlossberg's Theory of Transition. The guiding research question asked how military veterans perceived the transition services and support systems at their university in the context of their decision to obtain their degrees. A purposeful sampling approach was used for selecting student veteran participants who had returned from active duty and were enrolled at the university for 1 year. Moustakas's transcendental approach was the model used for interviewing 12 veterans. Inductive analysis was used to analyze data, including coding the interview transcripts and identifying themes to capture the collective experience of the veterans. Participants indicated that existing emotional or social support programs, organizations, and personnel to assist them on campus were inadequate. Implications for social change include increasing faculty and staff understanding of veterans' needs, which may lead to improved transition services, support systems, and communications within the university. Results may be used to improve retention and degree completion rates of student veterans.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my son, Stuart, whom I love dearly and will miss each and every day of my life. Son, I will see you in the afterlife in God's kingdom:

A precious one from us has gone

A voice we love is stilled

A place is vacant in our home-

Which never can be filled

And after a lovely heartache

And many a silent tear,

But always a beautiful memory-

Of one we love so dear.

Acknowledgments

There were several reasons why I continued with my doctoral journey, and I am grateful for the opportunity to be a part of Walden University's doctoral program. First I owe thanks to God for giving me the strength, knowledge, and perseverance to continue my doctoral journey. I give thanks to my lovely wife, Robbie, and my family for understanding that my studies required time away from family social gatherings; their patience will never be forgotten. I also want to acknowledge the military veterans and their families who were the catalyst for my researching their situations when transitioning into the university and the problems they encounter. They should benefit from their dedication to their country by receiving a higher learning degree that can produce a higher quality of life for themselves and their families. Finally, I would like to acknowledge my committee, Dr. Elizabeth Bruch, Dr. Mary Batiuk, and Dr. Donald Yarosz, who helped me become a better writer and taught me the importance of working to become a scholar. Their dedication as scholars and their belief in me as a potential scholar is what drove me to continue this doctoral program. I owe many thanks to many people for my accomplishments.

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Section 1: The Problem

Providing the relevant definitions of the research problem and the rationale for this study ensures a case will be made for bringing awareness to problems U.S. veterans are facing. The research question and theoretical framework that guided this study were thoroughly identified. Encompassing research literature supporting the research topic provided information on how the findings of this study could be used for specific educational settings. The conclusion highlights show the results could be utilized for specific educational settings for improvement in higher learning institutions.

Professional development programs are often achieved through a strategy that is successful in improving learning outcomes as they establish a robust relationship between participants that is built upon guidance, mutual trust, and support (Narayanasamy & Penney, 2014; Weisblat & Sell, 2012). The development of the professional development program may result in improved relationships between student veterans, faculty, and staff and may result in higher retention and increased veteran academic support at the university.

Definition of the Problem

Military veterans reenter the civilian world with the objective of pursuing college degrees to achieve economic stability (Bellafiore, 2012; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). With veterans having strong discipline and a highly structured and goal-setting mentality, obtaining a college degree should be an attainable endeavor (Hill, Lawhorne, & Philpott, 2011; Radford, 2011; Vacchi, 2012). There is a myth that transitioning from military to civilian life or a collegiate life is an unproblematic task for veterans due to their military and combat background (Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011). However, for many

veterans the task of transitioning to civilian life or collegiate life is extremely challenging (Hulsey, 2010; O'Herrin, 2011). A student veteran who attended a West Virginia junior college discussed the challenges veterans face: "Challenging concerns that veterans face when entering back into society include social and personal interactions with civilians, ongoing physical and psychological issues as a result of the military life, and adjusting to new and unfamiliar environmental settings" (personal communication, March 9, 2014).

Student veterans comprise a subpopulation that is more diverse than the greater undergraduate population and may require varied levels of support to be successful in college (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014). Many student veterans who lack the skills to handle their personal struggles along with the challenges of being a college student drop out of college (Budahn, 2011; Demers, 2011). Briggs (2012) indicated that thousands of student veterans nationwide enter the realm of higher education; however, many student veterans do not complete their academic programs. Out of the 800,000 military veterans who pursue higher education in the United States, 88% drop out during their first year and only 3% graduate (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013).

Transition services may be beneficial in helping academic institutions retain student veterans and assist them with their efforts toward graduation (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009; Glover-Graf, Miller, & Freeman, 2010; Parrish, 2011; Student Veterans of America, 2014; Zinger & Cohen, 2010). Transition services assist student veterans with methods of handling the heavy academic workload and provide a meeting ground to exchange methods in navigating the collegiate bureaucracies (Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughey, & Harris, 2011; Sander, 2012). These services aim to help student veterans navigate the collegiate hurdles and work toward graduation (Reynolds, 2013;

Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Also, these services reinforce the student veterans' decision to pursue a college degree and help the student veterans maintain the academic journey until the degree has been obtained (Kim & Cook, 2009; Moen, 2011; Moon & Schma, 2011).

With student veterans facing certain challenges, it is vital for institutions to have effective veterans' transition and support systems that ensure their academic success (American Council on Education, 2012; Hoge, 2010). To ensure the success of student veterans, transition services and support systems must be clearly visible and easily accessible within the collegiate setting (Atherton, 2012; Brooks & Young, 2011). On January 10, 2013, Congress passed H.R. 4057, Public Law (PL) 112-249, "Improving Transparency of Education Opportunities for Veterans Act of 2012 (ITEOVA)" (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013). This act mandates a description of available federal aid programs and requires monitoring of educational practices within institutions (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013). Further, PL112-249 addresses specific deficiencies as well as effective components in transition services and support systems by holding higher education institutions accountable for their academic services for veterans (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013).

Many institutions have inadequate or limited transition services and support systems in place for student veterans (Whiteman, Barry, Mroczek, & MacDermid Wadsworth, 2013; Yuengling & Kravitz, 2011). More research is needed in understanding student veterans' perceptions regarding the deficiencies and successful components within higher education transition services and support systems. The purpose of this study was to describe student veterans' perceptions of the transition services and

support systems at their university that may explain the challenges they face while pursuing their college degrees.

<div align="center">**Rationale**</div>

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

There are eight colleges in a mid-size city in West Virginia, and out of those eight colleges only four have veterans' transition services and support systems clearly listed on the school's website (Student Veterans of America [SVOA], 2014). Out of 23 colleges in the state of West Virginia, only 14 posted their veterans' transition services and support systems on their institution's website (SVOA, 2014). Colleges that do not advertise their veterans' services on their website are likely to have weak, limited, or no transition services or support systems for student veterans (Ostovary & Dapprich, 2011; Persky & Oliver, 2010). Public Law (PL) 112-249 indicates that these services must be transparent to the public within all college settings (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013). Several colleges in West Virginia, however, have not fulfilled the requirements of this act regarding the transparencies of these services to the public. A college recruiter for a junior college in West Virginia stated the following:

> Student veteran dropout rates are higher than nonveterans at this college. Seventy percent of our student veterans drop out within one year, and few ever return. Many of them suffer from traumatic brain injury, suicidal thoughts, and depression and face difficulty in adjusting into society. Possibly if there were more support from our college to help them fit in, they would feel more encouraged to continue. Also, if these services were more openly available

and easy to access, more students would utilize their services. (personal communication, March 9, 2014)

An academic advisor at a West Virginia junior college indicated that more than half of enrolled student veterans drop out within their first or second semester. The advisor said some leave because of personal reasons; however, most leave because of the difficulty of transitioning to the college setting: "I have at least three student veterans [who] mentioned to me that our college is not supportive enough so why should they care about staying" (personal communication, March 9, 2014). A student veteran who attended a West Virginia junior college stated, "Sometimes traditional students are constantly probing military questions or have anti-military comments that often surface within social interactions. It feels great just to hang with other student veterans who understand you more" (personal communication, March 9, 2014).

As a veteran, I was concerned that the transition services and support systems within the colleges in my city, as well as my state, were providing little support to student veterans. Based on preliminary evidence, it appears that the student veteran population enrolled in West Virginia colleges may have been facing challenges in transitioning to the college setting. Many student veterans in West Virginia may drop out of college because of the severe emotional and physical challenges that impact their academic success. The state of West Virginia needs to offer effective transition services and support systems in all of their colleges to meet the needs of their student veterans (West Virginia Legislature, 2016). Based on my experience as a student veteran during my undergraduate years, I understand the value of transition services and support services within the college setting. Data from this study will be a great asset in assisting West

Virginia colleges with understanding specific deficiencies and successful factors regarding transition services and support systems for student veterans.

This topic required examination based on the gap in educational practice surrounding the transparencies of transition services and support systems within college settings in West Virginia and within the larger education context. Many collegiate institutions lack adequate and effective services for student veterans on their college grounds (Moen, 2011; Ostovary & Dapprich, 2011; Persky & Oliver, 2010; Student Veterans of America, 2014; Vacchi, 2012). Ostovary and Dapprich (2011) found that 75% of student services on a college campus were designed to assist the general student body population as a whole, 10% were aimed at assisting disabled students, and 5% were allocated to student veterans. Many institutions, however, have not created a separate unit on their college campuses that specifically meets the academic and emotional needs of their student veterans (Budahn, 2011; Demers, 2011; Rumann et al., 2011; Wheeler, 2012; Yuengling & Kravitz, 2011).

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

Preliminary evidence indicated that many West Virginia colleges have not fulfilled the requirements of PL 112-249 regarding the transparencies of veterans' services to the public. Out of the 14 college websites that show veterans' transition services and support systems (SVOA, 2014), only 11 include a separate unit specifically for student veterans. Several researchers have indicated that to ensure the success of student veterans, colleges must create and maintain a unique department or program that is designed to meet the academic and emotional needs of these students (Ackerman et al., 2009; Bellafiore, 2012; Brooks & Young; 2011; Demers, 2011; Hulsey, 2010). As a

result of many colleges failing to employ an effective and separate team or program that handles the affairs of student veterans, it is clear that a gap in educational practice within the collegiate realm exists (Moen, 2011; O'Herrin, 2011).

Along with the gap in educational practice regarding transition services and support systems for veterans within college settings, there is limited research on this topic. More specifically, there is limited research highlighting student veterans' perspectives on transition services and support systems within their college. As I examined the various scholarly articles and journals regarding this topic, it was clear that the scholarly literature surrounding this topic rarely addresses the opinions and views of student veterans. Student veterans face certain challenges when integrating into the collegiate environment; therefore, more research is needed regarding the perspectives of student veterans regarding the support services on college campuses (O'Herrin, 2011; Ostovary & Dapprich, 2011). Many student veterans eventually drop out of college because of the severe emotional and physical challenges that impact their academic success (Budahn, 2011; Demers, 2011; Rumann et al., 2011; Wheeler, 2012; Yuengling & Kravitz, 2011); therefore, it is imperative to research the views of student veterans (Reynolds, 2013; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Although many student veterans are entering the collegiate setting, many are not obtaining their degree (Sander, 2012). The thoughts and concerns of student veterans regarding student veterans' services on the college campus are not adequately addressed in the research literature (Branker, 2009; Bellafiore, 2012; Carlstrom et al., 2011; Hulsey, 2010). The purpose of this study was to describe student veterans' perceptions of the transition services and support systems at their university in light of their decision to obtain their college degree.

Definitions

The following terms are defined in the context of this study.

*Military***:** Characteristics of soldiers or the armed forces (Department of Defense, 2012).

Perception: Having the ability to see, hear, or become aware of or comprehend or understand different views (Kim & Cook, 2009).

*Student***:** A former member of the United States armed forces including U.S. army, marine corps, navy, air force or coast guard, who has become a student in college (American Council on Education, 2012).

*Support***:** Services that are provided by the educational institution in assisting students during their collegiate experience (Student Veterans of America, 2014) and/or a network and/or group of individuals who provide emotional, physical, psychological, or financial support to one or many individuals in need (Hill et al., 2011).

Transition: A movement from one place to another or change (Hill et al., 2011) and/or services provided to students as they move from one place to another (Hill et al., 2011).

Transparency: Refers to a Public Law (PL) 112-249 that requires colleges to provide clear, noticeable, visible, and easily accessible student veterans' support services within the culture of the college.

Veteran: Former member of the U.S. army, navy, air force, marine corps, or coast guard (U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013).

Significance

The significance of the problem within the local context is that out of 23 colleges in the state of West Virginia, only 14 posted their veterans' transition services and support systems on their institution's website (Student Veterans of America, 2014). Out of the 14 colleges in the state of West Virginia that posted their veterans' transition services and support systems on the institution's website (Student Veterans of America, 2014), only 11 of them had a separate unit specifically for student veterans.

This problem was also identified within the larger educational context in that most support and transition services within college settings are not easily accessible, visible, or available to student veterans (Bellafiore, 2012; Briggs, 2012; Demers; 2011; Hoge, 2010). Further, most colleges do not have a separate student veterans' department within their college culture (Bellafiore, 2012; Briggs, 2012). There are many support systems on campus that were plainly visible to the entire student body; however, programs for student veterans are not easily detectable (Moen, 2011; O'Herrin, 2011; Wolfe, 2012). As a result of many colleges not having a separate unit or department that specifically handles the affairs of student veterans, the transition services and support systems for student veterans are very limited and inadequate (Persky & Oliver, 2010; Radford, 2011; Wheeler, 2012; Wolfe, 2012).

When student veterans are not able to access adequate support services, they are more likely to become emotionally withdrawn from collegiate life and drop out of college before graduating (Briggs, 2012). In addition, veterans who do not obtain a college degree will more likely face unemployment throughout their lifetime (Briggs, 2012). In 2010, veterans with a college degree outnumbered veterans without a college degree in

obtaining a job by 56% (NCES, 2014). In 2014, this number increased by 18% (NCES, 2014). In West Virginia, the average income of veterans between the ages of 21 and 35 without a college degree is between $15, 367 and $28, 761 a year (NCES, 2014). The average salary range for veterans with a bachelor's degree between the ages of 21 and 35 is $31, 256 - $53,856 a year in the state of West Virginia (NCES, 2014).

Guiding/Research Question

Pinpointing services that are beneficial to student veterans transitioning from military to collegiate life is best considered from the perceptions of student veterans (Bellafiore, 2012; Branker, 2009). This study focused on increasing the understanding of student veterans' perceptions of the deficiencies and successful components within higher education transition services and support systems.

The guiding question for this study was the following:

How do military veterans perceive the transition services and support systems at their university in light of their decision to obtain their college degrees?

The following subquestions were used to guide this project:

1. What transition services do student veterans describe as being available at their university and what are their perspectives on these transition services?

2. What support systems do student veterans describe as being available at their university and what are their perspectives on these support systems?

3. What are student veterans' perceptions of these transition services and support systems in light of their decision to obtain their college degrees?

4. What were the composite experiences of veterans transitioning to higher education after having been in the military?

Review of the Literature

This section expands on specific topics addressed in the study, including Schlossberg's Theory of Transition, the challenges for student veterans in higher education, and the impact of transition services and support services. I conducted an extensive search for literature that might provide information that would support faculty and staff services for veterans and that would include previous comments from veterans about what support is necessary for student veterans to become successful in graduating from college. The search for current literature included articles published between 2000 and 2014. I determined that I had reached saturation in the search efforts when slight changes in terms or Boolean operators generated the same group of articles. In my literature review, I address the limited information in the scholarly journals about the challenges facing veterans, indicating a gap in literature on the topic of this study. The literature review also addresses claim services that deliver benefits from faculty and staff and includes challenges veterans experience due to prolonged processing times for educational benefits claims.

Saturation for this research was achieved once the articles and findings began to repeat the same information and new information was not evident. Data saturation occurs when the researcher is no longer seeing or hearing new information from the participants or resource (Merriam, 2009). When researchers see in their data similar instances over and over again, specific categories within their research have reached saturation (Moustakas, 1994).

Databases used in this search included Academic Search Complete, ERIC, Academic OneFile, CINAHL Plus, Business Source Complete, and SocINDEX. I also

used government websites and the Google Scholar search engine. This search included the following key words: *theories of transition*, *combat veterans*, *student veterans*, *Schlossberg theory*, *Schlossberg veteran*, *stress disorders*, *Military Transition Services*, *Veterans College Support Services*, *Transition Support in Colleges*, *Veteran Higher Education*, *Troops to Teachers*, *Transition Counseling*, *GI Bill*, *Wounded Warriors*, *Veterans Affairs*, *Regional Processing Offices*, *Benefits for Veterans*, and *Veterans Benefit Administration.*

Schlossberg's Theory of Transition

Schlossberg's Theory of Transition is a beneficial conceptual framework for comprehending the transitional phases within an individual's life and the impact of those transitions (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). Schlossberg defined *transitions* as the emotional practices that humans experience when accommodating or making significant changes in their lives (Sheikh, 2013). With the focus of this study on veterans transitioning from the military setting to a collegiate environment, the four components of the Schlossberg theory (4 S's), situation, self, support, and strategies (Anderson et al., 2012) were used as a framework. *Situation* concerns the degree to which the transition impacts how an individual proceeds with his or her tasks. *Self* refers to how an individual copes with matters and how an individual handles and executes certain personality traits that enable him or her to transition (Anderson et al., 2012). *Support* refers to how an individual's outside forces encourage or motivate his or her drive while transitioning. These outside forces are usually relationships with family members, community members, friends, or even coworkers who add positive reinforcement to the individual (Anderson et al., 2012). Last, *strategies* refer to an individual using specific methods,

plans, approaches, or tactics to aid in the transition process (Anderson et al., 2012).

Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) argued that the 4 S's provided a strong

intuitive framework for understanding an individual's transition process. Goodman et al.

(2006) concluded that an individual's assessment and reassessment of his or her transition

process and available coping mechanism resources may be scrutinized in light of the 4

S's.

Schlossberg's Theory of Transition served to undergird transition services and

support systems. Veterans who transition into college life have a difficult time adjusting

from their old situation to a new and unfamiliar situation. Kim and Cook (2009) noted

that military veterans are confused about the precise collegiate procedures when making

major transitions from military service to college life. Many student veterans come across

transition problems identical to those of nontraditional students, but they bring issues that

resulted from their military experiences (Green & Hayden, 2013). Many veterans need

the assistance of transition services or support systems that can make an impact on how

they enter the collegiate setting (O'Herrin, 2011; Persky & Oliver, 2010; Reynolds,

2013). Schlossberg's construct of situation can be linked to colleges that provide services

that assist student veterans in transitioning into their new situation (Ackerman et al.,

2009).

