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Challenges Faced by U.S. Student Veterans Transitioning to a Community College

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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MS, Duquesne University, 2010

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Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Increasing numbers of student veterans in the United States are transitioning into a higher education culture that reflects major differences from the military culture. Higher education leaders need to understand what these students require and what will help them transition smoothly into higher education. The purpose of this quantitative case study was to understand why freshman student veterans stop attending community college temporarily or permanently. Schlossberg's transition model that includes the 4 concepts of situation, self, support, and strategies was used as a conceptual framework. The research questions focused on perceptions of student veterans and faculty/staff related to challenges faced by student veterans during their freshman year of college, as well as the support that student veterans need to succeed with their transition into higher education. Data were collected interviewing 8 freshman student veterans and 5 faculty/staff members at a local community college to address the research questions. Qualitative data analysis was used to identify categories and common themes in interview data. The findings from this study showed 3 themes: (a) mismatched environment, (b) leaders/mentors/friendships, and (c) veteran community and connections. The study findings may help reduce the number of student veterans who temporarily or permanently withdraw from community college and thus increase the institutional completion rates. Based on the findings, a 3-day professional development/training program was created that incorporates both online learning and face-to-face engagement. The project outcomes may lead to positive social change by increasing responsiveness to student veterans and removing barriers when transitioning into a higher education culture.

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Introduction

Educational institutions throughout the United States are seeking ways to increase student veteran engagement and program completion. There is limited national data that show why student veterans are not completing their programs (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014; Daly & Fox Garrity, 2013; Ford, Northrup, & Wiley, 2009), but student veterans are stopping their programs for many different reasons. Students who temporarily withdraw and return later are stop-out students, where those who permanently withdraw are classified as drop-out students (Woosley, 2004). New student veterans start in higher education each semester. These students separate from the U.S. armed forces and wish to start in education for various reasons (Lighthall, 2012; Phelps, 2015). They come to the institution with different experiences, education, and needs (Semer & Harmening, 2015). One challenge that these student veterans face is that the institution may not be ready for them.

For student veterans to succeed in higher education and finish their academic path, educational institutions need to provide a veteran-friendly academic and social support system to meet the student veterans' needs and help them overcome barriers (Cass & Hammond, 2015; Kurzynski, 2014; Semer & Harmening, 2015). Some student veterans may not have the academic competence to focus and understand the academic material. They may not understand the academic process and the institution's administration and faculty may not know how to support them (Kurzynski, 2014; Phelps, 2015). The problem is that these student veterans start higher education but do not finish.

Within the U.S. mid-Atlantic states, there are more than 77 public community colleges (Institute of Education Sciences, 2014). These colleges register and enroll veterans each semester, but the challenges continue, and the number of veterans is likely to increase (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008). According to Sportsman and Thomas (2015), the U.S. armed forces are decreasing the force size, which may increase the student veteran enrollment in higher education. Thus, educational institutions need to identify ways to adapt to student veterans' educational, emotional, mental, and physical needs (Church, 2009; Kurzynski, 2014; Schiavone & Gentry, 2014). U.S. student veterans bring unique needs to higher education. Their experience, education, and mentality are different than those who have not served in the U.S. armed forces (Hayden, Ledwith, Dong, & Buzzetta, 2014; Sportsman & Thomas, 2015). Educational leaders need to know, adapt, and meet the needs of these types of students (Vacchi, 2012).

Evans, Pellegrino, and Hoggan (2015) explained how community colleges are the starting blocks for many veterans due to the community college flexibilities. New student veterans often have prior obligations and family requirements when entering higher education. Educational institutions need to be ready for the increase in student veteran enrollment and be willing and able to adapt to these students' unique needs, which may change into problems if not identified or met.

The Local Problem

The problem that I addressed in this study is that student veterans at a local community college are not completing their academic programs. In 2014 and 2015, mid-Atlantic Community College [MACC, pseudonym], located in the U.S. mid-Atlantic,

enrolled more than 1,400 and 1,500 student veterans respectively (MACC, 2016). This increase in enrollment has been continuous for more than 10 decades (MACC, 2016). Two internal studies showed that as many as 48% of student veterans did not complete their degree or transfer to another institution, suggesting that they dropped-out or stopped-out (King, 2009, 2011). It is essential to identify and understand the reasons that student veterans at MACC drop-out or stop-out of the college to help ensure their successful transition into higher education.

The increase in student veteran enrollment in the local community college is reflective of the rise nationally. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, as of September 30, 2014, more than 2.4 million veterans claimed the U.S. mid-Atlantic states as their states of legal residence (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014a; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014b; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014c; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014d; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014e; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014f). As veterans return home from their military service to continue their education, college leaders need to ensure that the institution is ready to meet the unique needs of these students.

In 2011 and 2012, there were more than 1 million veterans and veteran beneficiaries enrolled in higher education and using GI-Bill benefits (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014; McCaslin et al., 2014). According to Evans et al. (2015), there are many challenges that student veterans face when they leave military service and transition from the military culture to civilian and educational culture. This transition can be especially difficult for student veterans because they are moving from a directed and structured

culture to an open, free, and self-directed culture (Evans et al., 2015; Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011). Institutional staff and faculty may not understand student veterans, what they require, or what is contributing to their stop-out or drop-out action. Pellegrin (2013) argued that student veterans and higher education institutional staff and faculty are on two different communication lines. They struggle with understanding each other's needs and how they will work together.

Student veterans have responsibilities that are different from those of traditional students. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2015), traditional students often do not have dependents or substantial prior higher education, are not employed, and choose to go to higher education full-time. New student veterans often have families, previous education, and prior extensive work experience (Evans et al., 2015). Adding to these unique needs, many veterans have visible and/or nonvisible disabilities. These disabilities may span from small physical injuries to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or traumatic brain injury (TBI). The veterans may also not disclose that they have these injuries (Evans et al., 2015).

The freshman student veterans' needs, requirements, and desires all reflect what the institutional leaders need to answer: What are the needs of these freshmen student veterans and how can the institutional faculty, staff, and leaders meet these needs? Evans et al. (2015) indicated that there were no primary directives or plans within higher education to help institutional leaders support these veterans. Evans et al. further indicated that there were no consistent processes, support functions, departments, or organizations within higher education institutions to support these students. According to

Kurzynski (2014), support services within higher education are improving and catching up to the need, but there are still significant growth areas to serve student veterans.

Each institution develops its processes and procedures to help address the student challenges, but they are effective when they are directly related to a known student problem (Evans et al., 2015). College leaders know and see there are some student issues range from students failing to attend class to not receiving recognition at commencement (student government association student, personal communication, April 10, 2010). Some nonapparent issues that they do not recognize range from no opportunities for relationship building between both peers and faculty/staff to being part of the higher education culture (Hammond, 2016). In my study, I helped to identify those unrecognized challenges.

My purpose in this project study was to identify and understand the reasons freshmen-year student veterans stop-out or drop-out of community college. An area of concern within higher education institutions is the stop-out and drop-out rates. These high rates adversely affect academic institutions, as well as student veterans. The completion and graduation rates within institutions are critical statistical data that help capture the attention of prospective students and create new opportunities for the institution. These opportunities range from new revenue sources and scholarship opportunities to federal grants and partnerships. These stop-out and drop-out rates do not focus on only traditional students, but also student veterans. Because student veterans are estimated to comprise approximately 4% to 5% of an institution's population, it is essential to look at their needs and determine how to increase graduation rates, lower drop-out, and stop-out

rates, and help these students successfully transition from the military culture to higher education (O'Herrin, 2011; Semer & Harmening, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

The low completion and graduation rates are especially prominent in community colleges (Bailey, Jenkins, & Leinbach, 2005; Price & Tovar, 2014). Community colleges are often the starting place for student veterans, so it is important that community colleges lead the way for other institutions. Community college leaders need to align their organizations to meet the current student veteran needs. Furthermore, they need to prepare their organization for an increase in the student veteran population. To be ready, they need to understand how student veterans think and what they expect when attending higher education (Cass & Hammond, 2015; Semer & Harmening, 2015). Also, leaders need to be ready to meet student veterans' needs and help them move successfully from military life to higher education, to graduation.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

There was evidence that student veterans at MACC need more support to succeed in their studies. In 2009, King, a research analyst at MACC, conducted a needs assessment survey on all veterans attending during that year. The survey focused on the customer service, and the initial interaction student had with staff. It also surveyed the students' responsiveness to the college's enrollment process. The student veterans' responses indicated there was a need to provide better counseling services to the student veterans (MACC, 2010).

The next year, in 2011, King conducted a research project analyzing the academic progress of student veteran cohorts starting in Fall 2003 and lasting until Fall 2005. King (2011) indicated that between 2003 and 2005, an average of 27.16% of new student veterans attending MACC stopped-out for a semester or two and then re-enrolled. Further, the research office did not track or follow student veterans that dropped-out of MACC entirely. Both of King's surveys in 2009 and 2011 indicated that less than 50% of student veterans were completing their degree or transferring to another institution (King, 2009, 2011). The remaining students were either dropping-out or stopping-out. These two internal studies showed a pattern of student veteran tendencies and enrollment actions. According to Smith (2010), MACC's retention rate has been within 50% to 52% and has remained unchanged for more than 9 decades (Smith, 2010). These percentages and sustained constant retention rate suggest that there is a problem with what the college's culture, environment, and student services.

Further, MACC's board of trustees discussed studying these rates to determine the reason for the low and unchanged retention rates (Smith, 2010). Community colleges are continuing to look for ways to increase their program completion statistics (Kurzynski, 2014). This study may help community colleges improve their service and increase program completion.

In 2015, MACC's student population was more than 19,000 students, all whom were pursuing an undergraduate degree or certificate (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Three percent of the student population had veteran status (MACC, 2014). MACC reported in Fall 2014 that 70% of their students were part-time and 30% full-time. Also,

63% were female, and 37% were male. The college also has a diverse population with 31% being a minority. Forty-three percent of the students are older than the age of 25 years, and 99% reside in the mid-Atlantic states (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

During MACC's growth periods, MACC's military and veteran affairs office (MVAO) conducted informal college-wide student surveys (King, 2009, 2011; MACC, 2010). Also, the MVAO requested a formal study to help determine how student veterans felt and what needed to be changed. King conducted the first survey in 2010, which reflected student data from 1999 to 2009. King (2011) explained how the students felt with their transition from military culture and training to higher education. According to the report, all students were dissatisfied with the translation of military education and experiences into higher educational, academic credit (King, 2009; Vacchi, 2012). Student veterans received only 3 credits, regardless of the amount of time they served in the U.S. armed forces. These 3 credits included 2 credits in physical education and 1 in wellness.

In 2011, MACC's office of institutional research conducted a study on first-time student veterans. King created a cohort, based on enrollment data, which included new student veterans from the Fall 2003 term through the Fall 2005 term (King, 2011). The reported information showed statistical data regarding which campus student veterans attended, which majors they were taking, their academic performance, and their academic progress. This report showed that most student veterans were changing majors at least once during their first year and many student veterans were enrolled in the math/science and allied health division (King, 2011). Finally, the report indicated that more than 25% of student veterans had stopped-out for at least one semester before returning. This

information leads MACC's MVAO staff to work with the college's faculty and staff to help them have a better understanding about their student veterans, where they were from, and what they wanted to do in higher education. These pieces of information lead to a further personal discussion with student veterans and the challenges they felt during their first year.

In addition to the survey, the MVAO staff consistently talked with student veterans and helped provide guidance on their veteran education benefits (J. Jones, pseudonym, personal communication, February 2013). These discussions lead to ideas and ways the college can better assist these students. Student veterans expressed interest in a veteran lounge where they could relax, use the computer, and talk with other student veterans. Faculty members who served in the armed forces were also invited to help mentor these student veterans. In addition to the lounge and mentorship, early registration, veteran-focused orientation, and veteran-focused counselors were presented.