Many student veterans who transfer into collegiate settings often deal with

personal matters and personal struggles (Baker et al., 2009; Bellafiore, 2012). Handling

personal matters that resulted from their military experience and the experience of

collegiate life can be an overwhelming process for many student veterans (Atherton,

2012; Carlstrom et al., 2011; Hill et al., 2011). While serving in the military, many

student veterans may have been self-assured, self-assertive, self-aware, and successful in completing their military missions (Hill et al., 2011). However, these same student veterans may lack the ability to transfer those characteristics into a college environment (Glover-Graf et al., 2010; O'Herrin, 2011), causing many not to attain their collegiate goals. Transition services and support systems can assist student veterans in building their self-esteem and efficacy (Demers, 2011) so that they are equipped to handle their academic workload and their emotional war wounds while attending college (Glover-Graf et al., 2010; O'Herrin, 2011). Schlossberg's construct of self connects to collegiate services that are designed to improve self-assurance factors among student veterans.

Common feelings among veterans when transferring to the college environment from a military background are loneliness, fear, depression, and isolation (Branker, 2009; Briggs, 2012; Carlstrom et al., 2011). Student veterans may need emotional support from various sources, and this support is key for their success in higher education. For example, the Veterans Student Organization (VSO) at the University of Miami established an advocacy office that responded to the needs of student veterans and made supporting student veterans one of their top priorities. The mission of the VSO was to bring student veterans together to foster fellowship among those attending the institutions (VSO, 2014). This network fostered emotional support like that of a family unit for student veterans (VSO, 2014). Schlossberg's construct of support perfectly ties into collegiate transition services and support systems that offer a wide range of support to student veterans.

Military veterans are familiar with strategic planning procedures as they relate to their active duty tasks (Wheeler, 2012; Wolfe, 2012); however, few understand the

necessary strategic planning procedures when transferring into the college world (Ryan et al., 2011). Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) indicated that advisors can administer assistance to student veterans by enhancing and developing strategic steps toward their academic success. Many student veterans need a thorough outline during their academic journey that details methods, plans, approaches, or tactics to aid in the transition process (Ryan et al., 2011). Most student veterans who are new to the college environment need this tangible blueprint that details necessary steps in academic achievement. Ryan et al. (2011) discussed how many student veterans need specific learning and emotional strategies when transitioning into college. Veterans are both different from and similar to the general population of students, and many times veterans need more assistance than the traditional student (Reynolds, 2013; Rumann et al., 2011; Stowers, 2014). Schlossberg's construct of strategy aligns with collegiate transition services and support systems that offer a wide range of strategic assistance toward academic success.

Student Veterans' Challenges in Higher Education

Health. Student veterans have many physical and emotional wounds before entering the collegiate environment. The most common military condition is posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which is an anxiety disorder resulting from traumatic scenes or events that were viewed, experienced, or witnessed by the veteran while active in the military (Bellafiore, 2012; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Hoge, 2010). Symptoms of PTSD include feelings of anger, depression, withdrawal, and avoidance of reminders of the trauma (Baker et al., 2009). According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2012), 21-26% of military service personnel will develop PTSD in their

lifetime, but Baker et al. (2009) found that only 10-15% of military servicemen and

servicewomen self-reported symptoms of PTSD. With PTSD being the most severe issue

for many veterans, it often overlaps with other mental health issues such as psychosocial

and behavioral problems (Baker et al., 2009). Thirty-six percent of veterans who have

PTSD also suffer from alcohol and drug addiction, violent outbursts, sleep deprivation,

paranoid episodes, and social isolation (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012).

Traumatic brain injury (TBI) is another severe injury that many military

servicemen and servicewomen have experienced as a result of their combat service

(Baker et al., 2009). An external force that disrupted brain functions caused this severe

injury. Many veterans suffer from all types of physical, behavioral, social, and cognitive

effects from this injury. Baker et al. (2009) revealed that 44% of military personnel suffer

from TBI and rarely recover fully from this injury. The severity of the injury determines

the long-term or short-term side effects and other potential symptoms. The number of

TBI incidents increased from 13, 456 injuries in 2011 to 17, 452 injuries in 2012

(Congressional Research Service, 2012). Major traumatic limb loss, drug abuse, and

suicidal tendencies are other major challenges that many veterans have encountered while

serving in the military (Department of Defense, 2012).

Educational Benefits. In addition to physical and emotional issues, student

veterans are challenged with the task of learning about various collegiate bureaucracies

such as admission, enrollment and financial aid, and housing and tuition procedures

(Ryan et al., 2011; Sander, 2012). A student veteran who attended a West Virginia junior

college indicated the following:

Trying to get my benefits from the Post-9/11 GI Bill was an awful experience. The biggest disappointments were the school advisors. They were unknowledgeable about the Post-9/11 GI Bill and how to help veterans get their benefits. It would have been better if there were advisors or a team that strictly handle veterans and their matters. I almost pulled out of college because of their slow service in handling my educational benefits. (personal communication, March 9, 2014)

Socializing, integrating and connecting with other students was also a major challenge that student veterans faced when transitioning into the collegiate setting. The same student veteran stated, "I struggled with interacting with my peers as well as adjusting to an unfamiliar and new environment. It was hard to feel accepted and relate with other students because our views, opinions and values were somewhat different from each other" (personal communication, March 9, 2014). A student veteran who attended a university in West Virginia stated the following:

Once I was accepted into the college, I was really on my own. I had to learn new study habits and how to complete academic assignments within a short time frame. I also had to get accustomed to people making derogatory remarks about the military such as their discontent with the government for spending too much money toward the armed forces. I struggled with people who made statements like this, so I stayed to myself most of the time. (personal communication, March 9, 2014)

Veterans entering higher education are challenged with the task of learning various collegiate bureaucracies such as the admission process, enrollment and financial

aid procedures, housing and tuition procedures, and the degree plan process (Ryan et al., 2011; Sander, 2012). This same student veteran indicated, "Once accepted in the college, student veterans must then familiarize themselves with academic lectures, academic assignments, classroom dynamics, study habits, and the campus life as a whole" (personal communication, March 9, 2014). Off campus or online student veterans may experience loneliness or isolation as a result of not being on campus (Ryan et al., 2011). Disabled student veterans may experience the fear of not being accepted by traditional students as well as the emotional and mental traumas requiring additional accommodations for their needs (Sander, 2012). A student veteran who attended a junior technical college in West Virginia stated the following:

> My college does not have a support program for veterans, and that is hard. Some of my veteran friends dropped out of school because they felt alone and they felt like the college was not that supportive. They felt helpless and isolated from everyone else. (personal communication, March 9, 2014)

Zinger and Cohen (2010) referred to the large influx of veterans expected to enter colleges seeking degrees and the ability of colleges to meet the needs of this population. Zinger and Cohen emphasized the Iraq and Afghanistan veterans adjusting to college life, the obstacles they faced, and their retention rate. Zinger and Cohen conducted interviews to describe the experiences of returning Afghanistan and Iraq veterans. The veterans revealed that they felt alone and disconnected from their peers and had difficulty keeping up with their academic assignments (Zinger & Cohen, 2010).

Ackerman et al. (2009) reviewed experiences of 25 Afghanistan and Iraq veterans and described them as a student veteran population with special needs. The qualitative

interviews included veterans transitioning into the classroom enrolled as full-time students in a local university. Ackerman et al. (2009) reported that veterans felt like they were thrown into college life without adequate preparation from their college. They believed their mental instabilities and their inability to concentrate in class could be addressed if there were a stronger veterans' support team at their college. They expressed their frustration with their school's veteran program in not meeting the needs of student veterans (Ackerman et al., 2009).

Student veterans who have health and collegiate challenges are at a disadvantage, more than traditional students when transitioning into the college (Black & Papile, 2010; Demers, 2011; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Traditional students may be presented with a wide range of student support services in the beginning stages of their college life (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Unfortunately, many student veterans rarely or never are initially presented with support services specifically for student veterans (Bellafiore, 2012; Glover-Graf et al., 2010). Colleges that do not have transparency in their support services often have limited services in helping student veterans in the transition process (Persky & Oliver, 2010).

The American Council on Education (2012) indicated that 74% of all institutions had available transition services or support services for student veterans on their college grounds. The report revealed that 42% of those institutions offered veteran orientation with 65% trained faculty and staff members to assist student veterans with transition issues (American Council on Education, 2012). The retention rate of student veterans within these institutions indicated 73% to 77% from 2012 to 2013 (American Council on

Education, 2012). Transition services and support systems can have a positive impact on student veterans' academic success (Persky & Oliver, 2010).

The Impact of Transition Services and Support Services

Transition services and support systems play an important role in the lives of student veterans who are transitioning into the collegiate setting (Hulsey, 2010; Moon & Schma, 2011). In particular, these services introduce student veterans to other veterans on campus, allowing them the chance to dialogue their military and college experience with other students (Brooks & Young 2011; Demers, 2011). For example, the UNL Student Veterans Organization University of Nebraska provided an environment in which student veterans had the opportunity to socialize with one another. The organization prides itself on assisting student veterans with challenges that they incur while transitioning into the college setting (Student Veterans Organization University of Nebraska, 2014). Their mission is to promote camaraderie on the school's campus and to encourage the development of a strong social network. It is important for veterans to connect with other veterans and foster their academic growth within a team or group environment (Student Veterans Organization University of Nebraska, 2014).

Transition services and support systems permit student veterans to interrelate with peers who are familiar with the language and culture of the military within a moderately risk-free and non-threatening environment (O'Herrin, 2011; Parrish, 2011). Student veterans often feel disconnected with traditional students and better connected with other students who have a military background (Parrish, 2011). The best group to provide emotional support to student veterans is other student veterans (Parrish, 2011). Student Veterans Association at Northwestern Michigan College strongly advocated

emotional support for student veterans by providing academic tutoring and guidance in selective career choices. Their goal was to help student veterans navigate through the collegiate hurdles as they progress toward graduation (Student Veterans Association at Northwestern Michigan College, 2014).

Student veteran services can operate as a social club, a place for networking and exchanging ideas and a residence for holding orientation groups sessions (Ryan et al., 2011; O'Herrin, 2011; Hulsey, 2010). During these network meetings, students can exchange their coping mechanisms regarding campus culture and exchange strategies for acquiring their educational benefits (Hulsey, 2010; O'Herrin, 2011; Ryan et al., 2011). Student Veterans of the University of Alaska Fairbanks were dedicated to providing procedures to acquire benefits from the Post-9/11 GI Bill. They also assist student veterans with methods of handling heavy academic workloads and provide a meeting ground to exchange methods in maneuvering through the collegiate bureaucracies (Student Veterans of University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2014).

A nationwide student veterans program that was specifically aimed toward increasing the student veterans' graduation rate and completion of postsecondary education programs was the Veterans' Upward Bound. This program provided counseling, academic tutoring and academic instruction in the core subjects such as math, English, reading and writing. Veterans Upward Bound Program (2014) prides itself on the following:

- To inspire and encourage student veterans to stay focused on the college path leading to the completion of their degree.

- To motivate student veterans to conquer their educational tasks regardless of the challenges that they may encounter along the way.

- To reinforce student veterans' decision in that the pursuit of a college degree is the right decision and to maintain the academic journey until the degree has been obtained.

- To assist in boosting a positive attitude in student veterans by strengthening their quest in getting their degree.

- To persuade student veterans to overlook negative experiences and continue the mission of obtaining a degree.

- To promote a sense of self-identity and self-worth in student veterans to stimulate their abilities in earning a college degree. (Veterans Upward Bound Program, 2014)

Military veterans experienced several problems when transitioning from military duty into higher education. Guiding Question 4 "What were the composite experiences of veterans transitioning to higher education after having been in the military?" was key to this phenomenology research study and identified transition difficulties that student veterans faced as they entered the university. For example, concentration in the classroom while viewing video media in class is difficult for some veterans because memories from combat duty can bring back horrific events that trigger flashbacks of soldiers dying in the field. This type of mental illness has been associated with several veterans in this study and as a result, they were diagnosed with PTSD. Also, veterans are a close-knit family and may not open up in communicating with everyone until an environment is present that they feel is trustworthy and free from harm. Student veterans were eager to offer

their opinion about solving the problem with sensitivity training for instructors that would help the instructors recognize harmful academic events that may have caused student veteran flashbacks. Academics and how well the student veteran is progressing toward their goal of obtaining a college degree is a major concern of student veterans at the University. They need the professors to show support not only to help them understand the curriculum but also to respect them as veterans and understand they are not like the traditional student who has moved from high school to the college classroom. Student veterans carried extra baggage of combat and military experiences to the classroom and needed the understanding and support of the university to help them overcome their transition obstacles that impede their progress in obtaining a higher learning degree.

Veterans continue to experience prolonged processing times in applying for GI Bill benefits. Veterans' response to this problem is to place counselors specifically trained to recognize student veteran transition experiences. Student veterans feel that the counselors selected to help them should have a military background so a trustworthy environment may be developed.

Transition services and support systems permit student veterans to interrelate with peers who are familiar with the language and culture of the military within a moderately risk-free and non-threatening environment (O'Herrin, 2011; Parrish, 2011). These services introduce student veterans to other veterans on campus, allowing them the chance to dialogue their military and college experience with other students (Brooks & Young, 2011; Demers, 2011). Last, they persuade student veterans to overlook negative experiences and continue the mission of obtaining a degree (Veterans Upward Bound Program, 2014).

Implications

It is anticipated that findings from this study will be helpful to other schools in the region. The information will allow other colleges to provide transparency regarding their transition services and support systems. The intent is to strengthen their veterans support services by adding components that specifically address the needs of student veterans. The findings from this study may bring a stronger awareness to administrative leaders within West Virginia colleges and other nationwide colleges regarding the severe dropout rates of student veterans. The gathered information provide insight needed to assist student veterans with issues such as emotional and physical problems, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), social dysfunction and the inability to adjust to civilian life. Findings from this study pinpoint influential factors that encouraged student veterans to persevere toward graduation in spite of the various challenges and obstacles.

A potential project that I would implement as a result of this study would be professional development sessions surrounding this topic, specifically designed for schools in the areas of the study's site. The professional development sessions would feature the benefits of effective transition services and support systems within the college setting. This would be an open invitation to all West Virginia colleges that have and do not have transition services. The intent of these professional development offerings would be to present the findings in my research, other documents and other research information to a representative at these colleges. Professional development topics would cover the need for these services, ways of improving existing services, and ways of implementing the services. My purpose in having professional development would be to educate collegiate representatives about the severe dropout rates of veterans and why they

are in need of specialized support within college settings. Further, this would allow colleges to network with one another and combat this issue.

Veterans were allowed to participate in one-on-one interviews that stated their perspectives about transition and support services, which gave a better understanding of problems they faced when transitioning into the university. Their interview responses identified areas lacking in support. These areas included the understanding of PTSD, the G.I. Bill process information, and academic support from faculty and staff.

Summary

This section described the local problem and the rationale for the study, guiding questions for the project study, and a review of the literature. Schlossberg's Theory of Transition was used as a framework in considering health and academic challenges faced by veterans entering higher education, and the impact of transition services and support systems.

There is a myth that transitioning from military to civilian life or collegiate life is an unproblematic task for veterans, due to their enormous military and combat background (Rumann et al., 2011). However, for many veterans the task of transitioning to civilian life or to collegiate life is extremely challenging and difficult. Transition services assist student veterans with methods of handling a heavy academic workload and provide a meeting ground to exchange methods in maneuvering through the collegiate bureaucracies (Sander, 2012; Ryan et al., 2011).

This problem was also identified within the larger educational context; as in West Virginia, support and transition services within college settings are often not easily accessible, visible or available to student veterans (Bellafiore, 2012; Briggs, 2012;

Demers; 2011; Hoge, 2010). Also, as a result of many colleges not having a separate unit or department that specifically handles the affairs of student veterans, their transition services and support systems for student veterans are very limited and inadequate (Persky & Oliver, 2010; Radford, 2011; Wheeler, 2012; Wolfe, 2012).

Understanding student veterans' perceptions was important in addressing the deficiencies and successful components within higher education transition services and support systems. The purpose of this project was to obtain student veterans' perceptions of the transition services and support systems at their university in light of their decision to obtain their college degree. The aim of this project study was to provide insight to institutions with specific deficiencies and successful factors regarding transition services and support systems for student veterans. The Schlossberg theory was the theoretical framework for this study.

Section 2 describes the methodology for this research study, which was a qualitative approach. The data collection, the role of the researcher, data analysis, and the justification of research design and why other choices would be less effective were presented. Also, the criteria for selecting the participants in Section 2 described the sampling approach and considerations for the ethical protection of the participants.

Section 2: The Methodology

Transition services and support systems aim to help student veterans navigate the collegiate hurdles as they progress toward graduation. The purpose of this study was to describe student veterans' perceptions of the transition services and support systems at their university in light of their decision to obtain their college degree. This section presents the qualitative research design, participants, data collection, data analysis, validity and reliability, and conclusion.

Qualitative Research Design

I identified my guiding research question, developed my research protocol, and established my sampling methods. I selected transcendental phenomenology as a design to research veterans' perceptions regarding support services. A phenomenological design is used to explain the lived experiences of an individual or a group of individuals regarding a specific phenomenon (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). The phenomenologist attempts to understand the phenomenon from the viewpoint of the participant. Phenomenology is derived from Husserl, who argued that researchers have the ability to navigate through ordinary restrictions past philosophies and predispositions to a transcendental state (Husserl, 1970). Transcendental phenomenology was appropriate for my study because it allowed me to look at veterans' perceptions with a more open mind resulting in fresh knowledge from veterans' descriptions of lived experiences during interviews. This design allowed me to reflect on my experiences as I transitioned from military life to the college campus, and how my needs were never met when I sought my college education while struggling to make a smooth transition. Merriam (2009) indicated that the epoche process results from seeking to block biases to explain a phenomenon.

The epoche process was used in the student veteran interviews as I blocked my biases and assumptions to explain feedback from the participants. Once epoche was established, the outcome of the interviews was ensured, as bias was not part of the dialogue.

I used bracketing to identify my experiences that may have influenced understanding of student veteran experiences. I put aside my beliefs about perceptions of what student veterans needed while I conducted interviews in the one-on-one sessions. When I was attending school after discharge from the military, I experienced problems with the G.I. Bill, with receiving support from campus regarding my academic studies, and with understanding how to transition from military duty to the college atmosphere. I struggled to complete my degree several times, and it was difficult because of the lack of support. When I began my doctoral research, I knew the importance of using bracketing throughout the study to ensure that the validity of the data and analysis process was not compromised. I put my personal opinions and experiences aside to objectively describe student veteran experiences.

My study was concerned with learning about students' perceptions of support services at the university through one-on-one interviews. The subquestions, which were derived from the guiding research question developed for this study, appear below, along with a brief explanation of the question.

1. What transition services do military student veterans describe as being available at their university and what are their perspectives on these transition services? This question referred to the theme situation and the degree of difficulty affecting veterans completing their academic tasks.

2. What support systems do military student veterans describe as being available at their university and what are their perspectives on these support systems? Support was related to external forces that motivated students' progress while transitioning.

3. What are military student veterans' perspectives on these transition services and support systems in light of their decision to obtain their college degrees? This question referred to self and the student veterans' ability to cope with the university atmosphere and how well they can overcome obstacles while they are transitioning into the classroom.