In 2014, due to Congressional oversight, many states started passing veteran protection bills. For example, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania enacted Act 46, which directed all public higher education institutions to offer priority registration for all student veterans (Higher Education Course Scheduling Preference for Veteran Students Act, 2014). Across the United States, many states continued to adopt new changes to their laws to assist student veterans. As of 2015, MACC has changed policy to provide priority registration for all student veterans.

From March 18, 2013 to March 26, 2013, MACC's research office conducted another survey focusing on the college employees. A college-wide survey was sent, and

there were 477 respondents with 21.5% indicating they were veterans of the U.S. armed forces; 48.5% of respondents indicated they were willing and able to mentor student veterans. This response indicated there is a willingness of faculty and staff to help MACC student veterans and help others understand the unique needs of these students.

Each year, members of MACC's faculty would inquire with the college's MVAO on the process and the best way to assist student veterans. They wanted to know how to "deal with them" and "how they can assist them" (P. Smith, personal communication, November, 2013). Each year, MACC hosted an event or activity to help support veterans for Veterans Day; it was at this time that most faculty and staff inquired about what they could do to assist the student veterans.

In addition to these inquiries, in my former role as MACC's military and veteran affairs director, I received numerous inquiries on the college's policy for working with student veterans when they must attend military events, personal issues and personal perceptions (P. Smith, personal communication, October 2008). These issues may be a cause for the students to stop attending and continue their enrollment at the institution.

Communication and enrollment barriers continue across higher education institutions, and the governments work to mitigate them. In 2012, the president of the United States issued an executive order requiring higher education institutions that receive federal military and veteran education program funding to comply with the principles of excellence (Executive Order No. 13, 607, 2012). According to this executive order, higher education institutions needed to ensure they supported student veterans, with their transition into higher education and continued support, by following the

established principles. There were 12 broad categories with the principles of excellence

that institutions were required to follow. If they failed, student veterans could file a

complaint against the institution if student veterans felt they were being mistreated or if

they felt the institution was not following the stated principles (U.S. Department of

Veterans Affairs, 2016a).

Evidence of the Problem From the Professional Literature

There is an increasing amount of student veterans returning to their civilian lives

and moving toward higher education (O'Herrin, 2011). According to Hayden et al.

(2014), there are more than 21 million veterans in the U.S. population. Of these veterans,

"more than 817,000 veterans have used the new GI Bill [Post 9/11 GI-Bill] to go to

college" (Sander, 2013, p. A1). This does not include other GI-Bill chapters such as

Chapters 30, 31, 32/34, 1606, or 1607 (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015a). As

the student veteran population increases, more students will seek higher education

opportunities and look for places they know their needs are being met (Callahan & Jarrat,

2014). Further, they look for higher education institutions where they can use their

Veterans Affairs (VA) educational benefits (O'Herrin, 2011; Vacchi, 2012).

Currently, many community colleges, as well as other higher education

institutions, lack the information to fully understand the student veterans' experiences

and their assessment of the services they have received at their college (Rumann et al.,

2011). Callahan and Jarrat (2014) further emphasized the challenges many institutions

have faced. The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators: Student

Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) concluded from a study that only

25% of higher education institutions understand why student veterans stop their education progress or drop-out of higher education (Sponsler, Wesaw, & Jarrat, 2013).

Pellegrin (2013) emphasized that educational leaders need to ensure that higher education staff and faculty are aware of student veterans' needs, terminology, and mindset. These students come from different backgrounds and have unique needs and thought processes. Many student veterans want to be told what exactly to do and how to do it. This is how they have been trained; they know whom to seek when they need assistance (Vacchi, 2012). In the U.S. armed forces, they are told where to go, when to go, and how to do it. The higher education culture is a major shift in their thought processes. For the student veterans to adapt to a new environment, there must be an awareness of the need to help them adapt. Considering the perspectives of Rumann, Rivera, and Hernandez (2011) regarding the lack of information and student veteran assessments, Daly and Fox Garrity (2013) emphasized that institutions "lack the skills" to help student veterans' transition from the military culture to the higher education culture (p. 6).

In 2012, the U.S. Department of Education (DoE) awarded more than $14.3 million to 51 higher education institutions to help student veterans. The U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan stated, "No group deserves our support for opportunities to learn and advance their knowledge and skills more than our veterans" (U.S. Department of Education, 2012, para. 2). In the grant, one element was to help support student veterans with transitioning from military life to civilian life. This U.S. government initiative further emphasized the need to help train and recognize the challenges that student

veterans face when entering community colleges. MACC was not one of the institutions selected for the grant, but it was selected as an institution hosting a VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) program. The VSOC program allows for higher education institutions to host vocational rehabilitation counselors (VRC) on campus. This front-line ability helps the VA to connect with veteran students at the higher educational level. In addition, they will help student veterans' transition from military culture to higher education culture (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016b).

There is a need both locally and nationally to understand the challenges faced by student veterans in their transition to higher education (Kirchner, Coryell, & Biniecki, 2014). Higher education administrators, faculty, and staff need to be aware of both the student veteran's academic needs and transitional needs (Woosley, 2004). McCaslin et al. (2014) further emphasized that "academic settings may not be fully equipped to aid student Veterans transitioning to academia" (p. 192). They further accentuated how much institutional staff are not ready or do not have a lot of exposure to the veteran's culture and language. This lack of knowledge puts both the student veteran and institution at a disadvantage. Woosley (2004) explained that having a clear understanding of student veteran challenges will prevent institutions from growing and adapting to the changing academic climate and increasing diverse student population. It is essential to know not only why students dropped-out and stopped-out, but the differences on why some returned, and others did not return to finish (Woosley, 2004).

Student veteran enrollment has increased in the past 5 years and is likely to continue to grow (Daly & Fox Garrity, 2013; Kirchner, 2015). Higher education

institutions need to understand the student veterans, where they come from, what they need, and what challenges they encounter when they enroll into higher education (Daly & Fox Garrity, 2013; Kirchner, 2015; Kirchner et al., 2014). My intent in this study was to identify the needs of student veterans and help these students transition from military culture into higher education. In addition, in my work, I have identified barriers that may prevent them from succeeding in their higher education path.

Definitions

For this study, I use the following terms:

Culture: A common view of beliefs, practices, and feelings based on the influence of a person or group's actions and choices that are different from others (Kuehner, 2013; McCaslin et al., 2014)

Drop-out: Students in higher education who leave a college and do not return later (Woosley, 2004)

Stop-out: Students in higher education who leave a college and after a period of time re-enter and to finish their degree (Woosley, 2004)

Student veteran: A student attending or attended higher education after serving in the U.S. armed forces. These students recently left military service and may or may not require institutional support (Osborne, 2014). This term is used in this study to classify and identify their unique status. They are classified as a student even though they may not attend.

VA support team: More than one higher education college employee assigned to support student veterans. These employees may directly work in the institution's veteran office or may be indirectly related to the office (Kurzynski, 2014).

Veteran-friendly: Higher education endeavors to help recognize and eliminate barriers to help veteran students transition from military culture to college culture, in addition, provide institutional support to the student veteran (Lokken, Pfeffer, McAuley, & Strong, 2009).

Significance

Student veterans are in almost every college. According to McCaslin et al. (2014), a college's enrollment of student veterans constitutes approximately 4% to 5% of total enrollment. In 2011, U.S. Congress passed the Budget Control Act of 2011, which set a fixed federal government spending level for 2012 to 2021 (Black, 2011). The U.S. Department of Defense (US DoD) was now required to review their budgets and lower their expenses to comply with the established law (Black, 2011; Office of the Under Secretary of Defense [Comptroller] Chief Financial Officer, 2015). This budget limitation in US DoD spending forced the U.S. armed forces to reduce their costs. These reductions in expenses range from reducing procurement to reducing the armed forces strength. This reduction in force strength, resulted in an increase in student veteran enrollment in higher education because these veterans were now seeking employment, education, or both (Banco, 2013). To meet the needs of these student veterans and the influx of student veterans, college administrators must understand the need, where these student veterans come from, what they expect, and how they will respond.

The mid-Atlantic states have one of the largest veteran populations in the United States (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015c). Higher education institutions must be aware of the potential needs of these students. Lokken, Pfeffer, McAuley, and Strong (2009) explained in their study the need to inform student veterans, create a support group, and increase awareness within the organization. Their focus was on identifying the needs, having the resources to meet those needs, and establishing a strong support system within the organization (Lokken et al., 2009). Knowing and understanding these elements will help institutional leaders have a better understanding on how to support student veterans and help lower the stop-out and drop-outs within the institution (Kurzynski, 2014; Lokken et al., 2009).

Moon and Schma (2011) emphasized that institutions need to take a proactive approach to understanding their student veteran students. They need to understand what their prospective students and current students need. Institutional leaders need a system to help see their students' perspective on where they come from and what they need. Mood and Schma discussed a "program known as the 'System of Care'" (p. 54). This program helped faculty and staff have access to resources to help understand and meet student veterans' needs. As the student veteran population increases, awareness is important and being prepared is vital for the institution and veteran students' success.

In this study, I focused on student veterans in their first year at a community college. As a freshman, one may remember more, in better detail, their beginning challenges and success compared to three or four years later. In addition, freshmen students who stopped-out or dropped-out may have a better recollection of why they

stopped and explained in detail the challenges or barriers they may have faced. Their experiences, feelings, and thoughts may help institutions change to welcome student veterans. It may then help these students feel comfortable, thus allowing them to assimilate into higher education.

Guiding/Research Questions

The research questions guiding this project study are centered on freshman student veterans attending a community college. The project was guided by the following questions:

1. Why do freshman student veterans drop out or stop out of community college?

2. What changes do freshman student veterans and community college faculty and staff believe will help student veterans succeed at MACC?

Community colleges are the first stop for many student veterans when they complete their U.S. military obligation. Colleges need to be ready and must understand what these students bring. Understanding their challenges, experiences, and background will help improve college offerings and better prepare the faculty and staff to serve its student population.

Prior research has indicated that student veterans are unique when compared with traditional students (Lighthall, 2012). Student veterans need additional services to help them transition from military culture to higher education and civilian culture. Each higher education institution that offers military and veterans' education benefits must have a certifying official at the institution. This person serves as a focal point within the

institution for student veterans. Other institutions are using this person to not only help

veterans with their educational benefits from the VA but also help them adapt into the

higher education culture. This point person helps to become the central place for the

student veteran to find help and assistance (Vacchi, 2012).

Higher education institutions must be proactive when working to design their

campus to be student veteran friendly. Research has shown that veterans may not say

anything, and they may struggle to find where they fit in (Semer & Harmening, 2015).

They will seek others that are like them. Institutional leaders need to have an

understanding of them in order to meet their spoken and unspoken needs. In 2014, the

mid-Atlantic states had more than 2.4 million veterans. Of the 2.4 million veterans, more

than 1.3 million, are younger than 65 years (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014a;

2014b; 2014c; 2014d; 2014e; 2014f). Higher education institutions must be willing and

able to serve these veterans.

Review of the Literature

The current literature shows the need for additional research on student veterans. I

researched this literature starting with the ProQuest and Eric databases using the

following keywords: *student veteran, veteran, higher education, transition, challenges,*

attitude, and *culture*. I furthered my research by using the resources they cited to provide

additional depth and reasoning to my study.

Conceptual Framework

Schlossberg's transition model (Schlossberg, 2011) serves as the conceptual

framework for this instrumental case study. Schlossberg's model focused on the subjects'

transition type, the degree of transition impact, a transition position, and transition resources (Schlossberg, 2011). Schlossberg studied how people cope with transition, how they feel, and what process they go through during their transition, describing the process of change based on the 4 *S*'s of situation, self, supports, and strategies (Schlossberg, 2008). This case study focuses on similar concepts, such as the participants' experiences, feelings, and perspectives of transitioning to a community college culture.