4. What were the composite experiences of veterans transitioning to higher education after having been in the military? This question referred to strategies used to cope with transitions into the university atmosphere and student veterans using different approaches to coping with those transitions.

Transcendental phenomenology centers on the personal thoughts of an individual's experience as a way of generating information that is distinctive (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). James (2012) provided a detailed exploration of potential methodologies including case study, grounded theory, ethnography, narrative research, and phenomenology. I selected phenomenology because I wanted my study to focus on what veterans have in common as they explained their perceptions about receiving support at the university. Narrative research was not appropriate because it focused on the life experiences of only one individual. Because my study included a group of 12 veterans, this method was not selected. Ethnography is used to describe how cultures work; however, it did not offer potential methods for understanding problems veterans are facing while transitioning from combat to the classroom or offering support in the

classroom. The case study method was not appropriate because it is used to examine an individual case or multiple cases in a particular setting. Grounded theory is similar to phenomenology, focusing on the meaning of an experience; however, the grounded theory approach involves discovering a theory or interaction, and my focus was understanding the lived experiences of veterans. I suspended my beliefs regarding problems I experienced with G.I. Bill, academic support, and transition awareness to prevent my experiences from influencing my study and to present findings that were objective after receiving responses from student veterans in the one-on-one interviews. The transcendental phenomenology design gave student veterans the opportunity to describe the available transition services and support systems and to offer their perspectives about the quality of services. I chose this approach because this design could be used to reveal various problems veterans faced. Also, this approach allowed veterans to speak from their experiences and hardships that they experienced.

Participant Selection

I used a purposeful sampling approach to select student veteran participants for this study. The intent of purposeful sampling was to select participants from a specific population of interest to fit the needs of the study (Patton, 2002). Participants in this study included 12 student veterans who were either current students or graduates of a college in West Virginia. Participant demographics included different ages, number of years of military service, number of years in college, educational backgrounds, gender, and nationalities. The criteria for inclusion included current student veterans who had been enrolled in the college for at least 1 year and were receiving or had received services or assistance from the military and veterans affairs office at the college. Graduate student

veterans who participated in the study had attended the study site for the entire 4 years. In addition, they had received assistance from the military and veterans affairs department at the university, and had graduated with at least a 2.5 grade point average.

There were several procedures for collecting data for this study. First, I requested permission from the Office of Integrity Institutional Review Board at the university to conduct interviews with the student veterans at the university. Then I contacted via letter, email, and telephone calls the director of military and veterans affairs at the university requesting permission to contact the student veterans. The letter requested access to current student veterans and student veterans who had graduated from the university. The letter described the purpose and nature of the study and the specific requirements of the participants. Further, the letter detailed how participants would be asked questions regarding their opinions and ideas of transition services and support systems at the university. After the military and veterans affairs office released a list of candidates who fit the profile for the study, I sent an email to the student veterans explaining the process and purpose of this study. I requested that each participant complete a consent form before the interview commenced, and I received the signed letters from each student veteran. Finally, I requested dates and times for the one-on-one interviews.

Participants' Background

The participants ranged in ages, number of years of military service, number of years in college, educational backgrounds, gender, nationalities, and student status (i.e., whether they were currently a student or had graduated from the university). The 12 participants were identified as Participant 1, Participant 2, and so forth during the

interview sessions. Table 1 presents the participants' demographics at the time of the

interview.

Table 1.

Military Demographics of Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Military	College	Education	Gender	Ethnicity	Status
Participant 1	29	4 yrs.	2yrs.	HS Diploma	Male	White	Student
Participant 2	27	4 yrs.	3yrs.	BA	Female	White	Student
Participant 3	25	2 yrs.	3yrs.	HS Diploma	Male	White	Student
Participant 4	27	2 yrs.	3yrs.	BS	Male	White	Student
Participant 5	44	20 yrs.	6yrs.	Graduate Degree	Male	African-American	Graduate
Participant 6	23	2 yrs.	2yrs.	HS Diploma	Female	White	Student
Participant 7	29	2 yrs.	4yrs.	BA	Male	White	Graduate
Participant 8	29	2 yrs.	4yrs.	BA	Female	White	Graduate
Participant 9	32	3 yrs.	3yrs.	HS Diploma	Female	White	Student
Participant 10	9	3 yrs.	6yrs.	HS Diploma	Female	White	Graduate
Participant 11	27	3 yrs.	2yrs.	HS Diploma	Male	White	Student
Participant 12	26	2 yrs.	1yrs.	HS Diploma	Male	White	Student

Note: Information received from student veteran one-on-one interviews.

Data Collection

As a veteran, I recognized that the problems student veterans faced in this study as they transitioned from military life to the classroom were similar to problems I encountered while in college. The bureaucracy of the G.I. Bill was frustrating to me because there was not enough information or support to guide me through applying for my educational benefits. It was very discouraging and almost deterred me from pursuing an education. Once I entered the university system, I felt alone because I had no support for problems that I experienced as a student veteran. It was embarrassing to ask for help because I was older than the nonveteran student; however, I desperately needed support. My military background created flashbacks from situations experienced from life-threatening situations and impeded my performance in the classroom. Some younger students had significant problems with the U. S. presence in foreign countries and did not support my service to our country. This was depressing and affected my grades. On another occasion, the Veterans Administration cut off my educational benefits with no warning. I had to drop out of school, find a temporary job, and pay for tuition until the Veterans Administration renewed my benefits. Posttraumatic stress syndrome is the most significant problem for veterans transitioning to college life. I was hopeful my knowledge of this disorder would prove helpful in understanding and interpreting the experiences relayed by my fellow veterans. It is important to note that I bracketed these experiences to prevent them from influencing the outcome of my study.

Data collection began by contacting the director of the Office of Research Integrity (DORI) asking for permission to conduct the project study and interview 12 veterans at the university. Although the university was not involved directly in the study,

university procedure required me to obtain permission to conduct the study and interviews while on campus property. Next I received permission to talk to the veterans because campus policy did not allow anyone to question any university student veteran without permission from his or her representative, the director of military and veteran affairs (DMVA). Both departments required written consent before proceeding with the interviews. Also, the Walden University IRB approved all documents received from the university. After meeting with the DMVA and explaining in detail the scope of the study, I asked for and received permission to use one of the university's private conference rooms for conducting the interviews. This room was located in the veterans' center in a building on campus. The purpose of using this conference room was to establish a secure and private atmosphere for asking the veterans questions about their experiences transitioning from military duty to the classroom and make them comfortable during the interview. I found that this location helped me to establish trust and build a relationship with each student veteran, and provided the veterans a relaxed atmosphere where they could offer more detailed responses to the interview questions.

Before gathering the data from the interviews, I sat down with the DMVA to work out a schedule for appointments to interview veterans at a veteran center. The DMVA posted a signup sheet at the center along with an invitation to participate in the study, which I developed to explain what the study was about and the participants' rights and protection should they volunteer for the study. Twelve student participants were contacted by the DMVA from the list posted at the veterans' center lounge. A time was selected according to the student veterans' schedule when they could come in for the interviews. The process for setting up and conducting the interviews took 2 weeks. Each

student veteran was asked nine questions that related to his or her experiences transitioning from the military to the college campus in pursuit of a college degree.

Open-ended questions were utilized in the interviews for this phenomenology study. The purpose of open-ended interviews (using questions that would be developed by the researcher in this study) was to allow the participants an opportunity to explain their lived experience. The interviews were structured to help ensure that the researcher addressed equivalent and appropriate topics with each participant while allowing flexibility in the order of the questions (Patton, 2002). Twelve participants were involved in this study. Based on Creswell's (2012) recommendation, having a minimum of 12 participants was important within a qualitative study so as to ensure saturation of the data. Saturation was achieved once the findings began to repeat the same information and new information was not evident. That is, the number of participants involved in this study was large enough to validate important perceptions collected from interviews without collecting repetitive data, which could take place if there were too many participants. I established a working relationship with the participants by sharing my experience as a veteran and my experience as a student veteran.

Schlossberg's (1995) theory was valuable in this study because it enabled me to utilize this theory as an analyzing tool recognizing veterans experiencing unusual transition periods. The interview questions were based upon the "4 S's" (*self, situation, support,* and *strategies*) from Schlossberg's Theory of Transition. The sample questions below represented key elements of problems veterans were facing and were utilized in my one-on-one interviews. Their perception of what was needed to serve them in a more efficient capacity was key to my research. Sample interview questions and the concepts

they addressed appear below. The concept and explanation of how each question was relevant to the concept is shown in italics:

- What has been your experience adjusting from a military 'situation' to a new collegiate life 'situation'? Veterans' perceptions about how they are adjusting from military to college life may show pervasive and continual influences. *(Situation concerns the degree in which the transition impacts how the individual proceeds with their tasks).*

- How did you utilize veteran support services? For veterans to become successful, self-actualization from both institution and veteran students is required. (*Self is concerned with how an individual copes with matters and how they handle and execute certain personality traits that enable them to transition (Anderson et al., 2012)).*

- What services are you aware of that your school may offer in fostering emotional and academic 'support' for student veterans? The question may identify different stages of participation that may have been offered to veterans by the institution. (*Support is concerned with an individual's outside forces that encourage or motivate their drive while transitioning).*

- What specific plan does your school offer in assisting student veterans during their collegiate experience? The plan may be put in place by institutions to help ensure veterans become successful in their quest for a college degree. Although institutions are not solely tasked to help veterans obtain a college degree, they are in a position to design effective engagement strategies.

(*Strategies are concerned with an individual utilizing specific methods, plans,*

approaches or tactics to aid in the transition process (Anderson et al., 2012)).

All interviews were conducted in a secluded room at the Military and Veterans

Affairs Office at the university. Once the interview was confirmed, each participant was

asked to bring a signed copy of the consent form preceding the interview. I explained to

each student veteran about confidentiality protecting the rights of participants before the

interview sessions began. The time frames for completing the interviews ranged from 30

to 45 minutes. I recorded each interview with a digital audio recorder and recorded many

of the responses on a laptop (saving those notes as a journal). Once the interviews were

completed, I utilized a transcription service and transferred the data to a Microsoft Office

word document. After all the interviews had been transcribed, I began the process of

analyzing the data. In this study, all the interview questions were pre-written and

evaluated by my doctoral committee members in advance. I asked my doctoral committee

members to participate in a practice interview that looked for accuracy, alignment, and

any bias issues. All of the tapes and documents are kept in a safe so as to protect each

veteran identity. This study modeled Moustakas' (1994) phenomenology analysis

approach that includes: epoche, bracketing, horizontalization, cluster/themes, textual and

structural descriptions and synthesis.

Data Analysis

An approach using epoche and bracketing to identify prior beliefs and temporarily

set aside prejudices for examination was necessary for this study (Moustakas, 1994). I put

aside my beliefs about perceptions of what student veterans needed while I conducted

interviews in the one-on-one sessions. When I was attending school after being

discharged from the military, I experienced problems with the G.I. Bill, receiving support from campus with academic studies and understanding of how to transition from military duty into the college atmosphere successfully. Moustakas (1994) indicated that horizontalization follows after bracketing is initiated. This occurs when the researcher sets aside specific statements from the participants. In this process, I obtained the data from the transcribed sheet and noted specific statements from each participant regarding their perspectives about their phenomenon. The statements talked about problems with G.I Bill support, the transition from military service to the college classroom, and academic support from counselors. I eradicated unclear, repetitive and overlapping statements.

Next, I took the noted statements and placed them within each specific theme setting that fit each description and placed them with the themes; this is known as horizontalization. Moustakas (1994) stated that units, themes or clusters are created as a result of the horizontalization process. The researcher must cautiously inspect the participant's statements and then cluster the statements into themes (Moustakas, 1994). The theoretical framework that guided this study by Schlossberg included: *self, situation, support, and strategies* (Anderson et al., 2012).

Textual and structural descriptions followed after themes were created. Moustakas (1994) indicated that a researcher must take the statements from the horizontalization and explain the themes in a narrative format. Textual descriptions entail the 'what' of the experience as perceived by the participant (Moustakas, 1994). Structural description entails the 'how' of the experience as perceived by the participants (Moustakas, 1994). To achieve this process, I combined both textual and structural

descriptions from the horizontalization and themes. I created a narrative description of 'what' (textual) occurred and 'how' (structural) the experience occurred for each participant. According to Moustakas (1994), the result of deriving meaning from a phenomenon is to be aware of the essence or the condition that must be present for a phenomenon to occur. The synthesis was the last process and was used to create the final analysis of the overall experience. Synthesis is considered the essence of the experience in which the composite descriptions are used to develop an understanding of the overall phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) offered a systematic approach in transcendental phenomenology in research. This approach analyzed the data collected as well as its procedures.

Negative or discrepant data may surface using triangulation confirming categories and certain themes. After I had determined those themes, I looked for data that questioned my themes that did not fit into one or more of the categories. The possibility of validity threats always exists in research and I looked for discrepant evidence after the interviews were collected when analyzing the data. Some of the veterans talked about not receiving enough support when seeking G.I. Bill information. Utilizing member-checking, the veterans viewed the interviews, and I received clarification on the support issue. I corrected my interview data sheets and increased the validity of my research.

Data Analysis and Results

The results of this study have been presented with Schlossberg's Theory of Transition, the four guiding research questions developed for this phenomenology research study and specific statements from the participants in responses to the interview questions. This project study focused on increasing the understanding of student veterans'

perceptions about the deficiencies and successful components within higher education transition services and support systems. Participants in this study included 12 student veterans who were either current students or graduates of a university in West Virginia. Data were collected and analyzed through a series of open-ended questions for each participant.

Participants were selected from the university in the student veterans' population group. Also, participants invited to take part in this research study were allowed the opportunity to describe and discuss their experiences with transition and support services offered by the university.

Interview Question 1. What had been your experience adjusting from a military '*situation*' to a new collegiate life '*situation*'? Based on the veterans' response, theme *situation* was evident. Participants 2, 4, 7 and 8 (who were the 4-year university student veterans) reported that adjusting from military service to a new college environment was a difficult transition. They reported that this difficult transition impacted their ability to communicate with their professors and non-student veterans and that they felt unwelcomed in their new college situations. Participants 10, 11 and 12 also stated that they felt they did not fit in the college environment and were unaware of any transitional support to overcome the problem of communicating with others and how often it impacted their tasks or self-esteem. Participant 11 stated, "I think it was difficult transitioning from military life to becoming a student, because the lifestyle and the culture were just completely different between the two, so many times I just stayed to myself." Participants 4 and 8 did not have any trouble transitioning to the classroom but did have difficulty obtaining housing because they were unaware of any services

available to help locate living quarters. Participants 4 and 8 struggled with transitioning into the classroom setting due to the lack of assistance from the university because there were no resources available. Participant 4 stated,

> The professor was not very helpful, and the class was very difficult, especially for me transitioning from military service to the classroom. The hardest part for me was getting back into a school mindset, like studying math. It's hard for me to develop good study habits without help. Because of this, I always had to ask another student for help and at times, this affected my self-esteem.

All 12 participants indicated that transitioning to a college setting after their military experience was difficult; six of the student veterans reported that it impacted their academic ability and social acceptance. Some struggled with communicating with their professors (which impacted their grades), while others struggled with finding specific resources within their new environment (which impacted their desire to get involved with college activities). Many indicated that not finding adequate support or not being able to communicate with their professors impacted how they proceeded with their school assignments. Based on the data, the theme *situation* was evident in six of the student veterans and two of the graduate student veterans in that the ratio was smaller in comparison to veterans who had graduated.

Interview Question 2. What had been your experience adjusting from a military 'situation' to a new collegiate life 'situation' in completing daily tasks? The responses from this question revealed how Schlossberg's theme of 'situation' described the veterans' ability to perform job tasks. Participants 2 and 3 indicated that the experience caused them to have difficulty in completing their tasks at their jobs.

After the service, I had problems getting a job, but I finally got a job as a teacher assistant. Although I had always enjoyed working with people, I struggled with working with children. In the service, I was always told what to do and when to do it. But as a teacher assistant, I struggled with my task of instructing kids on what to do. I also struggled with classroom management, discipline, and behavioral issues – which is all part of a teacher assistant position.

Participants 4 and 6 indicated that they did not have problems completing their academic and personal life job duties, but they struggled with completing multiple tasks at one time.

I got a job as a bank teller after the service. I did accounting in the service, so working at a bank was perfect for me. However, in the service, I only did accounting tasks in my office all day long - just one thing. As a bank teller manager, I did many things such as handle money, bank transactions, work with customers and oversee employees. At times, it was hard trying to do all of these jobs at one time.

Participants 12, 9, 1, 5 and 11 indicated that in the first year of college, they had more than one course at a time and had difficulty finishing all their assignments.

I wished a school counselor warned me not to take three classes in my first year, especially with me being a veteran. I could not keep up with the classwork, homework, group projects and study for tests and quizzes. Sometimes I had problems getting my professors to assist me and getting the help I needed from administrators within a certain time frame. I even had problems getting a tutor. I

eventually dropped one class because it was all too much for me to handle during that time.

The remaining three veterans believed the experience in the military better prepared them in completing their daily tasks both in academics and in their personal life. Participant 8 stated,

The military prepared me to take my time, organize my thoughts and complete all and any job duties regardless of the cost. Before I enrolled into the service, I never showed up to work on time - let alone complete all my daily tasks with urgency. Honestly, I was just very lazy. But after I came out of the service, I was a new man and understood that each job I got was to be completed to the best of my ability.

Several veterans indicated that they had difficulty in completing their job duties at their employment mainly because the jobs they had in the service had different expectations and requirements than their jobs in the civilian world. Two of the student veterans indicated that multitasking daily tasks was challenging as well as finishing each tasks in their academic and employment obligations. Five of the student veterans struggled with completing daily academic tasks due to the new experience of college life, not being well informed on the demand of taking various classes at one time and not having the skills of handling more than one course at a given time. In all, nine out of the twelve veterans revealed that they struggled to adjust from a military 'situation' to a new collegiate life 'situation' in completing daily tasks, and three indicated that their military experience prepared them adequately for completing both academic and employment

tasks. The results revealed that there were more student veterans versus graduate students that struggled in adjusting to a new collegiate life 'situation' in completing daily tasks.

Interview Question 3. What services are you aware of that your school offered in fostering academic 'support' for student veterans? Participants 2, 4 and 12 indicated that they were aware of the academic support services at their institution as a result of flyers. Participant 2 stated,

> The only academic support that I was aware of was the free tutoring services on campus. I did not take advantage of the tutoring program because it required signing up two weeks in advance. To get help, the tutoring sessions had to be scheduled within certain hours and days. This was hard for me many times because I worked full-time and never knew what my schedule would be two weeks in advance. Nevertheless, I was able to get tutoring from the tutoring service. I was made aware of it because of a flyer that was posted in the cafeteria. They also recommended tutors outside the college, but there was a cost. That was another extra $1,600 or whatever the fee was for that tutoring program that was for one semester.

Participants 5, 9, 11, 10 and 1 revealed that they were aware of academic support services as a result of word of mouth from colleagues.

Participant 9 stated, "I had no need for tutoring or counseling, but just the friendly faces around here pointed me in the right direction." Several of the student veterans stated that they utilized assistance from the Veterans for Veterans Program at the veterans' lounge on campus. This program had a military veteran who was previously stationed in Iraq for two tours and upon returning from military duty was hired as a

liaison for new veteran students to help them receive limited services such as counseling

and support for their academic classes. The title for this position was Director of Military

and Veterans Affairs (DMVA), and the representative's educational background was that

of a social worker. Student veterans who utilized the DMVA representative indicated that

the representative was knowledgeable with general information on how to assist them

with their academic needs and tried to point them in the right direction to receive

academic help. The remaining four veterans indicated that they were aware of academic

support as a result of their academic advisor. Participant 2 stated,

> I was told about the free tutoring services from my advisor when I first came to
>
> the college. I had informed her from the beginning that I struggled with reading
>
> and she said the college provided free tutoring. I attended sessions, and they
>
> helped me with some of my problems.
>
> Participant 7 stated, "I had tutoring assistance; however, I had not gone to the

sessions in a while because I did not like the fact that you worked with different tutors in

the sessions."

All twelve veterans were aware of the academic support services made available

at their college. Nine of the veterans took advantage of the free tutoring program on

campus, and two veterans took advantage of the off-campus tutoring program. Veterans

who received tutoring were overall pleased with their tutors. They believed the tutors

were very knowledgeable about their subject content and believed the college did a good

job in selecting appropriate tutors. Out of the twelve students, only one veteran did not

feel the need to receive tutoring as a college student. The results indicated that the ratio of

student veterans who took advantage of the academic support was higher than veterans who had graduated.

Interview Question 4. What services are you aware of that your school offered in fostering financial 'support' for student veterans? All twelve veterans indicated that they were aware that their school provided assistance in getting their GI Bill information; however, all twelve veterans indicated that the college advisors were unknowledgeable on the procedures of the GI Bill. Participant 4 stated,

> The school was so unorganized with the GI Bill process. I would wait for days for a response such as an email or a phone call back, letting me know if I had been approved. I took out a small loan just to start school because my GI Bill was not ready. I blame the school for causing me to be delayed in getting money and then causing me to get a loan. The GI Bill was finally approved, but it could have gone faster if the advisors were knowledgeable on the procedures.

Participant 4 stated,

> Throughout the entire four years as a student, every advisor that tried to help me get my money for school was nice but did not understand the process about how to get my funds. I had to connect with other veterans who received their GI Bill and let them show me the steps myself. Afterward, I had to explain the procedures to my school advisors so that they knew what I needed and how to expedite my funds. It was an awful experience regarding my GI Bill.
> I really enjoyed my school, but I hate the fact that the support services were not well packaged for student veterans in getting our funds. My experience in the first year was not that bad because my aunt worked as an advisor and she had me in

the system way ahead of time for the first year. However, in the second year, she

left, and I was in the hands of another advisor. This was horrible because this

advisor did not understand how to process GI Bill paperwork and I had to borrow

money in order to enroll in my classes. The GI Bill was finally approved, but it

took almost 2 months, which is crazy. The school was simply unorganized

regarding the GI Bill. Although my paperwork was approved in the first go

around, they misfiled my paperwork and I had to almost start all over again.

Participant 11 stated,

Getting your GI Bill paperwork together is extremely time consuming and chaotic

at this school. They misplaced my paperwork and I had continued emailing and

faxing over the same information. I almost, at one time, withdrew from the school

because of how I was treated regarding my GI Bill. The advisors were so not

together and I often had to remind them and resend previous documents. On top

of that, when I was approved, they did not even tell me in a timely manner. I

could have enrolled in four classes instead of two if I had known that I was

approved earlier. This school desperately needs to improve in this area.

Based on the data collected, all twelve veterans indicated that they were

disappointed with the college in not properly preparing advisors. Many indicated that as a

result of advisors not understanding and unknowledgeable about the standards and

procedures of the GI Bill, the veterans were delayed enrolling and paying for classes in a

timely manner. Some veterans even took out small private loans to assist them in getting

into their classes on time, and later repaid the money once the GI Bill was approved. As a

whole, the twelve veterans believed the school should have been better prepared and knowledgeable regarding how to execute the GI Bill for student veterans.

Interview Question 5. What services are you aware of that your school may offer in fostering social and emotional 'support' for student veterans? Several veterans discussed how they were aware of the Veterans for Veterans Program on campus that was designed to foster social and emotional '*support*', but many of them expressed how the program was not well organized.

Participant 5 stated,

> I know there was a Veterans for Veterans Program at the lounge on campus. You received basic information about school and possibly connected with other student veterans. The downfall was this; they do not have social gatherings of veterans on a regular basis on campus. I think there were gatherings periodically with social gatherings held on campus in the Veterans for Veterans Program department, but that is it. You are pretty much on your own socializing with other veterans. This was sad because more veterans would probably finish school if they had more social network organizations on campus.
>
> I have been here for three years, and I have never seen or been invited to a social gathering of veterans. I have been to the Veterans for Veterans Program office, but they do not host social gatherings for veterans. You just go to the office and speak with someone at a desk who assists you with things such as where this building or class is located. They also give you information about the GI Bill but just the paperwork. As far as social groups or emotional support for just veterans, this school does not offer that.

Participant 12 stated, "This school does not have an organization for veterans, they only have that Veterans for Veterans Program and that program is so unorganized that I stopped going." Participants 7, 1, and 10 indicated the school does not offer adequate social or emotional support specifically for veterans; further, they believed the school counselors were not experienced to deal with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Participant 7 indicated,

I suffer with PTSD and so it helps to have a trained counselor who understands the disease and can offer solutions in handling symptoms. I was really disappointed that she classified my disease just strictly depression and was unknowledgeable about PTSD. I decided to seek help outside the school.

Participant 1 stated,

I went to the counselor office only one time and never went back. She was really nice, but she actually told me that she was inexperienced to handle PTSD students. When I went to the counselor's office and told her that I had PTSD, she actually said that I might need to get outside counseling, because she was not professionally trained in handling students who suffer with that disease. Further, she said an outside support group that handled PTSD would be best because the school is not trained for that.

Based on the results, all twelve veterans were aware of the Veterans for Veterans Program at their college that provided social and emotional 'support' for veterans. Ten of the twelve veterans indicated that the program was unorganized. The remaining two veterans never utilized the program because they were unaware that the program existed

on campus. Veterans who considered the program to be unorganized consisted of five student veterans and one graduated veteran. Regarding emotional support, six veterans who were medically diagnosed with PTSD indicated that the counselors were unknowledgeable of treating that specific disease. The six veterans consisted of three graduated veterans and three student veterans. The remaining veterans did not indicate that they were medically diagnosed with PTSD or any other emotional disease as a result of being in the military; thus they did not have a need to seek counseling. Further, few were aware that the counselors on campus and school were not specifically trained to handle PTSD and stated if they had known that the counselors were professionally trained to offer emotional support group for student veterans, they would have used their services to get support for various emotional issues related to their experience in the military.

Interview Question 6. How did the services or assistance from instructors relate to the completion of your degree? Participants 2, 4 and 7 indicated that most of their instructors provided assistance related to the completion of their degree.

Participant 7 stated,

> Despite the fact that I was not pleased with the Veterans for Veterans Program on campus, I enjoyed my professors. Most of them were always willing to help or answer any questions I had about lectures and homework in all of my classes. Most of the time, my professors were really good about setting office hours to assist their students. This made a difference for me because I always did badly in math and I was grateful that my math professor had patience to work with me. I

passed the class because I really worked hard but also because my professor diligently worked with me.

The teachers are great. They all knew that I was a veteran and knew that I had not been in school for years. They always gave me their email address and cell phone numbers to call them directly if I had questions or needed extra help. Most times, I utilized the tutoring services on campus. But sometimes I would need further explanation on something in the classroom. With their help, completing the degree was golden because all of them were really helpful.

Participants 8, 12 and 7 revealed that the professors on campus assisted them in enrolling into their academic classes.

I think the professors on campus were really helpful, at least with me they were helpful. One of my professors actually helped me figure out my class schedule for each semester because I honestly had no clue of what classes I needed.

Participants 12 and 8 also indicated that at least one of their professors helped structure their degree plan by informing them in a timely manner what classes to take next.

I graduated with a BA in Education. One of my education professors would always give me a heads up on what classes I needed to take next. Even when I completed her class, she kept up with me for the entire 3 years. She would email me what classes to take before they were actually on the schedule because she knew I worked a lot and needed to know things in advance. She definitely was a major blessing in helping me complete my degree; I cannot say the same for the Veterans for Veterans Program.

Based on the results from the graduate veterans, all five of them perceived their instructors at the college overall as helpful. Three out of the five graduates indicated that their professors made themselves available to students who needed additional clarity regarding their course work. Four out of five graduated veterans regularly received additional assistance outside the classroom from their professors. Two out of five indicated that their professors assisted them in enrolling into the next course work as required for their degree plan. All five veterans revealed that most of their professors as a whole contributed to the completion of their degree.

Interview Question 7. What support services would you recommend to the university in working with veterans? Participants 12, 9, 5, 3, and 4 believed the university needs to better prepare counselors and professors to receive some type of military sensitivity training. They believed sensitivity training would help veterans cope with vivid memories of war scenes and the loss of comrades.

> If professors had some type of sensitivity training on military veterans, she or he would be more aware of their students' feelings and would possibly alter their curriculum. If not alter their curriculum, they may prepare the student veteran in advance regarding what the curriculum may entail. For instance, if a history professor received sensitivity training, they would have a better understanding of how certain films would or could trigger vivid memory scenes for student veterans. She or he would be mindful of films that depict war, and thus inform the student veteran in advance and possibly give them an option to watch or not watch classic war films.

It would be good if professors and administrators had ongoing professional development that was concerned with military college students and how to accommodate their emotional and psychological needs. Many professors do not understand that military students are somewhat different than non-military students and so our needs may be different than others'. This is especially true if the professor was never in the military. Many veterans drop out of college because they already felt lonely and isolated, plus learned how to adjust back to civilian life. I think ongoing professional development classes on this topic would allow teachers to better understand how to handle their military students and their learning and emotional needs. Possibly having a student veteran support program would enhance our educational progress. We really are in a crowd by ourselves and it was really scary.

Overall, this school does not have an adequate team in place for student veterans. I think the school and faculty and staff need to have some type of academic support program, or teacher and faculty and staff sessions regarding how to accommodate veterans who return to school. These classes should discuss things veterans deal with like PTSD, suicidal thoughts, fear, death of friends and horrific war memories. These classes would help the school and faculty and staff understand the mindset of veterans and be better prepared in working with them.

All twelve veterans indicated that the school needs a better system in place or a separate office that handles GI Bill procedures.

I have not met a student veteran who said that they have had a good experience regarding the GI Bill from this school. The counselors were so unknowledgeable

about the procedures. This school needs to prepare the counselors and their faculty and staff on the GI Bill process desperately.

It was just awful that this school does not have the right people in place to handle processing the GI Bill. The biggest recommendation I had was for this school to train their counselors and get a separate department that handles the GI Bill.

Participant 4 stated, "The number one thing I feel they need to work on is understanding how to proceed and process veterans' GI Bill paperwork." Participant 5 stated, "My first recommendation is that the faculty and staff at this school needed to attend some type of class or training about GI Bill, it [is] just sad for them not to understand it. It caused many of us to be delayed in our classes and take out loans because the faculty and staff and counselors were not properly trained to handle GI Bill procedures.

Several veterans indicated that the school needed a stronger Veterans for Veterans Program that offered support groups and social networks for veterans on campus.

The Veterans for Veterans Program is not really that organized or productive. I mean you may get some important information but not too much. The Veterans for Veterans Program should have a big support group that allows veterans to come in maybe once a week and talk about their experience in the military and their experience as a student. This would allow veterans to meet other veterans and stay connected. I stayed in contact with other veterans on campus throughout my college years and because some of us stayed connected, we graduated together as a team.

It makes a difference when veterans can meet other veterans on campus. When I met other veterans it was such a good feeling to not feel alone. This school should have a better veterans program that gives veterans the chance to meet others. They should have support groups that meet off and on campus. Socializing with other veterans allows me to share my stories and listen to other stories, which is awesome. I was in the military for a long time, so coming to civilian life on a college campus was a little scary but it made a difference when I met up with other student veterans.

Meeting other veterans on campus made a big difference for me. I would recommend that this school have a better support group system in place so that veterans are encouraged to stay and graduate from school. Maybe they should offer some type of peer buddy system. Meaning as soon as you come to the school, you are connected with another veteran who is already achieving success. That would be a great incentive for me to stay in college, knowing that I had a veteran 'buddy'. Because we were in the military, we understood each other better, and for that reason alone, we needed to connect with each other on a regular basis. I met other veterans but that was by chance. The school needed to incorporate a strong support system that allowed veterans to meet one another.

Based on the results, three out of five student veterans believed the university needed to better prepare counselors and professors to receive some type of military sensitivity training. They believed sensitivity training would help veterans cope with vivid memories of war scenes and the loss of comrades. All twelve veterans indicated that the school needed a better system in place or a separate office that handles GI Bill

procedures. Eight out of the twelve veterans indicated that the school needed a veterans program that offered support groups and social networks for veterans on campus. Evenly distributed, four were student veterans and four were graduated veterans.

Interview Question 8. How did you utilize veteran support services? In order for veterans to become successful, self-actualization from both institution and veteran students is required. Several veterans indicated that they did not utilize veterans' support services regarding coping with matters on campus because the program on campus only provided limited services. They indicated that the services did not provide ways of coping with matters or handling various personality traits that enabled them to transition. Participant 8 stated,

> The Veterans for Veterans Program was really limited in what they offered, so I really never went to their office. It was a waste of time for me, because nothing really was there that I needed.

> There was nothing in place in the Veterans for Veterans office that helped veterans to understand that they needed to acquire certain personality traits in order to achieve success in college. Nothing at all. I only went to the office to get paper work for my GI Bill and to ask questions about tutoring. But other than that, there were no services to assist veterans with adjusting their personalities for success in college. You were on your own, or got help outside the school.

Nine out of the twelve veterans indicated that the veterans' program was very limited and that there was nothing in place that assisted veterans in adjusting or acquiring certain personalities that promoted their success. The remaining three veterans indicated

that while they were in college, they had never been offered services that provided ways of adjusting to college from the military.

The theme *'strategies'* is concerned with an individual utilizing specific methods, plans, approaches or tactics to aid in the transition process (Anderson et al., 2012). This theme related to: What specific plan does your school offer in assisting student veterans during their collegiate experience? A plan may be put in place by institutions to help ensure veterans' success in their quest for achieving a college degree. All twelve veterans revealed that there were no specific methods, plans, approaches or tactics to aid in the transitioning process for veterans at the college.

Themes

Four dominant themes emerged from this research study. The four are identified as: student support, communication, sensitivity, and transition awareness. The following is a detailed examination of each theme.

Theme 1: student support. Many participants believed the learning environment at the university was substandard. With a lack of academic support for student veterans, instructors were not available for one-on-one feedback with student veterans, no meeting place existed for student veterans to consult with professors, and participants felt they were not in touch with faculty and staff support they needed to successfully complete their degree.

Theme 2: communication. Student veterans' overall perceptions of faculty and staff were less than favorable when the student veterans were asked if communication was a problem in receiving support. The student veterans felt they were not valued as students in need of assistance. As a result, there was a lack of communication that

prevented dialogue between faculty and staff and participants. Veterans felt this attitude contributed to a poor relationship with professors resulting in a lack of academic performance.

Theme 3: sensitivity. Many participants provided information about the need for instructors to become more sensitive when instructing them in the classroom. They needed university professors to screen materials used as instructional videos that contain sensitive war pictures that may trigger flashbacks of memories experienced in the combat zone. Veterans suffering from PTSD explained that many of them had to leave the classroom because the professor did not realize how sensitive the veterans were to the videos and they were unable to continue attendance in that day's class.

Theme 4: student veteran transition onto campus. Several student veterans agreed that the university needs to establish an understanding of how to address veterans transitioning from military duty to the classroom. Participants perceived university officials do not understand how to transition veterans released from military duty onto the college campus. Student veterans perceived this lack of understanding as deriving from a lack of knowledge of what veterans experienced in combat, how veterans acquired PTSD, and how the veterans differ from younger, traditional students coming straight from high school. Student veterans felt they were not part of campus life, had been overlooked as student veterans, and were not respected for their contributions made to our country. They also made reference to depression that may have resulted in lower academic performance.

Results

The four research questions and the nine open-ended interview questions were based upon the "4 S's" (*situation, support, self, and strategies*) from Schlossberg's Theory of Transition.

1. What transition services do military student veterans describe as being available at their university and what are their perspectives on these transition services? This question referred to the *situation* and the degree of difficulty affecting veterans completing their academic tasks. Student veterans complained that different situations affected their progress in completing their higher learning degree. This finding would be presented as a problem with student veterans completing their college degree and the lack of knowledge faculty and staff members revealed when addressing the student veterans' problems. Each veteran's problem would require a one-on-one solution to resolve any outstanding issues.

2. What support systems do military student veterans describe as being available at their university and what are their perspectives on these support systems? *Support* was related to external forces that motivated their progress while transitioning. The G.I. Bill was a significant problem for many student veterans because there was no support when transitioning from military duty to the processing center for benefits. This finding would enable faculty and staff to become more knowledgeable about processing the G.I. Bill than in the past, and, as a result, would help them learn how to handle problems in the future, supporting student veterans' goals of obtaining a college degree. Presenting this

information in the workshop may give other faculty and staff ideas on how to solve any issues they may have experienced.

3. What are military student veterans' perspectives on these transition services and support systems in light of their decision to obtain their college degrees? This question referred to *self* and the student veteran's ability to cope with the university atmosphere and how well they are able to overcome obstacles while they are transitioning into the classroom. Student veterans found that the university atmosphere was not veteran friendly when seeking help from university faculty and staff during enrollment. I think using the feedback workshop sessions about why the university does not project a friendly student veteran atmosphere would be the best approach to amplify this finding. I would utilize some of the one-on-one interview information to focus on some of the experiences of student veterans.

4. What were the composite experiences of veterans transitioning to higher education after having been in the military? This question referred to *strategies* coping with transitions into the university atmosphere and student veterans utilizing different approaches to coping with those transitions. Student veterans were not satisfied with overall support services on finding new ways to cope with stress related to their military service. This finding is at the very crux of what a phenomenological study is all about. The way student veterans look at an experience or encounter, or the way the veterans face unique problems, can explain the essence of their experiences. Presenting the experience from examples in the one-on-one interviews would give a clear picture of the problem. One-on-

one interview information given by veterans who experienced PTSD would be a good example to present to faculty and staff in the workshops. This information would convey the true meaning of this illness and give faculty and staff the knowledge of how to approach the problem both in the student veterans' classes and throughout their progress toward a university degree.