Every student is unique, and their needs are different based on their experiences (Robertson & Brott, 2014). Furthermore, student veterans each have different experiences from the U.S. armed forces. Understanding and studying student veterans (Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015) will help institutions meet these students' needs. Pellegrino and Hoggan used Schlossberg's transition model (Schlossberg, 2011) with regards to the "four fundamental coping factors, referred to as 4S – situation, self, supports, and strategies" (p. 125). This model was used in different studies including Griffin and Gilbert (2015) and DiRamio and Jarvis (2011). Both studies focused on student veteran transition into higher education institutions. Student veterans' transition from military culture to higher education culture can be challenging. Applying this conceptual framework to the study of student veterans can help enhance understanding of the challenges they face in their transition into community college and higher education culture.

Pellegrino and Hoggan (2015) used this framework to study female student military veterans during their first year at a community college. The research focused on students transitioning from the military to a community college. Pellegrino and Hoggan used one research question to address how student veterans transitioned as a community

college student. Their question asked: "In what ways did participants use the coping factors of situation, self, supports, and strategies during their first year as a community college student" (p. 125)? They grouped the 4S factor into separate categories and studied their sample's responses. Their responses were categorized into the 4S based on Schlossberg's theoretical framework. Pellegrino and Hoggan found multiple findings that suggest veteran students are unique and have unique needs. They required a more detailed plan and dedicated counselors to assist with their progress. Finally, they found that higher education employees, especially faculty, are critical to the student veterans' integration and success in higher education.

Griffin and Gilbert (2015) also used this framework but focused on the ways higher institutions can enable student veterans to adjust to higher education culture. Griffin and Gilbert focused on Schlossberg's 4's concept by linking the resources institutions provide to student veterans. They further studied the challenges that student veterans encounter when they start their shift from the military culture to the higher education culture. They analyzed each of the 4S concepts and found how a veteran would respond within each category. Their research focused on each of the 4's elements: situation, self, support, and strategies. Their focus was centered on two questions that asked how institutions support their student veterans using the 4's. Their findings showed that again, veteran students have unique needs and institutions must have the resources available to assist them. Griffin and Gilbert noted that there is not one fix to meeting their needs. They must assess and determine what the needs are both individually and as a

cohort and determine the best way to handle those needs and remove their educational barriers.

Hammond (2016) agreed with the notion of using the 4S factors as a basis for understanding student veteran transition. Past studies have not focused on the self-identity for student veterans. Hammond studied student veterans who have experienced combat and the "understanding of the phenomena of identity for combat veterans enrolled in college" (p. 149). I used Schlossberg's theory of adult transition, in this study while also expanding on one of the 4S actors, self. Hammond emphasized the point of continuing this research since prior research was done with limited participants. Hammond also found that communication and perception is an important element. The way student veterans are viewed and how others respond to them is critical to their success and progress in higher education. In addition, the linkage and bond between student veterans is also an important element to their success. There is an established bond and esprit de corps that veteran have, and higher education leaders can help create and continue that bond between them by removing barriers and creating the opportunities for clubs and unity.

Schiavone and Gentry (2014) also used Schlossberg's transition theory to study student veterans transitioning into higher education. While their focus was not on community colleges, their overall studies directly apply. They focused on two research questions. They used the qualitative method in their research to link the findings to the transition theory. Schiavone and Gentry supported the point that institutions need to

know how student veterans feel, think, and what challenges they experience in order to serve them better.

Student Veterans' Experiences in Transitioning to Higher Education

There are many different areas where student veterans experienced barriers when transitioning to higher education. According to Astin (2011), the environmental factor within higher education is the most important for changing from one culture to another. Especially, the students' colleagues are the most influential source for adaptation. Additionally, the institutions' programs, policies, and support organizations are also important for the student to adapt (Astin, 2011; Moon & Schma, 2011; Rumann et al., 2011).

Richardson, Ruckert, and Marion (2015) studied the importance of degree mapping to assist student veterans. They used a mixed-methods approach "to better understand the degree map's influence on the student population…" (p. 66). This concept helped create the link between the military culture and the higher education culture. The degree mapping gave structured guidance for the student. The degree mapping process is the process by which higher education advisors or counselors provide students with the course on how they will complete their degree. It also lays out which classes are required and in what order they must be taken in. The degree mapping process also helps the student know their anticipated graduation date (Richardson, Ruckert, & Marion, 2015). This approach supported the need to analyze the challenge student veterans have when attending a community college. According to O'Herrin (2011), there is a need to provide guidance to student veterans due to lack of formal structure within higher education.

Furthermore, establishing a liaison for student veterans will help both the degree mapping process and the day-to-day operations within the institution (O'Herrin, 2011; Sportsman & Thomas, 2015).

For Richardson et al. (2015), the importance of degree mapping for student veterans is an important element to their success. Griffin and Gilbert (2015) emphasized the need to study the student veterans' support structure within the institution. Callahan and Jarrat (2014) further supported this concept and noted the need to examine the student veteran population prior to making a supportive change within the institution. McCaslin et al. (2014) added the importance of understanding the student veteran population and recent studies showed the lack of knowledge within higher education (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Sportsman & Thomas, 2015).

Hayden et al. (2014) identified the needs and barriers for student veterans that related to career options development. More than 55% of respondents, in their study, indicated their need to link their military culture to the higher education culture. They needed to learn how to adapt. Again, this shows that student veterans are walking into higher education without a plan or a process. They need the direction on how to move from one point in their life to another. Higher education institutions need to be ready to help bridge the gap and remove barriers from the student veterans' paths. Institutions need to have the resources available to help guide student veterans to success (Burnett & Segoria, 2009; Daly & Fox Garrity, 2013; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Lokken et al., 2009; Pellegrin, 2013).

Culture of the Military and Higher Education

The culture and the language are important factors for any student continuing towards his or her higher educational goals. Jacobs (2014) discussed the connection between language and culture and how the language influences and amalgamates the student and the institution. The culture is what brings together the student and the institution. Understanding the cultures helps the student adapt and transform into a college student. Poth, Riedel, and Luth (2015) further studied students' responses with being integrated into the institutional culture and policy development. The authors showed that students want to learn and understand the higher education language, culture and seek to grow with it.

Kelly and Moogan (2012) also indicated that when adding diversity into higher education, the jargon and culture problems must be resolved. With the concept of unintended consequences, an institution wants to add diversity to the organization, but with this addition, there is a cultural and language barrier that must be understood and removed. Kelly and Moogan emphasized that for a student to be successful within the organization and be able to adapt to the culture, there must be institutional support.

Military culture. Koenig, Maguen, Monroy, Mayott, and Seal (2014) described *culture* as "shared values and perspectives" that is assumed, accepted, and standard practice (p. 415). Military veterans have a recognized culture when active in the armed forces. They are integrated into the military culture by attending and completing basic military training. According to Pierce (2010), the military culture is driven by its members, to understand it, one must understand the person and what his or her

perceptions, beliefs, and expectations are. The military culture is regulations, policies, and the interworking of the service members. The standards and expectations for the service members are the same. They train the same, they grow the same, and they work together in order to accomplish the overall goal.

The U.S. Air Force started its cultural shift of integration and working together by removing the general segregation and integrating the genders into one formation with similar career positions (Garner, 2015). The expectations within the armed forces are set and expected to be followed. According to The Noncommissioned Officer and Petty Officer: Backbone of the Armed Forces (2014), teamwork is the established and primary principle. All members are expected to work as a team. Second, each service branch establishes how it is to be seen, understood, and respected. All service members take what they know and apply it to the service's culture. Further, The Noncommissioned Officer and Petty Officer: Backbone of the Armed Forces book also illustrated that each service branch's culture is also very different. Service members must integrate from their civilian life into the military culture. Then, upon separation, they must re-integrate into civilian life. Further, if they choose, they must also integrate into the higher education culture. This cultural shift can be challenging. Wurster, Rinaldi, Woods, and Liu (2013) emphasized that disabled student veterans struggle compared to disabled non-student veterans because of their difference in culture.

Higher education culture. Jacobs (2014) emphasized that the language and culture are what defines a student. The language establishes who is in the system and who is out of the system. Students during their first year adapt to the institutional culture and

language they use, which shows that they understand and belong. In a taped interview, Carrell (The New Yorker Radio Hour, 2016) stated that it took almost a full year to express his thoughts and he had to learn a new language for his class colleagues to understand his points and perspectives. Carrell was a 35-year-old student veteran at Vassor College who established a connection with one of the faculty. He was interviewed because of his perspective and willingness to express himself to his faculty member. Carrell provided his perspective and challenges he faced with transitioning from the U.S. military culture into a higher education community and culture.

Kelly and Moogan (2012) further supported the notion that institutions have their own culture and they must decide on how they will adapt. Will they adapt to the students or will they make students adapt to the institution? The authors concluded that the educational culture must adapt to the changing diversity requirements. Institutions must be willing to adapt, change, and allocate resources to support these new, incoming students. In addition, new students coming into higher education have their own cultures and languages, and institutional leaders and faculty must be able to adapt to these challenges. Supported by Slee (2010), there is a need to continue to assess and address "cultural and equity issues" (p. 258). Furthermore, institutions are weaker in the area of support for diversity, culture, and language barriers.

Higher Education Challenges

There is a need to provide specialized services for student veterans in order to help them transition into the culture (Kurzynski, 2014). Griffin and Gilbert (2015) focused on Schlossberg's self-concept. They emphasized the need for institutions to

provide resources for mental health awareness. Student veterans face many unique challenges and having these services will help them integrate into their new culture. This concept is most important because it is how the student veteran feels. Finally, Griffin and Gilbert focused on support and strategies concepts. They focused on the institution's ability to support student veterans within the institution. Other research has indicated that student veterans do not feel that they were adequately supported within higher education (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015, p. 74).

Institutions need to provide support to student veterans. Schiavone and Gentry (2014) indicated that in prior studies, over 60% of their studied institutions provided services for student veterans. While 60% is a good start, the question is, how many institutions are not understanding the challenges that student veterans face because they do not know. In addition, even though these institutions are providing services, are they the services that are relevant to the student veteran needs?

Student veterans face other unique barriers that require additional support from the institution. These barriers are combat-related illnesses, both mental and physical (Alschuler, Williams, & Yarab, n.d.). Student veterans may alienate themselves from others due to these unique barriers. These challenges will require additional support from the institution (Cass & Hammond, 2015). According to Church (2009), the rate of mental health issues with returning veterans is more significant with each deployment. With this being the case, peer counseling and one-on-one communication are essential for student veterans to adapt. Teamwork and comradery are taught in the service, and thus student veterans bring it forward into higher education.

The problem identified within this study is not limited to the Mid-Atlantic states but extends across the United States of America. Higher education institutions are working to understand student veterans and what role they play within higher education. They come from different backgrounds and experiences and the way they "see" things is different than a traditional student who has not served in the U.S. armed forces.

Implications

The findings from this study may help community college leaders, staff, and faculty identify strategies for meeting the needs of student veterans. Findings may also help community colleges adapt to the student veteran needs. I anticipate that responses from participants will help community college staff, faculty, and administrators relate more effectively to these students and understand where they came from and where they want to go. Findings of the study can be used at MACC and may also apply to similar colleges across the country.

Another finding from this study may indicate there are unique challenges that student veterans face when beginning at a community college. These findings will guide the project towards solutions directly related to student veterans and helping them transition into the higher education culture. I anticipate that there are three potential projects that may be developed from these findings.

First, Carrell (The New Yorker Radio Hour, 2016) stated that he was looking for faculty and staff who were open-minded. Hsu, Carrell's faculty member at Vassor College, stated that he understood that the age gap between a faculty member and a student was small, but they had different experiences which gave different perspectives.

A new training program could be developed within the institution to help faculty and staff learn the language and understand the needs of student veterans.

Second, a focused orientation could be developed to help student veterans learn the higher education language for them to adapt to higher education culture. The findings may help focus the orientation on promoting a faster adaptation and cultural shift for the student veterans.

Third, the findings may help to guide the creation of a student veterans' group within the college community. The findings will help create the foundations for the group and help the student veterans find the connection between the military culture and the higher education culture.

This project study shows that the findings are directly related to the type of student veteran; community colleges must be ready to adapt and meet the needs of all students. Community college leaders must have a complete understanding of their current and future students. Overall, community college leaders need to have a complete understanding of student veteran needs and barriers in order to increase and sustain enrollment within their organization.

Summary

Community college leaders may use this study to understand the needs that student veterans have when they begin at their institution. For any student, the transition from secondary school education to higher education can be difficult. For student veterans, the transition brings additional challenges, as they have been trained in the U.S. armed forces to take orders, respond to orders, and be ready for additional orders. Within

higher education, freedom alone may be a challenge for student veterans. This study will help institutional leaders understand student veterans with regards to their background, their experiences, and their expectations. It will also help them prepare how to serve these students. Student veterans already experience challenges and barriers when beginning their higher education. This qualitative research study identifies these challenges based on the student's experiences, problems, and feelings when they begin higher education in a community college.

In the next section, I will present the proposed research methodology to address the research questions. It will also include why the method is relevant. In addition, I will identify criteria needed for the selection of participants who will describe what their experiences were during their first year at a community college. The ethical treatment of these human participants will also be discussed. Finally, the limitations of this study will be identified.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

A qualitative research method was needed to understand student veteran challenges and needs when entering and transitioning into higher education. Interviews and data analysis will help institutional leaders make sound decisions in both financial and nonfinancial investments. Institutions need to establish partnerships, training, groups, and guidance paths in order to help the student veteran population. This project will help determine those needs and what direction the institutional leaders should go.

In this section, I describe the research design and the approach used to conduct the study. My objective was to analyze responses that answer the guiding questions based on personal experiences from freshmen student veterans attending a community college, as well as faculty/staff who have interacted with freshmen student veterans. I focused on freshmen student veterans and their feelings, experiences, and culture. I used a qualitative case study research design to probe into participants' experiences and culture to better understand the challenges that student veterans face. The participants included both freshman student veterans and faculty/staff from MACC, a local community college. I then used that information and applied it to help understand and improve the process of transitioning from a military culture to the community college environment.

Research Design and Approach

A qualitative case study research design was an appropriate approach for this study to identify and understand the reasons that freshmen student veterans stop-out or drop-out of community college. The freshmen student veterans at MACC form the case

for this project study. According to Yin (2009), a case study focuses on *how* and *why* within the research topic. Similarly, Stake (1995) emphasized the need for case studies to help one understand a situation, thus answering the question of why. I wanted to understand the how and why of student veterans' decisions to stop-out or drop-out of MACC. Yin further emphasized that a case study is used to expand, generalize, and help answer the research questions. Case studies are used to understand a phenomenon within a meaningful and important context. This case study included multiple participants and reflected on one common and bounded concept of freshmen student veterans transitioning to a community college. My focus in this study was to understand why student veterans dropped-out or stopped-out of community college, how the environment influenced that outcome and changes that would help student veterans in transitioning to a community college. Findings from this case study may reflect or be informational to other institutions (Yin, 2009).

I focused on determining what a diverse group of student veterans and faculty/staff at one institution perceive as challenges for first-year student veterans and what would facilitate their transition to the higher education culture. Stake (1995) and Yin (2009) emphasized the use of a case study within a bounded system to understand the case by interpreting the data based on the interviews. Yin (2009) focused on five components in order to properly use a case study. This case study meets all five components. This study asks the question "why" and is focused around freshman student veterans attending a community college. It is further limited to students who stopped-out and drop-out during their first term. The third component, as Yin described, is what

defines the case. The case in this study was the stopped-out/dropped-out student veterans. The last two components focus on the interpretation of the results. Stake explained the search for patterns is key to interpretation and categorical aggregation.

Using the participants' responses and experiences, I was able to better understand the student veterans' needs and find commonality in order to help institutional leaders remove the barriers for student veterans. This design allowed me to focus on the student veteran's core experiences and feelings to help determine what their needs were and what challenges they handled (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle, 2010). Yin (2009) further argues that a case study is used to answer the why question regarding some type of contemporary activity. The author further emphasized that prior to doing a case study, it is important to ensure there are no other methods that will help answer the question, such as a survey or historical review or experimental study. In addition, an interview allowed me to seek, hear, and ask about prior behaviors, intentions, language, activities, and what is in participants' minds (Merriam, 2009). Observations also cannot be used because they will not portray the needed information.

Alternative Designs

I considered other research design methods, such as a quantitative approach, but I determined they were not practical for my study. Researchers use quantitative research to analyze trends to establish a common trend (Creswell, 2012). A survey, for example, will not help with finding the meaning behind the respondents' responses because it lacks the depth of information (Lodico et al., 2010). In addition, quantitative methods need a relationship on how one variable is related another. I did not use this study to focus on

establishing a relationship between variables but on developing a deep understanding of freshman student veterans' experiences in order to answer the research questions.

A qualitative ethnography study was also not a practical research method because it is designed to be a long-term observational study (Yin, 2009). I used the participants' views and perceptions and analyzed the data based on their specific responses. I was not there to view the participants' interactions, and I could not interpret their feelings and experiences. I had to rely on the information provided based on the questions and their in-depth, detailed responses.

A phenomenological study was also not an appropriate method because it is designed to look at the in-depth perspective and lived experiences of people (Lodico et al., 2010). It is used to study something that is not widely known, or there is little information on. I initially considered using this method but rejected it for this study because the focus was to understand the why and how of external elements that caused drop out and stop out action, not to understand the experiences and meaning of the experiences from the participants.

Finally, grounded theory designs were not practical for this project study because they focus on generating theory based on the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Also, this approach is used when other designs are not useful because of their focus. Researchers then use a methodical process to conduct their research and propose a theory. This research project study was not focusing on a process, but on understanding the participants' perspectives in order to help education leaders meet the needs of their student veterans.

To successfully understand the problem and understand the reasoning for stopping-out or dropping-out, I determined a case study is the best design for an in-depth analysis within a special timeframe and bounded system (Stake, 1995). This research design addresses the questions of why and how through in-depth data that can be analyzed to identify common themes related to the problem of the project study (Creswell, 2012; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009).

Data Collection Process

To collect detailed events, experiences, thoughts, and perspectives of the participants, I used an interview process. I coordinated face-to-face interviews via e-mail. I met with each participant where they felt most comfortable. I completed most interviews at the college campus libraries, where the participants are most affiliated to, and at a time that was convenient for each of them. We met in a quiet meeting space where the interview could be clearly recorded.

I used interviews to help understand the participants' experiences when they transitioned from the military culture into higher education (Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009). Schlossberg's concepts were used to develop the interview questions (Appendix C & Appendix D). The interview questions were used to understand student veterans' culture. In addition, they were used to understand the student veterans' inner person, such as their feelings and thoughts. Finally, the questions were used to better understand the support and strategies the institution may or may not have in order to support these student veterans. The interview questions focused on the participants' feelings, perspectives, strategies, and support structure based on their experiences. Schlossberg's

focus was on taking the challenges and the unknown out of change and transition. Schlossberg (2008) looked at 4 S's for removing the unknown. The 4 S's: situation, self, support, and strategies were integrated into the interview protocols to help understand the student veterans' perspective and culture in order to help leaders know how to respond to student veterans and have them complete their education. The interview questions and the basis for this study focused on the same concepts.

I focused the research questions on student veteran challenges who were attending their first year at a community college. I also explored what they felt they needed to succeed with their transition into the higher education culture. The data from the students and faculty/staff were gathered individually during an agreed upon day, time, and location. The environment was conducive to a private interview. Most interviews were conducted either in a private library study room, college conference room, or office. I established the agreed upon date and time via e-mail with each participant. I provided a bottle of water for each participant, and each participant reviewed the consent agreements. After review, each participant signed the informed consent agreement, and the interviews began. I recorded each interview with a digital recorder and saved each interview on a password protected flash drive.

The transcriptions had the participants' names removed and replaced with a number. The key containing the link between the participants and their number remained secure with the researcher and will not be released. I also used Microsoft Excel to track appointments, times, interview lengths, and participant codes. In addition, I used Microsoft Word for all transcriptions. I used Microsoft Word as the word processor

which helped me import the transcriptions into MAXQDA. I continued to use MAXQDA to catalog and analyze the interview data. All digital recordings submitted for transcription were done by the most secure means. The returned transcriptions were e-mailed by the most secure means.

Participants

In order to start searching for and obtaining participants for this study, I obtained approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Permission and approval number, 06-15-17-0308674 was provided by Walden University's IRB.

Second, I obtained permission to implement the study at MACC and obtained a list of potential participants. I initially engaged with MACC's IRB point of contact for guidance and permission. I communicated my desire to study MACC students and my constant communication with the college leadership had laid the foundation for consideration. I submitted my proposal to the college's IRB point person to request approval to include both their students and staff/faculty in my study. In addition, I requested to conduct the interviews on campus during regular business hours for the staff and faculty and at a time and place that was convenient for the student participants

The participants within this study were selected from lists provided by two different college sources. A formal request was submitted to the college to obtain a student veteran listing and a faculty/staff listing. I requested permission to e-mail the student veteran population. I also requested permission to e-mail the faculty/staff and requested their participation in this study.

For the participants to contribute to this study, the participants must have met each of the following criteria within their category

Student Participants

- Coded as a freshman student at MACC. Their attempted credit could not exceed 30 credits.

- Classified as a veteran student and not a dependent of a veteran.

- Cannot be a transfer student from another higher education institution.

- Classified as a stop-out or drop-out student.

Faculty/Staff Participant

- Had direct interaction with student veterans either in the classroom or in an office setting.

- Met with a veteran student at least once during the student's freshman year.

- Full-time or part-time employed at MACC.

The student veteran listing was a collaboration from the college's registrar, military and veteran affairs office and office of institutional research and assessment located at the college. I completed the paperwork and requested the student data. I received approval from the institution's leadership and obtained the student listing. The listing included, but not limited to, the student veteran's name, college e-mail address, veteran status code, veteran enrollment code, number of credits attempted, academic status, gender, ethnicity, age, and number of classes attempted. Lists were provided by semester. There was a total of more than 3,200 names on the lists.

I used Microsoft Excel to compare each list together to identify unique students. By comparing the lists and looking for unique values, I was able to identify which students dropped-out and stopped-out. Per the definition, a stop-out student is a student that stopped attending for a period but later returned. While a drop-out student is a student that attended, dropped-out and at the time of selection, has not returned to the college. I was able to use this information to determine my population pool.

My population pool consisted of 400 student veteran potential participants. I e-mailed all the students in the pool, requesting their assistance and participation for this study. When student veterans responded, I validated their status to ensure they met the study criteria and arranged for a face-to-face interview. I received four responses back indicating they were interested but did not meet the criteria I was looking for and did not further engage with me.

I reviewed the response pool to select student participants. I used the maximum variation sampling method to ensure a diverse group of student veterans and faculty/staff participants met the selection criteria. I used this method because it would help ensure that the small, detailed selection of participant responses reflect that of freshmen student veterans and faculty/staff at MACC (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Lodico et al., 2010). In addition, it helped me find the most significant amount of detail and differences among the participants (Patton, 2002).