Theme *situation* concerns the degree in which the transition impacts how an individual proceeds with his or her tasks (Anderson et al., 2012). This theme had two interview questions.

Findings

Student veterans in this study recommended that improvement in communication between student veterans and university personnel regarding progress toward academics and emotional support would help restore confidence in the ability of faculty and staff among the student veteran population. Also, student veterans believed that training, communication, support, and planning were not worthwhile without cohesive guidance. Upper university management from each department may improve programs that could assist student veterans in reaching their goal of a college degree. The university may develop additional programs from the feedback received from student veterans' interviews and utilize other university programs that have been developed in the past to support veteran academic progress. Armed with this information, university officials may make themselves available to professors to assist with any training that would enhance communication with student veterans.

Validity and Reliability

The reliability and validity in phenomenology lie within the lived experience of the individual and the revealed essence of the experience is the truth that is in interpretation (Patton, 2002). I looked for evidence of negative or discrepant data but as student veterans shared their experiences they agreed that support issues were a major concern and were asking for help solving their problems. Member checking was used to assess what the veterans intended to say and gave them the opportunity to make corrections that may exist from wrong interpretations. Member checking, which was also known as respondent validation, helped me validate the accuracy and quality of my interviews. During the interviews, I summarized the information from the one-on-one interviews from each participant and restated the information. I asked questions of the participants to check the accuracy of the information from the interview. This process allowed student veterans to analyze their information, and they made comments. Student veterans were given an option if their interviews had not agreed with the summary reflecting their views and experiences; they could edit the interview to make changes. Member checking for this study involved writing up a summary after each interview was completed, and sending it to each participant for them to review and affirm the information was correct. Everyone agreed that the summaries were accurate and reflected their feelings. Safeguarding internal validity does not always protect all research. I took necessary steps to control various elements of the study so as to not allow threats to the internal validity of the research. For example, I conducted the interview sessions in a secluded and quiet private office so that participants felt comfortable and confident that their remarks were private. I reduced distractions by conducting the interviews with cell

phones turned off and no loud noise or music nearby. Each participant demonstrated validity and reliability by discussing their human experiences as a student veteran.

The reliability and validity depended on my skills as a researcher. Utilizing the transcendental phenomenology method gave credibility to my study that sought personal experiences of the veterans and gave credibility to data collected and the analysis process. A paradigm was established that allowed me to establish a new way of looking at veterans' structures of experience and consciousness and resulted in enhancing my focus when collecting data and analyzing information. As mentioned earlier in the qualitative research design section, I used bracketing to identify student veterans' prior beliefs. Bracketing was used as a tool in the actual conversations between student veterans and myself as the participants answered my interview questions. Being intentional in conducting the data collection and analysis by following Moustakas' guidelines (1994) provided a structure that was helpful in seeking to set aside my assumptions and focus on what the participants reported.

Ensuring that data were accurate and that interpretations were clear and logical also enhanced reliability and validity. I thoroughly followed Walden University's procedures that protect participants' privacy and presented myself in a professional manner to gain the trust and confidence of the veterans.

Triangulation is designed to enhance the validity and reliability of the research findings. Patton (2002) indicated that triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods that ensure the credibility of the data: "Its premise was that all methods have inherent limitations and bias, so that the use of one method will invariably lead to limited and biased data" (Patton, 2002, p. 21). I wrote a brief summary of each interview and sent

it to the participant for verification to see if they wanted to add or change information following member-checking guidelines. The student veteran feedback was necessary to improve validity, credibility, and accuracy to ensure that all of the data collected was interpreted correctly. Authenticity was enhanced through member checking by allowing participants to function as co-researchers to add their input to data sets.

I continued to collect data until I reached a point of data saturation. Data saturation occurs when the researcher is no longer seeing or hearing new information from the participants (Merriam, 2009). Once the participants' responses began to include the same information in this area, new information was not presented, saturation for this study was achieved, and the goal of the interviews was obtained. All veteran participants described similar experiences. There was no support after transition to college and poor response when attempting to apply for the Government Issue Bill. Therefore, there was no need to pursue additional interviews because the interviews would not contribute any information beyond that found from previous interviews. The repetitive themes were also a good indicator that saturation had been reached.

Ethical Procedures

The researcher must ensure ethical standards are applied with strict discipline following the guidelines rendered by the IRB protecting potential risks to participants (Creswell, 2012). Merriam (2009) noted that human participants might be protected against any harm by following IRB-approved interview questions related to the research study: in this study that recommendation was followed. Participants were at least 18 years old. I provided confidentiality by using numerical identification to protect their identities. The participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that

they should bring their completed consent forms on the same day of their interviews.

Personal bias is always a factor when developing a research study. However, I worked

diligently to be as objective as possible to prevent negative influences, such as my past

living experiences, from influencing the outcome of this study. The participants'

responses were kept at a high level of security, and no information was transmitted

outside the study to any sources that were not part of the research. If any participant

wished to end the interview at any time, I informed them that they were free to terminate

our discussion. However, in this data collection process no one asked to stop their

participation. A protocol on sharing information was provided that followed IRB

guidelines. Compliance on monitoring ethical standards was applied during the entire

study according to Walden University Guidelines. Specific ethical procedures followed

were:

1. I sent a formal letter to the participants inviting them to participate in my study.
   The facility was identified, and they were introduced to the informed consent
   process. My name was identified as the researcher and my goal as a doctoral
   student was to identify the perceptions of student veterans of their transition
   experiences.

2. I provided participants with the background information that this was a qualitative
   study exploring the perceptions of veterans on receiving quality educational
   benefits from the veterans' administration.

3. The participants who agreed to be a part of the study were told the requirements
   in the one-on-one interviews.

4. This was a voluntary study and each individual's decision to participate was respected. At any time during the study if stress became a factor or if the participant chose not to answer particular questions, they were allowed to withdraw from the study.

5. I made sure that no known risk was associated with participating in the study and the proper authorities granted permission from the university.

6. This study did not grant any compensation for participation.

7. Confidentiality was exercised, and all participants were kept anonymous. The participants were told their identities would not be disclosed at any time.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to obtain student veterans' perceptions of the transition services and support systems at their university in light of their decision to obtain their college degree. This study utilized a phenomenological design. The objective of the phenomenological approach was to explain the connotation, edifice, and essence of the lived experiences of an individual, or a group of individuals surrounding a specific phenomenon (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). Participants used in this study included 12 student veterans affiliated with a university in West Virginia. Six of the student veterans were current students, and six other student veterans were graduates of a southwestern university in West Virginia within a three-year time frame of this study. Open-ended questions and interviews were administered in this phenomenology study. Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology analysis approach was the model for this study. The reliability and validity in phenomenology lie within the lived experience of the

individual and the revealed essence of the experience was the truth that was contained in

interpretation (Patton, 2002).

Section 3: The Project

The data received from student veteran interviews guided the development of this professional training project. The intent of this project is to execute professional development training, encompassing a veterans' support program that will encourage student veterans in obtaining their college degree and will promote positive outcomes in obtaining their college degree. A veterans' support program would complement existing higher education transition services and support systems designed for all student veterans. This section provides the rationale, literature review, project description, project evaluation plan, and project implications. I also describe implementation of the project, emphasizing support systems, obstacles, and timelines for completion. The project evaluation and its impact on social change are also included.

Description and Goals

Interviewing student veterans in one-on-one interviews allowed me to describe student veterans' perceptions of their transitions from military service to the classroom at a university in West Virginia. Major themes that emerged from this study were student support, lack of communication, sensitivity, academic instruction, and student veteran transition awareness. As I analyzed the data, I realized some of the faculty and staff were not focused on supporting student services that could encourage the student veterans in obtaining a college degree. The data also indicated that student veterans did not receive quality support from the university. Based on the data, there was a concern that the transition services and support systems within the colleges in my city, as well as my state, were providing little support to student veterans. The success of student veterans graduating from the university is dependent on their successful transition from military

life to the university classroom and receiving support from university faculty and staff. Student veterans may not possess the skill sets to complete higher education on their own. Therefore, a unique support system needs to be in place to assist student veterans in their quest for a higher education degree.

The support theme led me to develop a professional developmental training project with objectives to meet student veteran needs. The first goal is to make faculty and staff aware of issues regarding student veterans' needs at the university. The second goal is increasing communication among faculty, staff, and student veterans. The third goal is to create an action plan that will enhance student veterans' education for presentation to the university.

The goal of this professional development project is to inform faculty and staff about student veteran issues that may impede their success in graduating with a college degree. Resources would be readily available to student veterans as a result of faculty and staff members participating in the professional development training program.

Active Listening

The overall objective of the training workshops is to improve the quality of life for the new student veteran. Increasing student retention involves ongoing orientation to all aspects of the university during the first year (Kirchner, Coryell, & Yelich Biniecki, 2014). Faculty and staff who desire to support student veterans can be a great motivational factor for them. They need not only academic support, but emotional support in the form of a buddy (Hall & Jaugietis, 2011; Livingston, 2008). The primary component of being a buddy to student veterans is active listening skills. People sometimes neglect the value of active listening; therefore, it is imperative for faculty and

staff to listen to student veterans. Hermann, Hopkins, Wilson, and Allen (2011) provided several key concepts regarding listening skills:

- clearing one's mind of distractions, and removing random ideas or biased thoughts so that the listener is fully devoted to hearing the student veteran;

- maintaining eye contact with student veterans while they are talking;

- being aware of physical gestures such as facial expressions and body language from the student veteran;

- asking open-ended questions to student veterans allowing them to talk freely about their experience in the military;

- acknowledging their positive attributes that would make them excellent students;

- waiting to respond to the student veterans until after they are finished talking and avoiding interrupting their conversation;

- responding to positive comments or gestures that show they were heard and that their words are valuable.

Learning Outcomes

The following list represents learning outcomes that may enhance faculty and staff communications with student veterans.

1. Faculty and staff will be able to recognize any emotional, academic, social, and GI Bill support needed to enhance student veteran educational success at the university and recommend a department for support.

2. Faculty and staff will be able to use the instruction from the professional development workshops to enhance their communication and sensitivity skills when supporting veterans in the classroom.

3. Faculty and staff will be able to exercise active listening to influence student veterans in reaching their academic goals.

4. Faculty and staff will be able to develop an action plan designed to support student veterans' educational needs as they seek higher learning at the university.

Rationale

Nine out of the 12 student participants indicated that there are no adequate emotional or social support programs, organizations, or personnel to effectively assist student veterans on campus. Professional development is often achieved through a strategy that is successful in improving learning outcomes as it establishes a robust relationship between participants that is built upon guidance, mutual trust, and support (Narayanasamy & Penney, 2014; Weisblat & Sell, 2012).

Of the 12 student veterans who participated in the study, 10 responded almost identically on questions regarding support. The responses revealed that the veterans perceived that the college lacks supportive programs, organizations, and knowledgeable faculty and staff to assist military personnel transitioning into the college setting. Based on the findings of the study, the most appropriate approach to address the problem is a professional development program to implement instructional interventions to strengthen the central vision of the organization (Weisblat & Sell, 2012). Professional development

training would provide a blueprint on strategies or concepts about support programs that provide long-term emotional, social, and academic needs of student veterans.

My study indicated that participants felt they were isolated, and they expressed their desire for more support services for veterans. Further, all 12 participants reported a need for better support programs and organizations. Individuals who are highly knowledgeable about the emotional and academic needs of student veterans at the campus would enhance student veterans' educational efforts. A professional development training project could be used to educate faculty and staff on the emotional and academic needs of student veterans and establish teams or organizations that specifically concentrate on student veterans.

Professional development may be defined as a long-term collaborative learning strategy that nurtures the professional advancement of personnel, teams, and the organization as a whole by concentrating on the needs of participants and student learning requirements. Professional development includes the opportunity to understand, educate, and drill fresh skills in a nurturing, inclusive atmosphere (Saleem, Masrur, & Afzal, 2014).

Review of the Literature

This section presents an examination of empirical research for the purpose of professional development. The review of literature addresses professional development training programs for faculty and staff. The rationale for examining professional development was based on the responses of the student veterans indicating the need for more support at the university. Eight out of 12 participants revealed the need for faculty and staff members to attend training regarding student veterans who transition to college.

Further, five out of 12 student veterans showed the need for an enhanced academic support program. Key phrases searched *were professional development*, *academic support*, *retention*, *sensitivity*, *loan defaults*, and *competition.* The databases used to search were ERIC, Academic Search Premier, Academic Search Complete, ProQuest, and JSTOR.

Professional Development Training

Professional development refers to the continuous and consistent internal training of personnel on an individual and group basis for achieving improvements in productivity and practice (Bernhardt, 2015). According to Lindstrom and Speck (2004), professional development can be defined as a long-term collaborative learning strategy that nurtures the professional advancement of personnel, teams, and the organization as a whole by concentrating on the needs of participants and student learning requirements.

Professional development involves educating, motivating, and/or teaching concepts or strategies that improve a learner's outcome (Blau & Snell, 2013; Brack, Millard, & Shah, 2008). Improving a learner's outcome by altering academic, administrative, or instructional behavior both for the faculty and staff and the student body in ways that bring academic success is essential. These sessions typically provide learning goals, instructional techniques, learning strategies, outcomes, assessments, and evaluation. Guskey (1994) mentioned practitioners are most motivated to change as they notice student satisfaction and success can occur immediately.

The purpose of career development programs is to cultivate a team of skilled and competent leaders. When teachers participate in professional development programs, they play the role of the student and take part in the activity to increase the effectiveness of

their teaching practice for the benefit of the student. It is crucial that leaders of professional development programs possess exceptional teaching abilities so that they can act as role models for those participating in the course. Generally, the educational community should integrate common knowledge about teaching practices with adult learning theory, which requires a synthesis of pedagogy and andragogy (Behar-Horenstein, Zafar, & Roberts, 2012). Teaching practices can be achieved by integrating both approaches into teacher education programs so that all participants acknowledge the importance of four key professional development factors when organizing a teacher development seminar, namely governance, the role of administration, strategic planning, and effective budgeting (Korthagen, Atteema-Noordewier, & Zwart, 2014).

Best Practices

Faculty and staff are made aware of support issues student veterans experience and the need for quality programs that will enhance their success in higher education. Awareness of best practices in the classroom is equally important if faculty and staff are to enhance student veteran academics. The University of Delaware (2016) has formulated several classroom practices to help faculty and staff communicate with student veterans. The following suggestions may offer best practices for the local university.

1. Avoid pressuring veterans into sharing their experiences.

2. Avoid small group discussions with decision-making outcomes because veterans had always depended on a superior to make decisions for them. Processing information is difficult and very challenging.

3. Providing someone to talk to when the student veteran is confused will ease unrelated stress.

4. Avoid course content such as videos that could cause painful reflections on unwanted memories of combat for student veterans. Faculty and staff should be ready to talk to student veterans before the material is introduced.

The above best practices are necessary to enhance communication between faculty and staff to promote student veteran success. This relationship is crucial if student veterans are going to be successful in higher learning institutions.

Faculty and staff need to be supported with continued professional development courses. The quality of professional development programs has a direct impact on student achievement and society in general (Kazempour & Amirshokoohi, 2014). However, the scope and depth of this impact are difficult to quantify, and many argue that attempting to quantify them is a hopeless endeavor. For instance, complicated family structures, changing schools regularly, and the different socioeconomic backgrounds of individual institutions can affect the learning outcomes of students.

Training on Veterans' Issues

Faculty and staff, not being veterans, often have a vague understanding regarding the challenges encountered by student veterans (Barber, Rosenheck, Armstrong, & Resnick, 2008). These challenges should be identified by training programs and eventually enable faculty and staff to acquire a better understanding of how student veterans can be accommodated (Carroll, 2007). Some veteran challenges may include the following:

1. conflicts between scheduling doctor appointments and classes,

2. military reserve duties conflicting with university classroom schedules,

3. unemployment, and

4. VA bureaucracy and paperwork regarding GI Bill, health benefits, and disability.

Irrespective of the type of program that is developed, it should address the following four objectives. First, the academic strengths of students should be highlighted as a result of the program (Church, 2009). Second, the challenges faced by student veterans both inside and outside the classroom should also be brought into consideration. The educational experiences of student veterans should be connected firmly with the participants. Various techniques and strategies should be designed that would contribute to the educational experiences of the veteran (Barnett, 2011). Third, learning goals should be established that incorporate both assessment and feedback, and involve activities that are oriented toward learning (Anagnostopoulos, Sykes, McCrory, Cannata, & Frank, 2010). Outcome-based objectives, as well as assessments, should be constructed for establishing a best practices body backed by extensive research (Heath, 2010). Finally, when it comes to advising student veterans regarding psychological and academic issues, the preparedness of the advisors also tends to play a crucial role (Street & Stafford, 2007). The military-to-college transition may be greatly facilitated as a result of the collaboration among the faculty, staff, and the student veterans.

The training of faculty and staff should be developed by individuals that are devoted to the success of veterans and understand the various obstacles faced by these students (McCain, 2005). Faculty and staff will need professional development training from the workshops administered by veteran instructors that understand student veteran obstacles at the university. Also, work should be carried out in close collaboration with military programs so that a better understanding is developed (Salzer et al., 2013).

Utilizing military educational programs at the university may provide additional background information related to the problems of student veterans transitioning into college. The differences that exist between the military services and college personnel should be taken into account and eventually addressed to carry out productive training (Seal, Bertenthal, Miner, Sen, & Marmar, 2007). Change needs to be initiated by both parties that would result in an enhancement of the student veterans' educational experience.

Assessing of Professional Development:

The role of assessment or an evaluation component within a professional development program provides information on the impact of the sessions and allows suggestions on ways of making improvements (Newton & Ender, 2010; Salzer, 2010). Specific critical questions are also often asked:

- What were the main elements I learned from this session?

- Can I apply these techniques in a real-life situation effectively?

- Was the session informative and was it applicable to the school's needs?

- Did the activities match the learning goals?

- What can be improved on in future professional development sessions?

Assessment-oriented outcomes are judged based on the impact it has made. Often, the focus during measurements tends to be on output or, for instance, the number of participants attending the training (Miyamoto & Sono, 2012). The primary objective should be initiating change, and this would require a collaborative effort between the faculty and staff, the administration, the development team, and other support services. Regular meetings should be carried out that would contribute toward increasing

awareness of the best practices (Saxe, 2007). Both on-campus resources, such as student veteran events, guest speaker sessions, professional web seminars, and workshops, and off-campus resources, such as the VA, should be incorporated to drive the change forward (Saxe, 2007).

Preparing faculty and staff to support student veterans is most effective with professional development training sessions (Ruh, Spicer, & Vaughan, 2009). The training sessions may be designed in many ways based on the structure of the school. The sessions are aimed toward instructional purposes with the intent to increase learning outcomes (Schnoebelen, 2013; Street & Stafford, 2007). They should consist of ongoing conversations, planning objectives, program evaluations, goals, and learning objectives throughout the year. These sessions prepare faculty and staff on ways to best support student veterans without actually having a military experience (Welsh, 2004). When faculty and staff adequately apply certain instructional techniques, they will have a better chance of assisting student veterans with their academic, emotional and physical needs.

Faculty and staff have an important role in student veterans' transitioning into the college world. Many student veterans struggle with the idea of being in college, let alone making the decision to enroll. Being part of a new environment (outside of the military scene) is often viewed by student veterans as scary and uncomfortable (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Veterans leave the military for many reasons, such as the desire to obtain a college degree, family and emotional struggles, or becoming disabled. It is crucial for college staff members to fully understand the underlying issues involved in the transition process (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). If trained to offer suitable support for student veterans, faculty and staff can identify distinct needs, provide transfer credit support, and

explain education assistance programs. Offering support will eventually demonstrate to student veterans that they are appreciated and thought of as valuable learners and that the college is making strides in making their transition to college successful.

Supportive Faculty and Staff

Colonel Sutherland strongly proposed the need for establishing faculty and staff development initiatives for helping instructors better understand the various dimensions of a veteran (Wallis, 2012). One of the most preliminary aspects of faculty and staff awareness of student veteran support involves establishing an environment where students feel comfortable in expressing their opinions. It was suggested by Holley and Steiner (2005) that a safe classroom would be one where students can articulate their views, apart from sharing and exploring their behaviors, attitudes, and knowledge. However, certain veterans might not feel comfortable regarding sharing their military experiences. When such an issue arises, it becomes the responsibility of the educators to ensure that the privacy of the veteran is respected. The comments made by other students regarding the military, government, and war should also be carefully monitored by educators. It needs to be understood and ensured that etiquette is present when it comes to discussing military service (Hermann, Hopkins, Wilson, & Allen, 2011).

Possible Resources

There are a large number of training and webinars available online which provide a wonderful opportunity to understand the challenges and experiences of student veterans. The webinars offer information to faculty and staff about communicating and supporting veterans seeking higher education. Also, faculty and staff have an opportunity to increase their understanding and education as they encounter student veteran needs.

Some of the organizations possessing veteran-focused seminars are Military Friendly Schools, Kognito Interactive, Student Veterans of America, and The American Council on Education. Interactive online learning experience is available on Kognito Interactive for faculty and staff to better understand the experiences and needs of student veterans named "Veterans on Campus" (Adams, Daniels & Compagni, 2009). For facilitating educators, this training simulates a veteran's experience in the classroom or on the campus. These online training sessions can also help answer any questions educators might have (Budge, 2006; O'Hara, 2011). The federal government has established additional resources in this regard. Executive Order 13607 and the Principles of Excellence (2012) ensure that federal education and military programs provide information to service members, veterans, and their families. For instance, the short absences from the classroom due to military obligations for active military members need to be accommodated by instructors. Such aspects might prove to be rather challenging for veterans when managing their class schedules especially as active duty service obligations tend to be rather stringent (Chester, Burton, Xenos, & Elgar, 2013). Absences are particularly frustrating for National Guard members serving in Afghanistan who were called to duty without any notice. The needs of veterans' classroom schedules should be addressed by the university through working in collaboration with instructors to provide alternative classroom programs. In a similar manner to the government's approach to addressing the needs of student veterans, other topics can be further explored by researchers (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008).

Professional Development for Faculty and Staff

Research developed by the Pew Research Center (2011) reported that 84% of the

post-9/11 veterans said the general public does not understand problems veterans

encounter while in the military. The public is in agreement about the significance of the

problems but by less of a majority, 71%. Such differences in perceptions worsen the

challenges encountered by student veterans, for instance adapting to the entirely different

environment faced in the classroom in contrast to a military setting (Pew Research

Center, 2011). Moreover, the environment that the veterans are transitioning into often

has a significant amount of difficulty in understanding and supporting these veterans

(Brozak, 2013; DiRamio et al., 2008). Acknowledging and accepting such a divide

between civilian and military life is the first step toward reducing the amount of stress

that is encountered. It needs to be ensured by colleges that when veterans decide to

enroll, there must be an adequate number of trained faculty and staff present to facilitate

their transition. Training faculty and staff on supporting student veterans can be best

accomplished through professional development (Beaty-O'Farrell & Johnson, 2010).

The components of a successful development program incorporate learning goals,

feedback and assessment measures, and other initiatives that present opportunities for

learning (Berger, 2014). Practical application of formative assessment for the

professional development program can monitor skills learned by faculty and staff and

demonstrate their understanding of concepts learned from workshop sessions. Feedback

from formative assessments that are used by the facilitator, faculty, and staff will allow

feedback everyone can apply immediately and in the future. The formative assessments

can also allow opportunities to faculty and staff to demonstrate their level of performance

and can provide the facilitator an opportunity to adjust the instruction as needed by the participants. Several researchers developed various elements that should be discussed in the professional workshop sessions (Berger, 2014; Budge, 2006; Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012; DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011; Saxe, 2007).

Faculty and Staff Support Responsibilities

- Schedule specific times and dates to meet with student veterans (face-to-face) monthly.

- Initiate correspondence twice a month (email, phone call) with student veteran.

- Provide guidance and support to the student veteran by creating an atmosphere of openness, caring, and concern where meaningful communication and trust can exist.

- Encourage student veteran to take advantages of the other support services at the University.

- Motivate student veteran to get academic tutoring on campus if needed.

- Encourage student veteran to connect with other student veterans on campus for emotional support.

- Keep accurate records of each contact with student veteran, and submit those documents to the particular Veterans Support Office on campus.

- Help student veterans to stay abreast on academic studies by connecting with study groups on campus.

- Assist student veterans to keep faculty and staff informed of their academic progress.

Project Description

Interviewing student veterans, in one-on-one interviews, allowed me to recognize their perceptions about transitions from military service to the classroom at a university in West Virginia. As a veteran, I was concerned that the transition services and support systems within the colleges in my city, as well as my state, were providing little support to student veterans. The success of student veterans graduating from the university is dependent on their successful transition from military life to the academic classroom and receiving support from University faculty and staff. Many student veterans may not possess the skill sets to complete their higher education on their own. Therefore, a unique support system needs to be in place that assists student veterans in their quest for a higher education degree.

The interview data presented the support theme, and that finding led me to develop a professional developmental training project. Eight of twelve participants indicated that they believed the college lacked emotional and social support programs. In problem-solving this lack, I developed a training module that would prepare faculty and staff to set up a student veterans' support program. The goal of the project is to motivate student veterans in completing their college degree. This program will provide student veterans with numerous resources that support their financial, emotional, social and academic needs. With this program, resources would be more available to student veterans as a result of faculty and staff members participating in a professional development-training project.

This program involves faculty and staff members becoming role models, guides or special 'buddies' for student veterans during their college years. Participants will

include student veterans who have been at the site university for at least one year. The program will hopefully motivate student veterans in completing their academic studies, and ultimately obtaining a college degree.

Implementation

Implementation of the project will take place at the University in the fall semester of 2016. The 5-day training will consist of 26.5 hours. The first workshop session will consist of a keynote speaker and a total of 30 participants composed of faculty, staff, and student veterans. During this beginning training day session, faculty and staff will learn about each other's backgrounds, the importance of communications with student veterans, sensitivity needs of veterans, and factors that cause problems for student veterans as they transition to college life. The goal of the first-day workshop is to make faculty and staff aware of problems related to student veteran success, utilizing proven research and interactive examples during this training session. The interview process of this study acknowledged student veterans concerns about problems transitioning from military duty into the classroom and the importance of support programs that can enhance their academic progress. The first-day workshop will introduce the keynote speaker and his dual role serving as the workshop facilitator teaching faculty and staff about the importance of supporting student veterans.

The second workshop session will be conducted on the next day and faculty and staff will learn about the importance of how to listen to student veterans' needs. One of the themes student veterans identified from the interview process was the lack of support because faculty and staff did not understand how to listen to their needs. The second-day workshop will bring awareness to faculty and staff about the importance of utilizing

active listening and awareness of problems that can prevent effective communication. During the interview process, student veterans were concerned that faculty and staff were not sensitive to understanding them as student veterans. Student veterans felt that faculty and staff did not value them as they do traditional students, and they are not receiving the support programs that can enhance their success.

The third workshop session will have faculty, staff, and student veterans attending. Sensitivity and communication have been issues that have emerged, so this session will work on the beginning phases of developing an action plan that consists of making faculty and staff aware of issues, increasing communication among faculty, staff, and student veterans, and creating action plans for the university. Participants will be requested to focus their action plan on ideas that may improve the culture of the school to be more welcoming and supportive of student veterans. Participants will be asked to list no more than three suggestions in their action plans. In small group sessions, participants will share their ideas with others in their group and discuss the feasibility of the project and how their suggestions align with others in the group. Participants will be asked to think about good action plans. After the action plans have been developed with contributions from the student veterans, participants will be requested to develop no more than three action plans for discussion. Participants will discuss the plans and record their ideas into journals for discussion on workshop day four. The collaboration and continuity of faculty, staff, and student veterans working together will enhance communications and increase sensitivity toward student veterans.

Workshop day four will continue with faculty, staff, and student veterans communicating implementation ideas about their action plans for submission to the

university. Participants will have the opportunity to reflect on their action plans and what they have learned about each other. Because of the participation of the student veteran panel, keynote speaker, faculty, and staff and action plans developed, it is a good time to ask where the development of the action plans goes from here. Participants will select members of a small task force panel to take recommendations to the University stakeholders for approval that may provide quality support, awareness, empathy, and sensitivity for student veterans. A task force will be selected and will consist of one faculty member, one staff member and one student veteran chosen by participants of the large group. After the three action plans are identified, they will be presented to the University stakeholders for consideration, approving the best action plan and submitting it to the task force. The task force will report at the end of the semester in the day five workshop to all participants.

Day five workshop will consist of a task force meeting with participants and reporting information about how to present action plans to the University. Based on feedback from the University stakeholders, faculty, staff, and student veteran, the task force will submit their findings to the larger group. Faculty, staff, and the student veteran panel will have the opportunity to discuss any changes that may improve the action plan. The original student veteran group will bring any awareness or concerns that may surface if the selected action plan does not meet their standards and to offer their suggestions for improvements. Suggestions will be encouraged from all participants in the open forum, and a representative will record the results on the white board for follow-up. The report on the University-approved action plan by the University stakeholders will also require acceptance of the task force, and the implementation process will begin. A progress

meeting will be held six months after the action plan is implemented. Attendees will be University stakeholders, faculty, staff, and student veterans.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

I chose a Professional Development Training Program because it offered a unique approach to helping veterans acquire their college degree. The rationale for designing this program was to enhance faculty and staff educational performance toward assisting student veterans in achieving their goal of obtaining a college degree. Potential resources and existing support for this program include division chairs, deans, professors, school board, and other administration members. I would seek the approval of University officials from each academic department and administrative office including the University president. I will need a room with round tables, a projector, laptop, a wireless microphone, podium and additional resources as listed in Appendix A. The Office of Research Integrity representing the school would be called upon to support the request for certifying the program followed by a letter of consent requiring approval. The school board will follow with support if they feel the program is of significant value to the university. The faculty and staff that support student veterans on campus for administrative processing and academic related studies would be identified and their roles submitted for consideration for this project along with the goals of the program.

Potential Barriers

I anticipate the following potential barriers, in that the time frame for holding the sessions might be in conflict with other obligations veterans and faculty and staff members may have on Friday mornings. There will be 5 training sessions for a total of 26.5 hours. Each participant will have to clear their calendar to attend the sessions.

Another potential barrier is recruiting dedicated student veterans who would want to volunteer their time to participate in the workshop. I anticipate funding this project through a grant from the Wounded Warriors Foundation and utilizing some of the funds for the services of the keynote speaker. There is always the possibility that the funds are not available, which would also be another potential barrier.

Faculty and staff members are primarily full time and part time teachers; thus, they are at work and have demanding schedules. Faculty and staff members such as administrators or department heads are more focused on the structure of the school. Consequently, faculty and staff members need to be kept abreast of the needs of veterans because of the administrative responsibilities tied into accommodations. Thus, faculty and staff members may not desire to dedicate additional time to work exclusively with student veterans.

Roles and Responsibilities

Faculty and staff may instruct student veterans on where to find the necessary information regarding their G.I. Bill, how to handle multitasking jobs, school and family, how to effectively communicate with their professors, how to get the right assistance for academic support, and/or listen to them when they vent their frustrations. Their goal is to encourage and motivate student veterans and provide social and emotional support while transitioning into the college scene. A keynote speaker who is an expert on veterans returning to school will kick off the 3-day workshop and facilitate the program. Faculty, staff, and student veterans will combine efforts and suggestions to produce a University support guide.

Project Evaluation Plan

I will use a formative evaluation to measure results for the professional development

training sessions. The assessments in this project will be conducted at different intervals

throughout the project. The purpose of formative evaluation is to "change" or "make

better" the thing that is being studied (at the very moment in which it is being studied)

(Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010, p. 318). When appropriate, participants will be

asked evaluation types of questions using open-ended format questions. Ongoing

evaluations will allow the participants to describe their experiences in the program and

make recommendations for future support. Formative questions will use the framework

developed in the literature review section of the professional development training

program. The review of the training sessions will be collected in the winter of 2016 at

various times during the project. The purpose for evaluating professional development is

to examine the strengths and weaknesses of the program so as to make adjustments that

best fit the needs of the student veterans. Delivering surveys is the best approach to

gaining informative and valuable information promptly. Specific questions on the surveys

would include:

1. Which concepts do you feel were the most informative for a program?

2. How do you feel this program can develop your professional relationship with
    student veterans?

3. How successful do you think this program will be, based on the learning
    outcomes designed for the professional development program, in making
    improvements for student veteran support toward graduation?

The goal of the evaluation is to collect formative information as the workshops progress. Changes will be made in the program based on information gathered from conversations and surveys.

Project Implications

Local Community Implications

The intent of this professional development training workshop is to address the need for transition and support services for military students who need help in transitioning into the college setting. This particular university, located in West Virginia, lacks available, effective, and visible emotional and social support services geared toward student veterans. The objective is to provide student veterans a support network of faculty and staff personnel who are knowledgeable about the needs of student veterans. This university in West Virginia has over 100 student veterans, so investing in a student veteran support program could advance the recruitment of more military veterans to the college. Veterans may find the program an incentive and want to attend a college that appreciates their presence. When students feel more connected in their learning environment, they are more likely to advance academically and obtain their degree. Many students have the motivation to start college, but many lack the motivation or emotional stimuli to finish their program. This program may ideally prepare more faculty and staff members to be more culturally sensitive to student veterans and foster higher retention rates. Also, this program would be an advantageous movement that inspires the entire student body at the university to get involved and support transition services geared toward student veterans. Student veterans have expressed their concerns through one-on-one interviews with the researcher. The information gathered was a guiding resource of

where to look for problems in supporting veterans, and addresses specific problem areas that affect veterans' abilities to graduate with a higher learning degree. Out of 23 colleges in the state of West Virginia, only 14 colleges posted their veterans' transition services and support systems on the institution's website. Colleges that do not advertise their veterans' services on their website are likely to have weak, limited or no transition services or support systems designed for student veterans (Ostovary & Dapprich, 2011; Persky & Oliver, 2010). This program may also be used in future research in other colleges or universities that are looking to introduce or enhance their services for student veterans as they seek their college degree.

Far-Reaching Implications

According to a student veteran, veterans as a whole at this university are under-appreciated; thus, a support program in higher education would celebrate veterans' achievements and contributions they have made for our country (personal communication, March 21, 2014). This program could inspire colleges to embrace a support program specifically geared toward student veterans, in response to their sacrifices for our country. A student veteran support program could also foster a sense of 'unity' in colleges, thus increasing the colleges' reputation throughout higher education. Faculty and staff professional development training programs within higher education impact not only the colleges but also their community. This program could further build communities as a result of student veterans inspiring and motivating each other. Last, this support program could be a blueprint for other colleges who need strategies in recruiting and retaining student veterans.

Conclusion

This section provided the project goals and rationale of a professional development program. The rationale for a professional development program was based on the interview responses from the participants. A professional development program seemed an appropriate first type of education program for faculty and staff to bring relevant issues with veterans. The review of literature focused on professional development training, academic support, and retention. A professional development program may offer opportunities of learning and support for individuals (Narayanasamy & Penney, 2014; Weisblat & Sell, 2012). The implementation, project evaluation, and implication including social change were also presented in the section. The implementation of this professional development training session will be conducted during the fall semester at the University campus. Evaluations will be utilized to assess the implementation of the professional development program. The support from the professional development program could be a blueprint for other universities that require strategies in recruiting and retaining student veterans. Overall, a student veterans' support program would complement higher education transition services and support systems in serving the needs of student veterans.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Section 4 presents an overall view of my reflections and conclusions about this project as it relates to student veterans transitioning from the military to college life. I also describe how to remedy limitations, discuss project strengths and recommendations, and examine my learning as a scholar, researcher, professional/training developer, and qualified practitioner.

Project Strengths

It is significant to describe the project strengths of this study addressing veterans' needs on transitioning from military duty to the classroom and recognizing barriers to support for a veteran student. Teachers noted that they wanted to use professional development as a way to keep up with new ideas and practices within the field of education. Continued learning through this professional development opportunity is supported by Bernhardt (2015). The best solution to remedy this problem is to provide a professional development training program that includes student veterans and faculty and staff so that all participants can share and learn how to support student veterans. Faculty and staff may show an interest in helping student veterans, and this in-depth professional support program is designed to enhance their communication skills and supply them with the necessary tools to aid student veterans in obtaining a college degree. In my study, the one-on-one interviews were conducted to provide student veterans a voice in sharing their specific problems at the University. This was the first time student veterans had a direct voice in addressing specific problem areas at the University. Once the professional development program has been implemented, the learning from this experience and the outcome of action plans could have a far-reaching impact on the culture of the

University. As a result, faculty and staff may become more educated on how to guide student veterans' transitions and support them in obtaining their college degrees. One of the action plans that will emerge from the professional development program could be a mentoring program for student veterans with experienced and successful student veterans as the mentors. The keynote speaker/facilitator will be equipped with information from the one-on-one interviews that explains the problems veterans experienced. This knowledge will empower faculty and staff and student veterans with the necessary skill sets to enhance communication between themselves as student veterans work toward their college degree. Implementation can take place at minimal cost, allowing sessions to be held at the University. Sessions will not be difficult to implement, and will allow the University to initiate significant changes for the present and future.