I used purposeful sampling to obtain 8 student participants and 5 faculty/staff participants. I selected the student participants based on age, gender, and their attempted semesters. The attempted semester recorded indicated the student veterans' academic

status, such as freshman status. I ensured that I had a diverse student population that matched the general veteran population. I also selected the faculty/staff participants based on employed location and role within the institution. This helped ensure that I had a diverse population and wide perspectives from this population. Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010) and Merriam (2009) both emphasized that the minimum number of participants within the study should be at the point of data saturation. Creswell (2012) argued that the sample size ranges from one participant to over forty, depending on the diversity of responses. Creswell warned that having too many participants may "become unwieldy and result in superficial perspectives" (p. 209). Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) argued there is a participant range depending on the need and the design method used. Further, it depends on when data saturation is reached. Yin (2009) emphasized the need to build a sample size that gives replication to the study. The sample may be increased if there is not a "high degree of certainty" based on given participants (p. 58).

Once I obtained the potential participant lists and reviewed them for qualifications, I sent an e-mail, using my Walden University e-mail address, to all student veterans who met the criteria. I sent an e-mail to the college's military and veteran affairs office and counseling/advising office staff to recruit potential faculty/staff participants. Based on my working knowledge and experience within higher education, these two departments had the most direct contact with student veterans and faculty who met the criteria for participation in the study. I also introduced myself in the e-mail and briefly explained the plan and objectives for the study. I requested, in the e-mail, to conduct an

interview with the faculty/staff participants to explore their perspectives regarding the established research questions. I sent out an e-mail to each student in the participant pool.

I further engaged with the college's human resources staff and obtained a listing of staff/faculty. The listing was approved by the human resources staff and was considered public data. The list contained, but was not limited to, the faculty/staff members' name, job title, location, e-mail, phone number, and department.

I used the information, based on the job title to locate faculty/staff that interacted with students at the college. I focused my request on faculty/staff within the student affairs and student services departments. I received a listing of 1,641 faculty/staff members. I filtered the listing down to 1,340 faculty/staff. I received 14 responses back which indicated they did not feel they could provide useful information to the study and opted out. I received 30 responses back indicating their willingness to participate in the study.

Once I selected the student participants, I sent an e-mail to the selected student participants, asking them if they were willing to participate in a one-on-one interview. I notified my selected participants within 10 days and scheduled an appointment to conduct the face-to-face interview.

In order to filter down my willing faculty/staff participants, I used the college's public data to determine faculty/staff and student ratios at each campus. I used this data to help me ensure I had an equivalent balance from each campus. I also selected one faculty/staff to participate that works directly in the college's military and veteran affairs

office. Once I had a balance of faculty/staff participants, I requested a face-to-face interview with them.

The selected faculty and staff participants were also contacted by e-mail from my Walden University e-mail. This e-mail also asked them to engage in this research project. Once I had received responses back, I focused on five participants from this participative pool. These five were selected using the purposeful sampling method. I also communicated, by e-mail, with the selected faculty and staff to ensure they were willing to participate in a one-on-one interview at the institution.

Establishing a rapport as a researcher to the participants was an important concept because it helped establish a foundation of trust. This trust helped ensure responses that were genuine, truthful, and accurate. In order to establish a working relationship with the student veterans, I provided a basic background about myself, in my initial e-mail, to the participant pool and again during the interview. I also described myself, my work history, and status as a veteran too. Carrell discussed that a bond is formed when there is a specific association or commonality between the student veteran and the faculty and staff member (The New Yorker Radio Hour, 2016). My veteran status created the association with the student veterans and allowed for them to speak freely and honestly during the interview. As a prior full-time employee at MACC, I had established rapport with the faculty and staff. My former role within MACC administration allowed me to network and engage with many different departments both administratively and academically. My prior professional relationship helped me establish a connection between myself and the faculty/staff participants. Since I have been away from the institution for many years, I

established my role as a researcher and not as a colleague. I explained that my objective

was to obtain data for my research project. Yin (2009) stated that researchers' history and

background knowledge might make them prone to expressing bias in their research. In

order to avoid this bias, Yin recommended considering other's "alternative explanations

and suggestions" (p. 72) and locating others views to rebuttal my findings. If I can locate

some and justify my findings, the bias may be removed (Yin, 2009).

Protection of Participants

The participants' ethical treatment was of my highest priority. I made every effort

to ensure that privacy and confidentiality were kept to the highest standards. Merriam

(2009) discussed four main concerns when addressing participant's protection. The first

concern is ensuring I obtain informed consent from each participant. I had each

participant review and sign a form attesting that they were willfully participating, and

they were over the age of 18. In addition, I worked with MACC's IRB staff member and

Assessment and Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to obtain a letter

of approval from MACC. The informed consent letter to the participants stated that I had

obtained IRB approval. The letter also provided them with information regarding the

planned research procedure, sample questions, the risks and study benefits, privacy

expectations and finally contact information.

The second concern is the participants' information security (Merriam, 2009). I

ensured all materials, interview question responses, and written papers were secured in a

locked box and digital records password protected. I maintained complete access to both

the lockbox and electronic devices. No other person, including family or friends, had

access to these mediums. Further, all participant names were changed and assigned a number within the transcriptions and analysis. Only the participant number is referred to in the study. Finally, all personally identifiable information such as (a) names, (b) addresses, (c) e-mail addresses, (d) mailing address, and (e) college status are secured either by a password for electronic recording or in the lockbox.

The third concern Merriam (2009) addressed was the determination of private versus public information. I ensured all information used is protected and unique responses cannot be linked to an individual participant. I ensured this process by coding all unique, identifying information and securing the coding key.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher is to obtain all information related to the study. The objective is to capture the information without bias and remaining objective. Merriam (2009) emphasized the importance of interviewing and how to interview properly. The key was to bring out both positive and negative emotions. Participants may feel the interviewer is being too intrusive and invading their private lives. Whereas others may be more willing, giving, and wanting to explain how they feel and the positive and negative challenges they faced. I informed the participants that my role was a doctoral candidate student and I disclosed my current occupation and prior occupation. I also disclosed that I am a veteran to help create the link between the student veteran (participant) and myself (researcher). This discussion also helped remove an authoritative perspective or role during the interview. I further informed the faculty and staff participants that I am no longer a full-time employee at MACC but am an adjunct faculty member. This also

helped eliminate an authoritative role. This created the linkage between him or her and me, as the researcher. I did not consider any participant that was in my leadership structure at MACC or a student in one of my classes.

Since I am a veteran and have experienced a transition from the military culture into the higher education culture, I ensured I remained professional and responded appropriately to the participants. I worked to remove bias from my unintentional or intentional responses. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) argued that researchers must control their responses and remain objective, no matter what they hear. I remained objective and focused on the participants' responses and not how they make me feel. I wrote down my initial reaction and feelings during the interview to help ensure I saw and understood my own beliefs (Mehra, 2002). I ensured the participants felt comfortable talking with me but did not allow my feelings or emotions to influence their thinking or perspective. Writing my feelings and emotions helped me ensure I did not include my feelings in the findings.

Data Collection

Interviews

I received 13 responses back from student veterans willing and able to participate. I was able to secure an interview with eight eligible student veterans. I was unable to secure an interview with the remaining 5 student veterans because they did not respond back to my e-mail and request for available dates.

Before I started asking the participant questions, I provided each person with a bottle of water and I discussed with him or her the purpose of the interview. I also had them read and sign the consent form. I helped ensure the participants felt comfortable and

provided them assurance that all information would remain confidential and that all details were important for an accurate study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I also informed them that the college had approved this research and they would have the opportunity to review their transcript and my initial interpretation. Finally, I also explained that the interview would be recorded and transcribed electronically. I explained that the recording was necessary because it would ensure the integrity of the interview (Lodico et al., 2010). I also explained that the transcriber signed a confidentality agreement to ensure their privacy.

During the first 10 minutes of the interview, I talked with each participant about what my goals were. I briefly talked with them regarding the study and how the information they were about to provide was critical to understanding why they either dropped out of class or stopped out of class. Almost all the participants appeared excited about participating in the study.

I also told participants that I was a veteran student and that this interview was for my doctoral study. I saw, once I reminded them of this, they were ready to talk with me and there was a connection between them and me. The student veteran participants discussed some of their personal feelings and experiences. I was surprised at the responses I received. Some student veterans told about their addiction to drugs and alcohol. They went into detail about how they had an internal battle and what they were doing or did to overcome it. Others expressed their feelings about some physical challenges and blessings they experienced such as being pregnant or their professional relationship they had while in the service. Most took their time in responding as if they

were processing the questions and putting their thoughts together in order to help provide

a serious and thoughtful response. Other student veterans also expressed their gratitude

toward some of their counselors and advisors within their educational institution. They

recalled the exact names of those staff and how they helped them overcome certain

challenges. Overall, the student participants were engaged, thoughtful, and focused

during the whole interview session. They asked for clarification regarding the questions

and provided specific examples of how they felt and what they experienced.

During the interviews, the environment was calm. There was not much noise in

the background. We could hear air circulating around and muffled voices outside the

walls of our meeting room. Each participant was eager to express their feelings and was

willing to share their experiences. Some felt they were providing too much information,

while others responded quickly and to the point.

After each of the interviews, I wrote down field notes of how I felt during the

interview and how I saw each interviewee. These notes helped me recollect our

conversation and helped me validate their responses. I wrote down how the environment

was, if they were late, felt rushed, and how they responded. Further, I noted their

expressions and non-verbal communication elements.

Participant Engagement

There was one student participant that was distracted. SS1 was paying more

attention to the flying insect that happened to be in the same room as us than the

questions. At times, SS1 did not respond and the question needed to be readdressed.

Overall during this interview, SS1 responded to the questions and was genuine. As with

all the participants, their responses appeared to be honest and forthright. Most of the student veteran participants were casually dressed. I directed them to a seat in front of me, where they sat up when talking with me. Their demeanor showed they were confident about their discussion.

The faculty and staff participants were professionally dressed as we usually talked during their regular working hours. We were not rushed, and each of these participants expressed their responses with confidence. They expressed how they felt and why they felt it. I could tell from their body language and facial expressions they were concerned about students and wanted to help them.

I believed all the faculty and staff had a passion for helping and seeing all students succeed in higher education. They responded to all the questions with focused and detailed responses. All the faculty and staff participants were very knowledgeable within their areas. Some had experiences with student veterans outside their regular assigned duties. After I reminded them of my project goal, they all were willing to express their feeling on what they have experienced with student veterans.

Many of the faculty and staff participants had ideas that kept all students in mind. It was not just about the student veterans, but many of their explanations expanded to the higher education student population. I could tell by their expressions that they were passionate about helping their students succeed. This interview, to them, was a matter of getting their information out so others could use it. The faculty and staff were also enthusiastic about finding solutions for student veterans. Many times, the faculty and

staff participants expressed how grateful they were for the student veteran population and what an impact they made to their environment.

Three faculty and staff participants indicated that veterans were their passion and they wanted to know more about their needs and how to meet their needs. Two indicated they were researching and attending professional development courses in order to know more about that population. These types of responses and attitudes showed me that they were speaking honestly and thoughtful regarding each interview question.

Data Analysis

I collected and recorded data from all participants using a digital recording device during one-on-one interviews. I took the digital recording file and downloaded the file onto my computer and transmitted it to the transcriptionist. Prior to submission to the transcriptionist, I ensured the transcriptionist signed a confidentiality agreement (Appendix B). The transmitted file contained our interview, and it did not contain any participants' full names. I received the transcriptions back to my e-mail typed in Microsoft Word. The transcripts were on average, 14.5 pages long. I ensured that all participant names were removed and coded each participant with a unique participant number. I listened to all transcriptions and matched them perfectly to each recording. This ensured I had 100% transcription accuracy.