Project Limitations

In previous research, university personnel reacted ambivalently as to whether support programs fostered a meaningful relationship between staff and students, enhanced success as a teacher, or contributed to the art of congeniality (Faurer, Sutton, & Worster, 2014). This finding implies some potential limitations for my project. Faculty and staff may not have the time to rearrange their schedules to meet on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday for the training sessions. University leaders may not accept this support program, and although student veterans are in agreement that they need support, university officials may express that student veterans already have all the support they need in the existing university programs. Also, I am looking at the possibility that the themes I addressed, including academic support problems and transitioning into college, may not be aligned with what university officials feel are key issues in helping student

veterans progress. My approach to addressing these limitations is to consider potential problems in my professional development training module, allowing feedback from participants to help prove that the professional training program addresses all issues. If the program proves to be an asset in resolving support problems for student veterans, then full implementation could take place throughout the University. The program is written to include feedback from faculty, staff, and student veterans, and would allow room for future recommendations, values, and changes.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

The data from the one-on-one interviews showed student veterans were seeking support in several areas from University faculty and staff, and there were a number of research projects that could be used to find solutions to the problem. I chose a professional development training program to enhance faculty and staff capabilities to support student veterans' educational goals at the University. Recognizing transition problems as veterans migrate into the university atmosphere is very important if student veterans are to be successful throughout their university careers. A professional development training program for faculty and staff was the best option as the outcome for the project to research student veteran support. This method may produce the desired outcome, which is to render support to student veterans with the goal of graduating from the University. A professional development training program for faculty and staff is one of several approaches that could be used for supporting student veterans' goals.

One method could have been a white paper. The content in the white paper could have focused on specific recommendations to improve the educational experiences for veterans. Recommendations could have included enhancing student veteran academic

advisor support, communication with veterans after class, and verbal and written interactions among student veterans, faculty, and staff. One example would be to enhance the University's academic probation program allowing improved communications between student veterans, faculty, and staff. Letters that are sent to the veterans could include encouragement from faculty and staff and offer to set up an appointment for help in their class work. The second approach could have been the development of a freshman orientation with a component specifically focused on veterans. These aspects of support allow numerous opportunities for student veterans to gain knowledge of the university support programs and offer a welcome to their population. A third approach could have been to have a training program for academic advisors so they would be better prepared to advise veteran students. Student veterans in my study mentioned communications, sensitivity, support, and transition problems at the university; therefore, supplying the veterans with the support they need in these areas is worthwhile. All of the methods mentioned would create a positive atmosphere for support at the University. All of the alternative approaches have merit. However, for an initial introduction to the issues and challenges of veteran students, a professional development program seemed to be the best option to implement the findings from the data.

Scholarship

When I began my doctoral journey, I had no idea what it took to become a scholar until I began communicating with my classmates and following the advice of my committee chair and my second committee member. My mindset was focused in one direction, but after communicating with my colleagues, I began to view my ideas as opportunities to expand my thoughts, allowing me to enhance my study. My research

began to make more sense because I could focus on one problem as my main topic without presenting several problems that would confuse my readers. My dedication to student veterans was already at a very high level because of dedication to servicemen and servicewomen and my personal experience in the military. However, now I have an increased interest to research student veterans' transition problems in a scholarly way and to dig deeper into information that will bring even more awareness to problems veterans are experiencing. As a veteran, I began to appreciate writings of other scholars and their dedication to their research, and I found myself adding to the educational information others may use in the future. I look forward to continuing writing as a scholar in the future and offering my writings to others who may cite my work. One of my former positions at my place of employment was minority veterans program coordinator (MVPC). I always used professionalism when addressing veterans at public meetings, seminars, and one-on-one interviews. Now my education allows me to address veterans with additional educational experience as a scholar, and this project has taught me the significance of researching my subject before committing to presentations and public speaking. I cannot tell you how much I appreciate my chair and second committee member's dedication to my advancement as a scholar. Their continued dedication to me as a student is priceless.

As I have mentioned, I am a dedicated veteran and because of my relationships with other veterans and my previous position as MVPC, I have continued to work on my biases related to this topic, putting aside my previous thoughts that were based on my military experience. This approach made my research even more focused, and I continue to stay dedicated to student veterans' problems. My one-on-one interviews revealed more

information than I expected but made my research even stronger by bringing back more supporting data that reinforced my findings. This data led me to develop a professional development training program that offers strong support for faculty, staff, and student veterans. The data collected were analyzed to identify themes from my research and have led me to structure the professional developmental workshop. With the increased education I have received, and the addition of my scholarly skill sets, I have become a veterans' advocate with knowledge of how to develop a project in a scholarly way.

Project Development

In developing this project, my focus was to create an atmosphere for student veterans, faculty and staff that addressed all their concerns and kept them focused on the problems of veterans transitioning into college and the need for support services. I was not sure how my theme of support would be accepted and whether the implementation of the professional development program would be feasible. I am sure each participant has his or her idea of what is needed regarding support that would enhance student veterans' goals of receiving a college degree. This is my first attempt to develop a professional development program, which took a great deal of thought and preparation. When I began, I was overwhelmed and looked for a good place to begin. My answer was found in my problem statement, themes, and data collected from the student veterans' interviews. I obtained more than enough information to develop the program and keep all participants focused on the problems veterans were facing. The only unknown that remains is determining whether the workshop is understandable, productive, and fun for all participants. If this program works, it will make a significant change in creating new

opportunities for student veterans who face major obstacles in college and will bring awareness to college administrators.

Leadership and Change

My opportunity in a leadership role has given me a new outlook on how I can help veterans improve their success rate in achieving a college degree. My professional development program may help student veterans, faculty, and staff develop a significant relationship that may lead to improved educational opportunities for veterans and increased communication among the student veterans, faculty, and staff. As a veteran, I know what my fellow veterans were experiencing. To know I had a small part in potentially helping veterans and their families is very gratifying. When conducting the one-on-one interviews, it was extremely important for me to collect all the data from student veterans and to interpret the information so that faculty and staff could understand what significant problems veterans were experiencing. I realized the potential for change was significant because student veterans were given the opportunity to make faculty and staff aware of their problems. If the program were successful, faculty would improve their teaching capabilities and improve their skill sets in educating veterans.

Growth of Self as Scholar

I have developed into a researcher who has learned how to focus on critical issues related to my research during my enrollment at Walden University. My development has also given me new techniques to ask questions during staff meetings focusing on proof about the legitimacy of information provided by my colleagues. If I am working on a related subject and feel that the information given is useful to my research, I always ask what are the resources and are they credible. My educational learning experience with

Walden University has prepared me to obtain scholarly skill sets in higher learning, and I have gained significant confidence that I will communicate as a scholar in my field.

Growth of Self as Practitioner

As I progressed through my doctoral journey, I found myself becoming a better educational researcher. I remembered beginning my first class and wondering what obstacles I faced, and how I would meet those challenges toward developing my writings. Slowly I could see the improvement in my research as I continued to develop my drafts and as I worked tirelessly in a positive way without developing bias in my writings. I remembered, throughout my doctoral journey, receiving feedback comments from my chair and committee member and how I addressed my responses in a scholarly manner. Regardless of the number of edits required, I managed to continue building a solid foundation for my study that included citations from other scholars.

Working with veterans is a challenge; some have college credit and college experience, and some are preparing to enter the college atmosphere. I have learned to be a better listener and to give feedback in a more positive way. One group of veterans I approached in class was sensitive to war issues and suffered from PTSD. Sounds of explosions or bombs going off during presentations were upsetting to them. As a scholar, I have learned to present information that could be damaging or upsetting to veterans in a way that is more positive, constructive, and sensitive when making presentations. This new approach to researching material in a professional manner has led me to become a scholar.

Growth of Self as Project Developer

Before I began my doctoral journey, I did not have any experience developing a

project. Also, I did not know where to start. I remembered reading, in my earlier course work, that scholars who publish their work use other scholars' works to help build the foundation for their research. I looked at several other researchers' projects, and although the subject matter was different from mine, I began to develop a pattern for writing my drafts. This procedure was a good example for me to follow, and I certainly knew the meaning of citing and using basic ideas from other scholars' works. After my challenging start in becoming a developer, I can truthfully say my new skill sets have made me a confident, solid developer whom faculty, staff, and student veterans will appreciate.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

I think the importance of this project was identifying the needs of veterans when they transitioned from military duty to the college classroom. Also, veterans have experienced obstacles trying to cope with G.I. Bill processing, academic progress, mental health issues, and support from faculty and staff. It is important to note the new information collected will be presented to university officials, and the result of the findings will help improve the quality of life for student veterans and their families. This project can improve university educational standards aiding veterans in their quest for a college degree. After collecting data from one-on-one interviews, I have learned that being open-minded, keeping an unbiased opinion about data collected, and transcribing the data accurately so that my participants can understand the true meaning of the data, strengthened the credibility of my entire project. I have also become a better researcher, and the new skill sets will allow me to become an asset to the higher learning community.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

This project has the potential to be successful in the University and other educational

institutions throughout the state of West Virginia. Looking at the problems student

veterans faced in transitioning from the military and receiving support, I believe the

support program will significantly improve communications between student veterans

and faculty and staff, allowing improved support for veterans seeking college degrees.

The overall student veteran educational atmosphere of the University will significantly

change and have a positive effect on creating new relationships between student veterans,

faculty, and staff. Also, the University may benefit from increased enrollment once the

success of the program is known.

There is always room for improvement, regardless of how a program study

supports a community. When working with articles that could support my project, I did

not find any overwhelming data that would offer solutions to problems veterans faced.

Future research was necessary for support programs that enhanced educational

opportunities for veterans facing obstacles while seeking college degrees. Veterans

served their country well, and we as researchers and educators need to spend our time and

resources to supply them with tools for improved higher learning opportunity. I think this

study has the potential to be a pilot program for universities throughout the state of West

Virginia supporting needs of veterans and their families.

Conclusion

I took a personal interest in presenting my reflections for this study because I saw

how veterans struggled with receiving support at the University. I have grown as a

scholar, recognizing the importance of how to analyze and present findings from the data

veterans have submitted from the one-on-one interviews. I looked at professional development training because I wanted to bring the most effective medium I could use to reach all participants and make it easier for them to communicate with one another. The most important purpose of this project was to identify any obstacles that impede higher learning abilities and that prevent student veterans from obtaining their degrees. Also, the University should utilize the professional development program I have developed to address any problems that student veterans will have so they may have an equal and fair opportunity to become assets in our society using their higher learning degrees. I think this project will make a positive change in the lives of student veterans, faculty and staff throughout the University now and in the future.

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Appendix A: The Project

Professional Development Faculty/Staff Support Training Program Workshop First Day (8.0 hrs.)

Facilitator/Keynote Speaker: Colonel Stephen Dinauer

Learning Objectives

At the end of the first day workshop, faculty, and student veteran resource panel will:
- be able to articulate at least three common problems related to transitioning from military duty into the classroom for student veterans
- be able to articulate the importance of support programs that enhance student veteran learning
- be able to identify three strategies that can support student veterans' success in academic programs

Agenda

- Introduction Remarks from Keynote Speaker
- Video: Student Veteran Transitions
- Small Group Table Discussion
- Participant Reports and Large Group Discussions
- Break
- Elements that Influence Student Veteran Success
- Lunch Break
- Small Group Table Discussion: Value of Support Programs for Student Veterans
- Participant Reports and Open Discussions
- Break
- Participant Reports and Large Group Discussions
- Facilitator Led: Large Group Discussion on Support Services for Student Veterans

Training Materials
- Set up 5 round tables for 6 participants at each table
- Projector screen and projector, Internet access, and laptop
- Microphone
- Pencil and paper (30 participants)
- White board and markers
- Flip chart for each table (6)
- Evaluation forms (30)

- Agenda (30)
- Video Monitor
- DVD Player
- Name tags

8:00 am – 9:00 am	**Introduction Remarks from Keynote Speaker/Facilitator and Review of First Day's Agenda**
	
	Faculty and staff introductions. Participants will pair up and interview each other in their small groups. Later participants will introduce each other to the larger group learning about each other's background. Student Veterans will serve as a resource for information utilizing their Student Veteran's Resource Panel
	   • Name and position
	   • Educational experience
	   • Why are you taking this workshop?
	
	The facilitator will discuss an overview of the first day workshop and the purpose of the program:
	   • Student veterans' transitions to campus
	   • Supporting student veterans in completing their college degree
	   • Communicating with student veterans
	   • Sensitivity to student veteran needs

9:00 am – 9:30 am	**Video: Student Veteran Transitions** https://maketheconnection.net/events/transitioning-from-service https://maketheconnection.net/events/students-higher-education https://maketheconnection.net/stories-of-connection? Experiences =2,3

9:30 am – 9:50 am	**Small Group Table Discussion**
	
	Each small group, consisting of faculty, staff, and student veterans, will select an individual to take notes and another individual to be a speaker. Each individual will answer the following questions:
	   • What intrigued you the most about this video?
	   • Do you feel student veterans at this university have

	experienced similar situations? • Do you feel there were any positive ideas that could be utilized at our university? • Was this an objective presentation?
9:50 am –10:20 am	**Participant Reports and Open Discussions** After the small group discussions are finished, the groups will display their chart sheets in the room. The reports will reference information from each chart sheet, and notations will be shared with all groups.
10:20 am – 10:35 am	**Break**
10:35 am – 12:00 pm	**Facilitator Led/Student Veteran's Resource Panel: Elements that Influence Student Veterans Transition** Student Veteran's Resource Panel will present their perspectives on their experiences at the University focusing on elements that affected their transitions to campus and related problems with receiving support as related to the video.
12:00 pm – 12:30 pm	**Lunch Break**
1:00 pm – 1:30 pm	**Small Group Table Discussion from Information Received from Student Veteran Panelists** The keynote speaker will lead the discussion and the Student Veteran's Resource Panel will be present as a resource of information. (Each student veteran who has been successful in completing two years of his or her education is an important resource for providing positive information for this study). Each small group, consisting of faculty and staff, will select one individual to be a speaker. Each group will answer the following questions: • As faculty and staff members, what are your thoughts about factors that cause transition problems for student veterans? • Do your thoughts differ from earlier discussions? • Do you think there is enough support from university programs for student veterans that significantly enhance their educational goals?

1:30 pm – 2:30 pm	**Participants Reports and Open Discussions** Each group table will share their group discussions from the prompts listed. Each group will contribute their group responses in an open forum discussion.
2:30 pm – 2:45 pm	**Break**
2:45 pm – 3:45 pm	After the open discussions are completed, faculty and staff will be asked to rethink their original ideas about problems related to veterans transitioning into college on identifying solutions to troubled areas. Student veterans will review the solutions and discuss in an open forum with faculty and staff.

3:45 pm – 4:45 pm	**Facilitator Led: Group Discussion on Support Services for Student Veterans** The facilitator will moderate a discussion for faculty and staff. Each small group will consist of both faculty and staff and will work toward bringing creative ideas to the discussion for possible remedies to the problem areas. All participants will take notes and reflect on any additional thoughts and ideas related to student veteran issues for discussion in the next workshop. The Student Veteran's Resource Panel will discuss the feasibility of the ideas or solutions. The second day of the workshop will focus on the thoughts and ideas from faculty, staff, and student veterans for discussion. Staff and faculty will have an opportunity to hear the student veteran's responses.
4:45 pm – 5:00 pm	Review: First Day Workshop Complete Day 1 Evaluation forms Dismiss for the Day

Training Day One Workshop Reference Lists

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Make The Connection (2016, January 4). Student Veterans/Higher Education. Retrieved from https://maketheconnection.net/events/students-higher-education

Make The Connection (2016, January 10). A Marine's Journey of Recovery after TBI and PTSD. Retrieved from https://maketheconnection.net/stories-of-connection? Experiences =2,3

The Project
Professional Development Faculty/Staff Support Training Program
Training Evaluation Day One Workshop
Date:_____

Please respond to the effectiveness of the following subject matter:	1 Poor	2 Fair	3 Good	4 Excellent
Overall usefulness of training				
Training could be useful in my job duties				
Organization of training				
Topics were presented in a timely manner				
Activities were easily understood				
Workshop training materials were effective				
Please respond to the effectiveness of the presentation goals				
Presenter was experienced in student veteran affairs				
Training subject matter was interesting				
Clearly understood the presentation of materials				
Your questions were effectively answered				
The atmosphere created engagement with participants				
How would you rate this training session?				
Are there any suggestions you would make for improvements?				

Professional Development Faculty/Staff Support Training Program
Workshop Second Day (8.0 hrs.)