It is important to keep all data secure and when analyzing it, keep it organized. According to Creswell (2012), there are two ways to analyze the data, either by hand or by computer. I analyzed the data by computer using a qualitative data analysis computer program, MAXQDA. Creswell explained that qualitative analysis computer programs

help in analysis of interview transcripts by organizing and assigning coding to the data which shows the topic and focus, and then organizing those codes into common themes. I used MAXQDA program to help analyze, organize, and code the data. I took the coded data and established themes. The MAXQDA program helped me review multiple documents and link common data together more efficiently and methodically.

Stake (1995) emphasized that codes are created from variables and categories. He further argued that prior literature would provide a good start, but the researcher will devise his or her own process based on the established variables and categories. This process will ensure the coding is practical and remains focused on the established case (Stake, 1995).

Yin (2009) also argued for using a computer-based system to help organize the text from the interviews, search for the keywords or phrases, and help break up the data into basic contexts. Yin emphasized that a computer system will only get the researcher started; it will not provide or show patterns in the data. The researcher must review the data and codes to establish common patterns.

I coded the interviews and matched the data to specific categories that related to each of the research questions. I then used the codes to help me identify common themes related to the research questions (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009). These connections and common themes helped me form a better understanding of the participant responses. Creswell and Merriam stated that establishing a few common themes will help provide more detailed analyses compared to having more broad themes.

With the limited number of participants and not an excessively large amount of data, I was able to identify patterns from the collected data (Yin, 2009). Based on the patterns, I could limit the number of themes to help me focus more on the details within the responses than generalizing with many themes. Creswell recommended limiting the number to between five and seven themes.

Once I established the themes, I reviewed my field notes to help validate each participant's response. My notes consisted of the environment, layout, dress and appearance, and attitude and tone.

Measures to Ensure Accuracy and Credibility

Member Checking

To ensure transcription and interpretation accuracy, I used member checks to ensure the transcriptions and my initial interpretation were accurate (Lodico et al., 2010). First, I interviewed the student population which provided the foundation and basis for this study. Second, I conducted interviews with MACC's faculty and staff. I reviewed, analyzed, and synthesized to establish common themes (Stake, 1995). Once synthetization was complete, I had the participants review the initial findings to establish validation. This method helped ensure validity and reliability from the participants' responses and show creditability to my analysis and findings (Merriam, 2009).

After I completed the transcription process and analysis of the data, I contacted the participants to obtain their perspective and review. Participants were offered the opportunity to read the interview transcript and my initial interpretation to ensure their responses were recorded accurately and anything written would not cause them any

undue harm. This step helped ensure that I heard and understood the participants in the way they intended and that they were comfortable with the recording and was certain that their information was protected. Having a balanced, deep, and full understanding helped ensure my analysis was accurate and credible. All participants who responded to my inquiry stated that my transcription and analysis were accurate to their intent.

Triangulation and Establishment of Context

The faculty and staff interviews added credibility to the findings from the student participants in the form of triangulation (Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009). For further credibility and dependability, I took field notes during the interview process (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Yin (2009) stated that field notes provide for a greater understanding of the context for a study. I took field notes by taking careful consideration of the participants' tone, attitude, and feelings towards the military and higher education cultures during the interview process. My notes reflected the participants' attitudes, expressions, impressions, and manner. My analysis conveyed the feelings and personality of the participant in order to gain a deeper perspective to the participants' responses. These elements helped add depth, validity, credibility, and perspective to my analysis.

To provide additional information for understanding the context of the study, I also collected demographic data from participants. This allowed me to describe my sample and provide a context of gender, age, ethnicity, attempted credits, current enrollment, and military background in order to better understand individual interview responses.

Discrepant Cases

To ensure the accuracy of my conclusions, I investigated all discrepancies that arose during the data analysis and member checking process (Yin, 2012). I reviewed the transcriptions and common themes with the participants that responded to my member checking follow up. After I reviewed the transcriptions and my interpretations, the participants concurred with the findings. After all the reviews, I determined there were no discrepant cases within the data and interpretations.

Data Analysis Results

This study is limited to those participants who responded to my inquiry and reflects the perspectives of those within the mid-Atlantic region of the United States of America. The student veteran population is vast, and thus this sample is based on those attending community colleges within the stated region. Other areas and cultures may reflect additional findings.

I conducted interviews with qualifying student veterans and with faculty/staff while audio-recording their responses. All the student participants were students who either dropped out or stopped out of community college during their freshman year. Further, the faculty/staff who were interviewed provided a perspective on what challenges the student veterans faced and reasons why these students stopped out of college. I focused the research questions on why each student decided to drop out or stop out and what changes they felt were needed to support veteran students within the community college.

Description of Participants

My sample consisted of 13 participants. As shown in Table 1, there were eight student participants diversified by gender, age, ethnicity, college status, college objective and military status. This coding aligned with the study requirements to ensure there would be representation from both stop-out students and drop-out students

Table 1

Student Participation Demographics

Code	Gender	Age (y)	Ethnicity	Status	Military
SD1	M	28	Hispanic-American	FT	AD
SD2	M	32	Caucasian-American	FT	AD
SD3	M	31	Caucasian-American	PT	AD
SD4	F	32	African-American	FT	NG
SD5	F	56	Caucasian-American	PT	NG
SS1	M	35	African-American	PT	AD
SS2	M	36	Caucasian-American	PT	AD
SS3	F	25	Caucasian-American	FT	NG

Note. SD = student drop-out, SS = student stop-out, M = male, F = female, FT = full-time, PT = part-time, AD = active duty, NG = National Guard.

As qualitative research is focused on an in-depth analysis of individual participants, I decided it was important to provide brief descriptions to deliver an in-depth framework for understanding their responses.

- SD1's goal was to complete an associate degree. He dropped out because there was no cultural responsibility and support as he received in the U.S. armed forces.

- SD2's goal was to complete an associate degree. He dropped out because of personal challenges such as substance abuse.

- SD3's goal was to complete an associate degree from another educational institution. He dropped out because there was not a need or professional requirement to keep him in class.

- SD4's goal was to obtain a bachelor's degree. She dropped out because of personal challenges.

- SD5's goal was to obtain an associate degree from another educational institution. She dropped out because her immediate goals were accomplished.

- SS1's goal was to obtain a degree in music. He stopped out because of academic challenges.

- SS2's was to take classes to obtain a bachelor's degree at another higher education institution. He stopped out because of personal environmental challenges.

- SS3's goal was taking classes to obtain a bachelor's degree at another higher education institution. She stopped out because of the lack of motivation to continue, and there was no drive.

I also interviewed five faculty or staff employees all from different backgrounds and experiences. As shown in Table 2, the faculty and staff were diverse based on their positions and experience.

Table 2

Faculty and Staff Participation Demographics

Code	Gender	Position	Department	Employment status	Experience
FS1	F	Academic counselor (staff)	Student affairs	FT	< 20 years
FS2	F	Faculty member	Academic affairs	PT	< 13 years
FS3	F	Staff & faculty member	Student affairs	FT	< 15 years
FS4	F	Faculty member	Both student & academic affairs	FT	< 15 years
FS5	M	Staff member	Student affairs	FT	< 15 years

Note. M = male, f = female, FT = full-time, PT = part-time.

The faculty and staff consisted of four females and one male. There were only two staff participants, two faculty/staff participants because they taught class part-time and held a staff position full-time, and one faculty only position.

- FS1 had a diverse background in helping students both in an academic setting and in a private setting.

- FS2 taught multiple classes each academic term. The class sizes were between 10 and 20 students each semester. FS2 had a depth of experience in academics and student engagement within the classroom.

- FS3 had a diverse background with different focus areas such as counseling, advising, and student services.

- FS4's diverse experience focused on being a professor and their engagement with students around the classroom.

- FS5's experience was all focused-on student veterans.

Themes

The themes that I identified are related to the research questions which help show the deeper reason for why student veterans dropped out. The software program, MAXQDA, assisted me in identifying themes through providing a visual representation of the data. I like to visualize everything, and this software compiled all my notes from each transcription and helped me to see how many of the same comments or themes were mentioned. It also helped me see which participant group emphasized the topic the most. Appendix G is a visual data sample from MAXQDA. This sample shows the recurring themes from the interviews. The larger boxes indicate, the more times the same theme was discussed from each of the participants. What was missing in their lives that contributed to leaving community college? In addition to the deeper reasoning, I wanted to know what community colleges could do to help student veterans. The responses from both the student and faculty participants provided insight to both research questions.

I used two guiding research questions for the interviews: Why do freshman student veterans drop out or stop out of community college? What changes do freshman student veterans and community college faculty and staff believe will help student veterans succeed at MACC? There were three emergent themes from the analysis of the student and faculty/staff responses: (a) mismatched environment, (b) leaders/mentors/friendships, and (c) veteran community and connections. A synopsis of the themes follows.

Theme 1: Mismatched Environment. The first guiding research question states: Why do freshmen student veterans drop out or stop out of community college? According to the student participants, the environment was a direct influence that affected why student veterans dropped out or stopped out of MACC. The U.S. Armed Forces established structure and direction for student veterans, but this appeared to be missing at MACC.

Challenges. The community colleague environment is very different than what a service member experiences while serving in a duty status. The environment within a community college is open and adaptable to what the student wants or desires. The environment within the U.S. armed services is very different. SD3 stated that the U.S. armed forces' environment is a "controlled environment". SD3 focused on the structured element, stating that the U.S. armed forces are "…a structured environment…where instead of it just being about me, me, it's not about me at all anymore…it was all one little community". FS2 explained the college's organizational structure to get enrolled. FS2 stated,

The expectations of school, and home, and you know all the things that they've

got to balance in their lives.…Not necessarily the organizational structure of the

college. For example, maybe the processes that we have in place, or that you have

in place here. You have to go to orientation; then you have to go, class, you have

to meet with your counselor to sign up for classes…I think the stop-out, stop-start,

stop-start, really comes from what's going on in their lives.

SD2 and SD4 both emphasized, life was a cycle, it was formal. They trained together,

they worked together, and they lived together. SD3 said, "…[a] real shock because I

didn't know who to turn to, who to ask…". SS3 also said, "I think the problem is there's

a disconnect" and it is challenging to relate. SD3 also stated, "I feel like I'm in a different

world when I'm here…". SD2 stated:

I do thrive on structure. When it is in full effect in my life, my life runs very

smoothly. It's when I get a little out of swing and start thinking I'm my own

commander type thing. If anything, I think just the comradery of sticking around

other vets really does still help me [be] accountable, at least today…It's

irreplaceable, you know? Just today, just whatever, the experience that we have,

the comradery, or just simply that identity. I struggled with that for a while once I

got out. That, you know, who am I? I don't even know how to transition

correctly…

The environment was a contributing factor to these stop-out and drop-out

decisions. Even though the participants did not directly state that they stopped attending

community college because of the environment, their responses indicated that they

needed the guidance or the support to keep them on track. The veteran students

sometimes felt lost; even though the community college had advisors and counselors, the

step-by-step direction, the control, was not there for them. SD2 stated:

> I didn't really know what to expect. When I first started, I was newly sober, so I
>
> was a little worried whether I'd be able to maintain not only my sobriety but also
>
> these classes and the demand of taking four or five classes at a time.

SD2 also stated:

> Overall, I have a sometimes-difficult time interacting with people that weren't
>
> military. I don't know if it's all in my head…I can kinda say this about the
>
> civilian world as a whole: there's just not that connection. Most veterans would
>
> travel on a dime, do anything for you, knowing if you were another veteran or not.
>
> It's just…it is a different culture. I think, in the past few years that I've been
>
> sober, I have been able to handle-I don't wanna say deal with civilian culture – a
>
> lot easier, but it's still a difference. Same with the students, you know, there is a
>
> little bit of a generation gap. At least ten years, once I started college at 28, so
>
> generation X versus millennials. Just the different upraising, so I think that is a
>
> little bit difference of the interactions.

Potential solutions. The environment affected how students responded and acted

within the community college. SD2 stated that there are challenges with interacting with

other people who are not military. SD4 indicated "there should be an environment for us

all . . . even meetings for the veterans to come together and say, okay, what are some

things that maybe they could do better for veterans". SD3 additionally indicated that "it

was still a challenge because it was a very heavy workload on top of a full-time job, on top of volunteering and all those things combined just added up and made it a struggle". SD4 emphasized that having an environment where there is a connection will help with student success:

> an outlet for the veterans.… It's something that grounds them. It would be nice if we had that and a better full-time position that the Veteran Affairs offices at each MACC campus so that you can always have your questions answered, it's a familiar face you get to know.

SD5 indicated that she had a person that helped her get through the first two semesters of her community college experience. Without that person, she would not have gotten started or been able to complete those two semesters. SD2 indicated that while in school, "a lot of my papers would be on my military history". This indicated that student veterans bring with them their military experiences from the armed services to the classroom.

The faculty and staff provided some similar and different perspectives from the student veterans. FS2 indicated that there is a structure within the organization and that most student veterans like the structure. FS2 stated, ". . . veteran students are more compliant with those rules, because it's structured, and you tell them it's a rule, they know it's a rule, they do it." FS3 also supported the concept of a structured environment. FS3 stated, ". . . follow the rules attitude". FS4 further emphasized that most students follow the rules and procedures, but they try to apply it to academia and sometimes there is a challenge. FS4 stated, "…they want to know it today and use it tomorrow, and sometimes it just doesn't click that quickly". In the U.S. armed forces, training is focused

and detailed. Service members are trained and expected to respond; the noticeable differences between each environment are the amount and type of information being provided. In the armed services, they are trained and do their job versus, in a higher education environment they are balancing new processes, multiple classes, and their families. S3 stated, ". . .stateside it was . . . 9-5 unless we were really ramping up training for a deployment. Then sometimes we were trying to get more in the swing of what it's gonna be like working real long hours. . .". FS2 stated,

> we have program check sheets, which students have access to and, which we should be giving to students when we meet with them. . . it helps the student to be able to understand where they are, and where they need to get to. Again, they have to study for the accounting class and the English class and do the papers and do whatever, but we can show them the way to get there.

There is an environmental balance for students transitioning from the military to community college environments. FS2 stated, "Like I have veterans sometimes say to me, 'I miss the military; I miss that sense of belonging'. . . . [They] meander until they get to know a person, get to know counseling". In addition, FS2 emphasized the reason for dropping out is because of

> . . . having excessive absences because they have a child that has special needs, or just a child that they're just trying to balance things with. Are they going through a divorce? I think the reasons why they stop out are not much different than the reasons why any of our students at a community college stop out. They've got a lot going on in their lives.

FS3 further supported FS2 by indicating that student veterans have a broader and unique environment that they must balance. FS2 stated

> they have all these additional responsibilities that maybe the traditional student does not have. So, this kind of allows them to piecemeal [sic] OK, I got the family to take care of, or I got the job, I got to work, and this is just a part-time, you know, motor school part-time.

FS5 also indicated the "biggest thing is…they are making up their mind whether they want to go right into work again or get the schooling to get a particular job". Both FS4 and FS1 focused on the economic environment that may have influenced student veterans to stop out or drop out. In the armed services, FS4 stated, "the military will usually provide the housing. They have the housing, they have the food, and they have the job. . .". FS1 stated, "the economy has been challenging in terms of employment, for everyone, but I think for veterans …I think it's even more challenging… I've talked with veteran students about the thought cycle of getting overwhelmed". FS1 further discussed and alluded to the impact of mental health on student veterans. There is an awareness within the community college. She stated, "whether it's faculty or student affairs people. We, we have been making more of a conscious effort, and we have recently started an initiative, with some life coaching as it relates to the educational programs…". She emphasized that the college is referring students out and making people available to discuss when they are identified. This discussion leads to the growth and need to expand the understanding about the student veteran environment and overall health. She wondered how they could be reached to connect better.

Once a student veteran has figured out the plan and has balanced their environment, they realize the community college environment is flexible, and they need to accept some of the flexibility. FS4 stated,

> That's why community colleges are so popular. Classes are offered at a good time that I can drop in over my lunch hour. I had a veteran student that was working for the State, and she was allowed to take off her lunch and come in for my, my hour and 15-minute class at lunchtime. The class was 11:00 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. and she was allowed that extra 15 minutes, and they accommodated.…

This type of flexible once accepted allows for student veterans to balance their requirements with family and school. Some are not able to rectify those challenges and thus stop attending and do not return.

FS4 further indicated that the community college environment is different based on the type of training being provided. FS4 discussed the medical education program and MACC.

> Although from a good perspective, for health care programs, they're rule followers, so they know what's expected, and they know right from wrong, and they don't deviate from that, which is a great thing. But I think they also, they want to know it today and use it tomorrow and sometimes it just doesn't click that quickly.

Student veterans are familiar with a focused education. Their training is focused on their job and position within the armed forces. SD5 stated, "where the culture of the military is now, they keep telling us what we're supposed to be, telling us how we're supposed to

feel, telling us what we're supposed to be doing". FS3 further stated, "…the military is law and order…". When it comes to higher education, the training and teaching styles are different. FS2 stated:

> They really just have to learn the process. I love it when I walk around campus, and I can pick out who the veterans are just by their backpack. Because you know, you all have that backpack and I love to see the people that wear that backpack, and they just wear it with so much pride. And they're on a mission, man.

This emphasizes the difference between military environment and community college environment. Student veterans have to re-learn a process. They have a mission and goal, but they do not know how to get there. The key is creating an environment that they are familiar with in order to help them succeed.

Theme 2: Leader/mentors/friendship. The second guiding research question stated: What changes do freshman student veterans and community college faculty and staff believe will help student veterans succeed at MACC? Many of the participants indicated that a relationship or need of a person to help support them was an important element in their lives. The relationship is what they had while serving in the U.S. armed forces. Each of the student participants indicated some type of relationship. They also need relationships that can help motivate them along the college path. The connection that student veterans have between each other promotes family, unity, strength, and motivation. SD3 stated that their military supervisor was "like our dad"; while SS3 and SS1 indicated that family pushed and encouraged. SD3 further indicated that when there

were challenges within the organization, his supervisors would come "to see me every day" to encourage and motivate. SS3 indicated that their drill instructor is the person they remember the most because they motivated, encouraged and helped them stay focused on the job.

SD1, SD2, SS3, SD4, and SD5 all indicated that there was someone they looked up to while in the service. SD1 stated:

Even our gunnery sergeant, he was like our dad. He was our shop dad. He was there for us in every way. Within the first week I got there he sat me down, and he was like, "All right, if you want to be successful," he's like, "you need to start saving 18% of your checks and putting it into retirement." I was just like, "Okay." I just listened to whatever he told me to do. We always respected him in that way. I'm still friends with him to this day…There's just always that respectability there. It was a true brotherhood, I will say. You get that everywhere else as well. Especially if you're in infantry, you're going overseas. You're fighting with guys by your side.

SS3 emphasized the mentorship she received while active in the service. SS3 stated:

…my staff sergeant, Staff Sergeant Lu.…So that kind of was like that tough love coming through. I was like, "Okay, I see that," and that's only because I was part of his, they had four different platoons, I was part of his third platoon. I know that he doesn't like anybody from third platoon falling behind. He had a higher standard for all of us.

She further compared her perspective with the military duty to the community college. SS3 stated:

> I think the third one when it comes to college is that because of that disconnect of not having those friendship groups or having people close to your age to really connect with it makes it that much harder because in the military you have that support. Like I explained with that group of females they're there to support you no matter what. You always have that support network. It's like when you start going to school it feels like you jumped from that ocean into a small fishbowl and you're like, "What's going on?" It's kind of really confused on well can I trust this person, can I trust that person, are they going to help me study, are they going to take advantage of me? Your brain is constantly tagging safe one safe, safe one safe and it's like well can I even trust these people to be my friends. My military buddies I know if shit hits the fan, they're going to have my back no matter what, whether it's me working on ANVIS goggles and there's small round fires coming in or if we have to be on the frontline, we know what to do. But when it comes to school, you don't know if you can trust that person next to you to take good notes, to help you out, to help work in a team environment, when they try to do these team projects, especially in Sociology, as I noticed.

Further, participants all indicated that there was someone within the community college environment that helped and motivated them. SD5 indicated that she "had a person that helped me out". This person was the motivating factor that kept them going and helped them achieve their goals and objectives. While the community college environment does

not present this type of professional relationship, the military service does; this is what

helps many of the service members succeed. SD2 stated that most veterans "on a dime,

do anything for you, know if you were another veteran or not. It is a different culture".

Both SD1 and SD2 discussed the professional relationship that they had with a

staff/faculty member. SD1 indicated that another factor that helped her was the

counseling.

> …is the counseling that they provide me. I go to one of the counselors here; I
>
> meet with her once a week. It has nothing to do with school. The focus isn't
>
> school; it's a personal counseling. It's life counseling. I've been thankful so far is
>
> the fact that they were able to give me a counselor that wasn't just about school.
>
> SD2 stated, ". . . so I not only would go to him for my studies but also just to talk .

. .". This professional relationship kept SD1 focused on the objective just like the armed

forces does. SD2 further discussed the professional relationship with their counselor.

"…he was kind of a guide for me, always gone above and beyond when I needed

something – just to talk, trying to figure out where I want *[sic]* [to] go. Kind of *[sic]*

assumed the responsibility as my advisor". SD5 also conveyed that they had someone

within the college environment to help guide and encourage them through the process.

SD5 stated:

> considering that I had somebody that was actually helping me out with all that
>
> stuff . . . . The person helped me. I mean, if I would have had to have done all that
>
> on my own, I still think I would be struggling

In addition, SD4 accentuated the point that relationships are important to everyday success. SD4 stated:

> …because *[sic]* they saw you were alone. And you go home, and now you're inseparable. . . . No one is really, come with us; we'll take you, I'll show you the way. And that's what I'm kind of comparing, that's kind of how my mind works.

SS3 indicated that they established a rapport with a faculty member once indicating to them that they were having some challenges with their current service branch. SS3 stated:

> I'm just trying to get veterans together, so we can motivate each other." I know that veterans look for that bond. I also know that veterans also look for some type of leadership, especially if you're on the enlisted side.

FS2 reinforced this relationship concept by indicating, "he *[sic]* decided to go down a different career path and came back to me specifically because he knew me. I had a connection with him."

SS3 was seeking a bond one in the U.S. armed services. A bond with someone that will help support and motivate. SS3 saw that connection with a faculty member. The faculty member indicated that he was a veteran and that he understood the challenges. SS3 stated, "I didn't realize that there was actual professors here that were veterans that have served. To me, that was extremely impressive . . . ."

Student veterans also indicated the importance of how they felt to have a professional relationship to keep them focused and motivated. This type of relationship was successful in the armed forces and affects them today. Even when on campus, the student veteran population attempted to create a bond between themselves. SD3 stated

that they had their family members on campus to help guide on how to work within the community college environment. SD5 indicated that there was a person that helped them through the process and motivated them through the course. She described this person as a current service member and graduate student of MACC. This person motivated, guided and explained his experiences to her. This allowed SD2 to understand the process and stay motivated to continue. SD2 also discussed how he had a connection. SD2 stated:

> He and I kinda connected…So I not only would go to him for my studies but also just to talk . . . and having that resource there was wonder of MACC to have . . . He and I developed a relationship of "Where we going SD2, with this future of yours", and trying to stick straight.