Facilitator/Keynote Speaker: Colonel Stephen Dinauer

Learning Objectives
At the end of the second day workshop, faculty, staff and student veteran resource panel will:
- Bring awareness to faculty and staff about the importance of listening
- Identify elements that influence listening
- Discuss how staff and faculty can support student veterans utilizing active listening
- Identify strategies that prevent communicating with student veterans

Agenda

- Facilitator/Keynote speaker: Review of Agenda
- What was your greatest "take away" from that initial opening introduction activity yesterday
- Listening Exercise "Whispers"
- Small Group Table Discussion
- Break
- Video: "In Their Own Words"
- Small Group Table Discussion
- Lunch Break
- Video: Transitions: Veterans on Campus
- Small Group Table Discussion
- Break
- Second Day Workshop Review
- Complete Evaluation Forms

Training Materials
- Set up 5 round tables for 6 participants at each table
- Projector screen and projector, Internet access, and laptop
- Microphone
- Pencil and paper (30 participants)
- White board and markers
- Flip chart for each table (6)
- Evaluation forms (30)
- Agenda (30)

- Video Monitor
- DVD Player

8:00 am – 8:15 am	**Facilitator/Keynote speaker: Review of Agenda**
8:15 am – 9:00 am	**Listening Exercise "Whispers"** The Whispers exercise demonstrates the necessity of validating the information received from participants (Skills Converged, 2015). Individuals will line up and whisper two messages, one at the beginning, and one at the end of the participant line. While this takes place, the facilitator will play distracting music to create some confusion. As soon as the message reaches the final individual, he/she asks the originator of the message to repeat it for verification and accuracy. This activity will demonstrate to the participants a lack of concentration when communicating with student veterans, and bring awareness about how they can improve their active listening skills. Participants will go to their respective groups and discuss the results of the "Whispers" activity and keep notes for feedback.
9:00 am – 9:15 am	**Break**
9:15 am – 10:15 am	**Video "In Their Own Words"**
10:15 – 10:30 am	**Classroom Discussion**
	This video will emphasize the importance of listening to and recognizing students because we never know enough about individuals and their needs as students. http://my.umbc.edu/groups/ocss/media/3277
	Facilitator: Introduction to Active Listening **Small Group Table Discussion**

10:30 am – 12:00 am	The facilitator will discuss, with faculty and staff, the importance of actively listening to student veterans and the need to know more about their population. Active listening and its role in enhancing student veteran education will also be an issue for discussion. • What experiences did you identify from this video that may apply to your university? • Have you ever asked a veteran if he/she would like to talk about any problems other than college? Example: loneliness on campus. • Do you think listening to student veterans' issues can help you deliver better support as they seek their education? • Can understanding student veteran issues help them reconnect to civilian life? • Do you think military veterans are faced with new challenges and needs as they enter the university atmosphere? How can listening help? • As faculty and staff, you are preparing to receive student veterans on campus, and the veterans may take months to adjust as they transition from military duty to collegiate life. How can you make their transition easier when listening to their conversations? • Emotionally, veterans may respond to the slightest gesture that relates to a comment about war or a video containing war content. What can you do to prepare yourself for this response and support the student veteran? • Serving the student veteran in your role as faculty and staff, do you understand how to recognize PTSD and what to listen for when recognizing the symptoms?
12:00 pm – 1:00 pm	**Lunch Break**
1:00 pm – 1:45 pm	**Video** **"Transitions: Veterans on Campus"** This video will emphasize the importance of communicating, sensitivity, understanding what veterans encountered while serving, transitioning, and the different lifestyles they experienced while they served in the military.

	http://scccmedia.weebly.com/veterans-on-campus-video.html
2:00 pm – 2:30 pm	**Small Group Table Discussion** Participants will discuss the contents of the communication video and the following: 　　"Ten items to know about student veterans". 　1.　Student veterans are a good human resource of untapped information. 　2.　In order for student veterans to succeed, faculty and staff need to respect, understand, and be compassionate toward student veterans 　3.　Student veterans that have suffered combat trauma should be recognized as having an injury, not having a mental illness. 　4.　Most military veterans want to return to a warzone. 　5.　Veterans that remain silent because the military is considered a man's domain are the female veterans. 　6.　Never say these three things to a veteran. 　7.　Veterans sometimes are not aware of their traumatic brain injuries. 　8.　Veterans often feel isolated at their campus. 　9.　Veterans rarely feel like they are victims. 　10. Veterans are a unique diverse population. Each small group, consisting of faculty and staff, will select one individual to be a speaker for faculty and staff. The spokesperson will use the flip chart to communicate with the entire group about recognizing interpersonal skills that may enhance communicating styles with student veterans. http://www.nea.org/home/53407.htm
2:00 pm – 2:15 pm	**Break**
2:15 pm – 2:45 pm	**Second Day Workshop Review** The facilitator will lead the review and cover issues raised from videos "In Their Own Words" and Transitions: Veterans on Campus.
	Complete Evaluation Forms

Training Day Two Workshop Reference Lists

National Education Association (2016, January 31). Ten Things You Should Know

About Today's Veteran. Retrieved from http://www.nea.org/home/53407.html

Off-Campus Student Veterans (2016, January 20). In their Own Words, Student Veterans

from Maryland. Retrieved from http://my.umbc.edu/groups/ocss/media/3277

O'Herrin, E. (2011). Enhancing veteran success in higher education. *Peer Review,*

13(1),15–18.

Skills Converged. (2015), Communication exercise: Chinese Whisper. Retrieved from

http://www.skillsconverged.com/FreeTrainingMaterials/tabid/258/articleType/Ar

ticleView/articleId/630/Communication-Exercise-Chinese-Whisper.aspx

Suffolk County Community College (2016, January 21). Transitions: Veterans On

Campus Retrieved from http://scccmedia.weebly.com/veterans-on-campus-

video.html

Professional Development Faculty/Staff Support Training Program
Training Evaluation Day Two Workshop
Date:_____

Please respond to the effectiveness of the following subject matter:	1 Poor	2 Fair	3 Good	4 Excellent
Overall usefulness of training				
Training could be useful in my job duties				
Organization of training				
Topics were presented in a timely manner				
Activities were easily understood				

Workshop training materials were effective				
Please respond to the effectiveness of the presentation goals				
Presenter was experienced in student veteran affairs				
Training subject matter was interesting				
Clearly understood the presentation of materials				
Your questions were effectively answered				
The atmosphere created engagement with participants				
How would you rate this training session?				
Are there any suggestions you would recommend for improvements?				

Professional Development Faculty/Staff Support Training Program Workshop Third Day (4.0 hrs.)

8:00 am – 8:15 am	**Review of Agenda and Welcome**
8:15 am – 10:00 am	**Small Group Action Plan Development** All participants will think about what would be beneficial action plans that could enhance student veteran success. • Participants will break up into small groups of five tables with two faculty members, two staff members, and one student veteran per table. • Each participant will develop their own individual idea listing two objectives for implementation at the university.

10:00 am – 10:30 am	**Small Group Action Plan Development (Continued)** • After the individual ideas have been developed with student veteran interaction, participants will discuss their ideas with each other. Participants will discuss individual ideas in the small groups and develop three feasible action plans. Each small group will assemble into one large group.
10:30 am – 10:45 am	**Break**
10:45 am – 11:15 am	**Large Group Action Plan Development** One member from each table will act as a spokesperson to represent their action plan. The large group will decide on the final three action plans that are most feasible and vote for an approval.
11:15 am – 11:30 am	**Review Notes on Implementing Action Plans** Participants will record their ideas in journals with implementation action plans focusing on the following: • What were the most important ideas you learned from the faculty, staff and student veteran panel discussions? • Do you think the new knowledge you learned is feasible for implementation toward support for student veteran success? • Do you expect any difficulties for implementing new changes? • What could be implemented without difficulty? • What plan of action would require longer time for implementation? • How could faculty and staff categorize suggestions? Participants will bring their notes to workshop four. Workshop four will be held in the middle of the semester, and workshop five will be held at the end of the semester. This time span will allow participants a chance to review their action plan notes and make minor changes or suggestions.
11:30 am – 12:00 pm	**Complete Evaluation Forms** **Last Workshop to Meet In Six Weeks**

Facilitator/Key Note Speaker

Learning Objectives

Faculty and staff will create their action plans for enhanced communications with student veterans so as to promote a more positive atmosphere in support of their educational goals toward developing this workshop.

Agenda

- Review of Agenda and Welcome
- Small Group Action Plan Development
- Small Group Action Plan Development (continued)
- Break
- Action Plan Reports from Large Group and Student Veteran Panel
- Large Group Action Plan Development
- Review Notes on Implementing Action Plans
- Complete Evaluation Forms

Materials/Equipment Needed:

- One large round tables set up for 30 participants
- Overhead projector, laptop, projection screen, link to the Internet
- Podium and wireless microphone
- Flip Chart
- White board and markers
- Loose leaf copies of agenda (30 copies)
- Action plan template hardcopies
- Day 3 evaluation form

Professional Development Faculty/Staff Support Training Program
Training Evaluation Day Three Workshop
Date:_____

Please respond to the effectiveness of the following subject matter:	1 Poor	2 Fair	3 Good	4 Excellent
Overall usefulness of training				
Training could be useful in my job duties				
Organization of training				
Topics were presented in a timely manner				

Activities were easily understood				
Workshop training materials were effective				
Please respond to the effectiveness of the presentation goals				
Presenter was experienced in student veteran affairs				
Training subject matter was interesting				
Clearly understood the presentation of materials				
Your questions were effectively answered				
The atmosphere created engagement with participants				
How would you rate this training session?				
Are there any suggestions you would make for improvements?				

Professional Development Faculty/Staff Support Training Program Workshop Fourth Day (4.0 hrs.)

Facilitator/Key Note Speaker: Colonel Stephen Dinauer

Learning Objectives

Faculty, staff, and student veterans who have been panelists will communicate the implementation ideas from their action plans that could translate to the broader university.

8:00 am – 8:15 am	**Facilitator: Overview of Workshops and Agenda Review**
8:15 am – 8:45 am	**Large Group Participation: Action Plan Discussion** Participants will reflect on their action plans and what was

	learned about themselves as faculty and staff members. The Student's Veteran Panel will also serve as a resource for providing information to faculty and staff and to make sure their concerns have been answered.
8:45 am – 9:00 am	**Break**
9:00 am – 11:00 am	**Large Group Participation: Where do we go from here?** Participants will continue to reflect on their notes and what they have learned from the experiences in a large group discussion on the following: • Student veterans panel • Keynote speakerFaculty and staff actions • So where do we go from here? Participants will form a task force panel to take recommendations to the university stakeholders with three action plans approved by the larger group that may provide quality support, awareness, empathy, and sensitivity for student veterans. A task force will be formed and consist of two faculty members, two staff members, and two student veterans selected by participants of the large group. This group will work with the three action plans, as voted on by the participants, to organize into a short presentation to identified key stakeholders of the university. Before submitting to the university stakeholders, the taskforce will present the report to the closing session of the workshop with feedback from all participants.
11:00 am – 11:15 am	**Upcoming Workshop Five Information** Workshop five will be the final part of training and will begin in four weeks after the end of the semester term.
11:15 am – 11:45 am	**Complete Evaluations**

Agenda

- Facilitator: Overview of Workshops and Agenda Review
- Large Group Participation: Action Plan Discussion
- Break
- Large Group Participation: Where do we go from here?
- Upcoming workshop five information
- Complete Evaluation Forms

Materials/Equipment Needed:

- One large round tables set up for 25 participants
- Overhead projector, laptop, projection screen, link to the Internet
- Podium and wireless microphone
- Flip Chart
- White board and markers
- Loose leaf copies of agenda (25 copies)
- Day 4 evaluation forms

Professional Development Faculty/Staff Support Training Program
Training Evaluation Day Four Workshop
Date:_____

Please respond to the effectiveness of the following subject matter:	1 Poor	2 Fair	3 Good	4 Excellent
Overall usefulness of training				
Training could be useful in my job duties				
Organization of training				
Topics were presented in a timely manner				
Activities were easily understood				
Workshop training materials were effective				

Please respond to the effectiveness of the presentation goals				
Presenter was experienced in student veteran affairs				
Training subject matter was interesting				
Clearly understood the presentation of materials				
Your questions were effectively answered				
The atmosphere created engagement with participants				
How would you rate this training session?				
Are there any suggestions you would make for improvements?				

Professional Development Faculty/Staff Support Training Program
Workshop Fifth Day (2.5 hrs.)

Facilitator/Keynote Speaker: Colonel Stephen Dinauer

Learning Objectives

The workshop fifth day will have the taskforce meet with the participants reporting information about the progress of the action plans presented to the university and if implementation is in progress. Participants will have the opportunity to offer more ideas and discuss future opportunities.

Agenda

- Review of Agenda and Welcome
- Review of Participant Feedback Data and Task Force Progress
- Reflecting Back On Action Plans and Report
- Final Remarks
- Complete Evaluation Forms

Materials/Equipment Needed:

- One large round tables set up for 25 participants
- Overhead projector, laptop, projection screen, link to the Internet
- Podium and wireless microphone
- Flip Chart
- White board and markers
- Day 5 evaluation forms

8:00 am to 8:15 am	**Review of Agenda and Welcome**
8:15 am to 8:30 am	**Feedback and Implementation Progress** This session is a report on the progress of the task force and feedback from university stakeholders' selection of one action plan.
8:30 am to 9:30 am	**Reflecting Back On Action Plans** Faculty, staff, and student veteran panel discuss in an open forum any enhancements that are needed to the program as they receive feedback from university stakeholders, and reflect on how they may improve on the selected action plan. Student veterans who were on the panel will dialogue with faculty and staff about action plans and what seems realistic for next steps. Suggestions will be encouraged from all participants in the open forum and a representative will record the results on the white board for follow-up. The report on the university-approved action plan by the university stakeholders will also require acceptance from the task force and the implementation process will begin. A progress meeting will be held six months after the action plan is implemented. Attendees will be university stakeholders, faculty, staff, and student veterans.

9:30 am to 10:00 am	**Final Remarks**
	The keynote speaker will be present in all workshop sessions and will also be available for the closing session reflecting on remarks from the five-day workshops. The facilitator will congratulate faculty, staff, and student veterans for their participation and continue to monitor the progress of the program at the end of the next semester. The facilitator will continue to answer questions after completion of the workshop and will collect any suggestions for improving the training utilizing the evaluation forms.

Professional Development Faculty/Staff Support Training Program
Training Evaluation Day Five Workshop
Date:_____

Please respond to the effectiveness of the following subject matter:	1 Poor	2 Fair	3 Good	4 Excellent
At what moment in class this weekend did you feel most engaged with what was happening?				
At what moment in class this weekend were you most distanced from what was happening?				
What action that anyone (teacher or student) took this weekend did you find most affirming or helpful?				
What action that anyone took did you find most puzzling or confusing?				
Are there any suggestions you would recommend for improvements?				

Please see the following page

Please relate your answers to training sessions 1 through 5

Rate how effectively the training sessions meet the goals of faculty, staff, and student veteran needs.	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly Agree
How appropriate is the training to my work environment				
Indicate if your interest and needs have been addressed				
Taking notes helped to retain information				
My cognitive thinking was enhanced when sharing information with participants				
Training will be easily implemented when supporting student veteran needs				
Training was effective with respect to format and timeliness				
A positive atmosphere was projected in the keynote speaker presentations				
Feasibility of the subject matter was practical				
Subject matter for problems related to student veteran success was introduced at the local, state, and national level				
Clear understanding about sensitivity, communication, and support as they relate to student veterans				
Clear understanding about faculty and staff can be instrumental in student veteran success in higher learning				
I have learned what the major causes of student veteran transition problems are as veterans become students at the university				
I can present enhanced strategies to				

improve student veteran success				
My experience as a participant changed the way I will support student veterans				
The workshops have made me aware of new teaching strategies				

What part of the training was most valuable to you?
What part of the training was the least effective?
Do you think you would promote this training to a colleague? Why or why not?
What would you recommend for improvements in the sessions?

Training Day Five Workshop Reference Lists

Brookfield, S. (2013). Dr. Stephen D. Brookfield Retrieved from

http://www.stephenbrookfield.com/Dr._Stephen_D._Brookfield/Home.html

Appendix B: Interview Guide

List the titles of all self-designed interview guides, coding protocols, surveys,

document review protocols, etc. here:

Transitions from Military Duty to College for United States Military Veterans Interview

Checklist

1. Name:
2. Date:
3. Time:
4. Veteran Student Status:
5. Veteran Graduate Status:

Initial Contact with veteran

Hello, My name is Velma Layne and I am a doctoral student at Walden

University. I appreciate your time and participation in this study. I am a Vietnam-era

veteran and I appreciate your service to our country. The purpose of this study is to

obtain student veterans' perceptions of the transition services and support systems at

███████University following your decision to obtain your college degree. I would like

to learn about your life experiences of any difficulties you faced while transitioning from

military duty to the college campus. I would also like to know about the support you

experienced while in college. Before we get started, I would need your consent form. Do

you understand that this is a voluntary study and your identity will not be shared with

anyone? Also you have the opportunity to withdraw or stop participation at any time.

No one from ███████University will treat you any differently. Please feel relaxed and

comfortable to speak freely. As a veteran, I have been in your shoes and I want you to

know I understand and appreciate your concerns. Also, I want you to know that your

opinion is valued and my thoughts will not have any influence on the information you

share with me. During the course of this interview, you will see me taking notes and

recording the interview. The purpose of this procedure is to gather information from the

interview accurately. I do not want to rely on my memory and I want to make sure I

capture your interview as you see it. When I complete the analysis of the interview, I will

let you read over the summary and you will be given an opportunity to make corrections

and add any new information that you would like to include.

Initial Questions

- What has been your experience adjusting from a military 'situation' to a new collegiate life 'situation'?
- How did you utilize veteran support services? In order for veterans to become successful, self-actualization from both institution and student veterans is required.
- What services are you aware of that your school may offer in fostering emotional and academic 'support' for student veterans?
- What specific plan does your school offer in assisting student veterans during their collegiate experience?
- How did the services or assistance from instructors relate to the completion of your degree?
- In your contacts with the university what were the strengths of these experiences? What were the limitations?
- What, if any, changes would you recommend to the university in working with veterans?

Follow-up Questions

1. Can you elaborate about your transition from the military to college life?
2. Can you be more specific about your answer?
3. Can you give more explanation about your response?
4. Please expand on your response about support services.
5. Do you have information you would like to add?
6. What do you think about this interview?

As I stated earlier, I want you to look over the summary I develop and make sure I have captured the true meaning of what your interview implies. If there is anything that you disagree with, please e-mail me or call my cell phone. Again, your confidentially will be protected and the information and interview will be destroyed after the five year period. Thank you for your participation.

Appendix C

Student Veteran Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study that will allow Veterans the opportunity to describe and discuss their experiences with transition and support services offered by the university and allow you a chance to voice both positive comments and opportunities for improvement in the services. The researcher is inviting veterans who are current students or graduates of ▬▬▬University to take part in the study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

A researcher named Velma Layne, who is a doctoral student at Walden University, is conducting this study.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to obtain student veterans' perceptions of the transition services and support systems at their college following their decisions to obtain their college degrees.

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

Participate in one individual interview that will last about 45 minutes.

Describe your experiences as a veteran who has been attending college.

Review a written summary of the interview about two weeks after it is conducted, and give me feedback about any areas that need to be corrected. Here are some sample questions:

What has been your experience adjusting from a military situation to a new collegiate life situation?

How did you utilize veteran support services?

Voluntary Nature of the Study

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision about whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at ▬▬▬University or Walden University will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as fatigue, stress, or becoming upset. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing. Some of the veterans may experience discomfort associated with discussing their experiences. This discomfort, if experienced, should be mild. The potential benefits associated with participating will be the opportunity to share your experiences and to provide input toward expanding or improving transition services for veterans at the University.

Privacy

The interview will be audio-recorded. Any information you provide will be kept confidential. I will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. I will keep data secure by storing notes in a locked briefcase. All documents will be password protected on my personal computer. All paper data will be shredded and electronic data will be erased from external hard drives after the required five year period has expired**.** Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via phone 304-521-9672 or by e-mail. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **02-11-15-0300489** and it expires on **February 10, 2016.**

Please keep this consent form for your records.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature

Appendix D

Letter of Cooperation

Office of Research Integrity
Institutional Review Board

February 23, 2015

Velma Layne
Doctoral Student Higher Education
Walden University

Dear Velma Layne:

This letter is in response to the study that was approved by the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) "*Transitions from Military Duty to College for United States Military Veterans.*" We are in agreement with the Walden University IRB determination and you have permission to conduct the study at ███████ University in accordance with the IRB approved protocol. The Code of Federal Regulations (45CFR46) has set forth the criteria utilized in making this determination. If there are any modifications to the study requiring IRB approval please submit a description of the modification along with a copy of the Walden University IRB modification approval letter to the ███████ University Office of Research Integrity for administrative review.

I appreciate your willingness to submit the study for an administrative review. Please feel free to contact the Office of Research Integrity with any questions or if modifications to the study are required.

Sincerely,

Director
Office of Research Integrity