Finally, SS3 stated that there is a bond between the veteran students that helps create that sense of security, closeness, and encouragement in any environment. SS3 stated:

> Whoa, I'm just trying to get veterans together, so we can motivate each other." I know that veterans look for that bond. I also know that veterans also look for some type of leadership, especially if you're on the listed side. You look for that next person above you for guidance. I was trying to establish something like that here, and it just seems to be that it failed…

MACC also has one dedicated VA counselor on staff that can assist student veterans with VA matters, educational challenges, personal challenges, and disability challenges. This person is a VA employee but assigned to the college as a resource. Both SD2 and SS3 identified this person within the college. They stated how important it was

to use this resource and how it helped direct their goals and objectives. SS3 stated, "Marc (pseudonym) helped me out. This is really important". SD2 further supported the same resource as being an important element for student veterans.

Similarly, the faculty and staff participants recognized the need for a mentor or a professional relationship for student veterans. FS2 stated, "They walk into a blank canvas and maybe not know where to go. Meander until they get to know a person, get to know counseling…" FS2 experienced this with a stop-out student. The student "came back to me specifically because he knew me. I had a connection with him." There was a professional relationship between FS2 and the student. FS5 indicated a mentor was important for student veterans, as they need someone to talk with them, someone to connect with. FS5 explained that a specific person would "reach out to all people who may have dropped out for some reason and just to find out if they were doing okay if they needed anything. So, he was very -- I thought, very effective in helping students". This connection may be embraced by students as it aligned with their experiences. FS4 indicated that having a mentor would help the student establish a bond, like the U.S. armed forces. FS4 stated, "I think that we are very veteran-oriented overall and that we try to match them up with someone at the college who can help them." FS4 also indicated that the relationship might not be just at the community college. It may also come from the family. Most student veterans have outside influences; those influences need to be supportive. FS4 stated, "She [female student veteran] had a lot of support from a spouse, so that was, I think, that was a key thing". FS1 stated, "I've noticed that student veterans tend to keep to themselves . . . [student veteran population] need to have something

supportive. . . ." This supportive structure either at home or at the institution may lead to continuous motivation.

SS3 talked about two different types of relationships. The first relationship was personal and when that relationship changed, the motivation to continue also stopped. SS3 stated,

My husband . . . was my biggest support and when he graduated from MACC and he moved on . . . that motivation completely fell by the wayside . . . he was one other person that I knew that after class I can meet up with. . . . We start making a network of some type of friends because we got involved with the student government association. We tried getting involved with the veteran organization, but any time you try to do a veteran organization it just crumbled and failed miserably.

After this time, SS3 stopped attending and stopped out of MACC. A few semesters later, SS3 returned and established another relationship, which was a professional relationship that she had with a faculty member. SS3 stated,

He served in World War II as a scientist actually testing people and subjects to see how certain things would work when it comes to the medical field. When I told him, "Listen, I don't understand what's going on. I also have a situation with my unit going on." He's like, "Unit?" He's like, "Did you serve?" I was like, "Yeah, I'm in the Army National Guard." He was like, "Here," and he actually sat down with me and he addressed my personal situation, giving me personal contact saying, "Okay, this is who you can reach out. This is what you can do." He was

like, "This is what I did." He explained his history. I'm like, "Oh my God." I didn't

realize that there was actual professors here that were veterans that have served.

To me, that was extremely impressive the fact that the professors are amazing.

SS3's experiences show the importance of relationship and the impact it has on continued

veteran student enrollment. SD2 also spoke about a professional relationship with a

VSOC team member. SD2 stated:

> …the VSOC *[sic]* was a good resource once I actually met him…he was one to
>
> really help me look at all angles of where I can go with my background and
>
> where…What I can pursue for education, just as a major. He was the one to really
>
> get his hands dirty with me. And then come back in, but unfortunately, after I met
>
> him, I got locked up. So, I never came back.

SD4 spoke about the relationships while deployed, and when one returns home and

attends community college, that type of relationship is not there. SD4 stated:

> …you got home (from deployment), and now you're inseparable. And here, you
>
> look at here; you don't have that. No one is really, come with us; we'll take you,
>
> I'll show you the way. And that's what I'm kind of comparing, that's kind of how
>
> my mind works.

Finally, SD5 stated,

> considering that I had somebody that was actually helping me out with all that
>
> stuff… The person that helped me. I mean, if I would have had to have done all
>
> that on my own, I still think I would be struggling

SD5 had a professional relationship but dropped out because the environment changed. The professional relationship was key to their first semester.

      Theme 3: Veteran Community and Connections. Again, the guiding research question focused on why freshman student veterans drop out or stop out of community college and what changes do the student and faculty and staff believe will help student veterans succeed? The participants indicated there are elements within the community college environment that need to be improved and strengthened. Both faculty and staff indicated a need for student veterans to come together and network. SD1, SS3, SD4, SD5, FS1, FS2, FS4, and FS5 all indicated that student veterans need a place to "hang out" and do homework. They needed a place to relax, collaborate, and bond together. SD4 indicated challenges with the Veteran Affairs offices. They indicated the need for a "full-time position that the Veteran Affairs offices at each MACC campus so that you can always have your questions answered, it's a familiar face you get to know". SD3 also indicated "there needs to be more campus liaisons on campus . . . ." SD3 further indicated "I don't see anything really being done for us, anything like anything".

      SD2 indicated, "if anything, I think just the comradery of sticking around other vets really does still help keep me accountable, at least today". A functioning veteran affairs office is an important element to a student veterans' success within the community college environment. Student veterans need this office to link themselves to the college, to the Veterans Affairs Administration (VA) and to other student veterans. SD2 stated, "I felt things weren't explained to me well, within the VA office". SD4 stated, "… getting my GI Bill and all that stuff straightened out took a while …."": SD4 also indicated "… a

lounge in there, place you could study, do homework, computers so that all the veterans could get together and be amongst just veterans." SS3 stated:

> It's something that grounds them. It would be nice if we had that and a better full-time position for the Veteran Affairs offices at each MACC campus just so that you can always have your questions answered, it's a familiar face you get to know.

> These elements link to the concept of creating and sustaining a welcoming environment and place of comfort and connection for student veterans. Student veterans come from a place where they lean, rest, encourage and understand each other. The community college culture and environment need to embrace this concept which may further enhance the student experience.

> Furthermore, there was some indication of a need for an organized veterans' group. This group would help bring the students together and allow them a place to bond, blend, and encourage. SD4 stated, "if they had that little veteran organization or club, whatever they want to call it we could publish something like that amongst ourselves". SD3 called for doing more for its veteran student population.

> Why not do fundraisers? Why not? Maybe that's a calling I can have some day in my college career where I'm doing stuff like that to help the veterans, but the school needs to take action too if you're going to support your veterans ….

> SD2 indicated they "met a few good friends here, at MACC . . ., when I was going up there. SD4 detailed how it was

hard for me to make a connection to other people, whether they were within my

age, whether they were younger, whether they were old, especially at MACC …

when it comes to school you don't know if you can trust that person next to you

… to help you out, to help work in a team environment

SD2 also elaborated SD4's ideas. SD2 stated:

I don't know what MACC's doing today as far as advertising how veteran

friendly they are, but that could an option…My interactions with the student

work-study people were not the greatest. Everybody seemed mostly…some were

great. Some could get things done and then be sociable; some just seemed like

they didn't want to be there. It's not gonna be rainbows and butterflies, but that's

just my experience with the office.

This alludes to further discussion regarding the impact that a leader, mentor, and

friendship have on their success within a community college.

SS3 further emphasized the element of outreach and linking the student veterans

to the student government association (SGA) and other formal college organizations. SS3

stated, "Why don't we help push each other? It would just be better to have a better

support network with the veterans themselves. Like I said, even getting an organization

started, that would be great". Further SS3 stated,

I think that's just because it's an outlet for the veterans. It's something that

grounds them. It would be nice if we that and a better full-time position for the

Veterans Affairs office at each HACC campus just so that you can always have

your questions answered, it's a familiar face you get to know.

SD3 further indicated that having dedicated veteran affairs staff at each campus, including online would help with the communication. SD3 stated,

[There was a] slight hiccup in terms of [processing] that would be the veteran department over there … if you submit it wrong and it comes back to you, they don't really tell you exactly what you did wrong.

SD5 further supported the concept of having a fully staffed office by emphasizing the concept of having dedicated people for certain groups of student veterans.

They definitely still need to stay out there and be visible … if it wouldn't be that I had somebody that was helping me, it would have been really difficult and it would be really cool, like, if there was a way for the staff to be able to pinpoint those people that – to be able to help them….

Having a place for student veterans to gather and support is also an area where multiple participants indicated that was needed. SS3 and C1 stated that a VA lounge would help support the environment and encourage active engagement between student veterans. SS3 stated,

I think the problem is there's a disconnect there such as if your 18 years old; you join the military . . . you finally finish everything . . . now I'm going to focus on my education . . . [it is] hard for me to make a connection to other people

If there was a place where student veterans could come together and bond, it would allow them to connect and have someone to lean on and support and ultimately finish with.

The faculty and staff participants also emphasized the changes that community colleges need to make in order to support the student veteran population. Their perspective also supports the need to change the environment.

FS2 stated, there are "no military identifiers on campus, so if they're looking to connect with their military background, I don't think that they sense that visually when they come here". Creating a sense of belonging is key to student veterans. FS2 and FS5 also supported the idea of establishing a veteran's lounge. This would be an area for student veterans to allow them to connect. She further stated, "I think that it would create more of a . . . maybe even learning communities or just a community. Like I have veterans sometimes say to me, 'I miss the military, I miss that sense of belonging'". FS5 stated, "I think the biggest thing would be to have a veteran's lounge or veteran's gathering area at every campus where vets can sit and talk to other vets".

Another improvement area that was discussed both by the student veterans and the faculty and staff was establishing a veterans' club or support group. FS1 stated, "couple of years ago there was an attempt by some of our veteran students to develop a supportive group just for veterans. Um, it lasted two semesters before, which is sad." SS3 also stated,

> if they had that little veteran organization or club, whatever they want to call it we could publish something like that amongst ourselves. Why don't we help push each other? It would just be better to have a better support network with the veterans themselves. Like I said, even getting an organization started that would be great

The place for veteran students to engage and collaborate or creating an organization or club links directly to their U.S. armed forces experience. SD1 stated, "I feel like I'm in a different world when I'm here". SS3 also stated,

> I think the problem is there's a disconnect there such as if you're 18 years old, you join the military, and you get back from all your training even if you're National Guard or active duty, you finally finish everything off and you're like all right, now I'm going to focus on my education. It's hard for me to make a connection to other people, whether they were within my age, whether they were younger, whether they were older, especially at MACC you have multiple ranges of ages of people

SD2 had a different experience with regarding the offerings and changes at MACC. SD2 stated:

> I was my own barrier most of the time when I was in a negative swing of things…I didn't really use the resources like I could have, you know, the GI-bill offered tutoring as well as MACC even offered tutoring. I just never took advantage of it…Along the way, I 'm trying to figure out what I can do with the felony under my record, and I just didn't want to jump into, "I'm gonna do business." And I don't like it once I get there. I think even still, at this point, that's a huge barrier for me and why I haven't started back up class this fall as to what I'm gonna do yet with my life…It was nothing about MACC. Everything…I pretty much had positive experiences here.

While SD2 indicated there were no challenges at MACC, there were challenges with connecting the armed forces culture and the higher education culture. The armed forces culture was comradery, motivation, and direction. While MACC offered resources, there were no connections. These changes will help create the environment which may allow for the student veterans to remain and complete their educational goal while balancing all their responsibilities.

Analysis of Field Notes

Overall, participants in this study provided a wealth of data that allowed for a detailed and focused understanding regarding the challenges that student veterans face when adapting into the higher education culture. Data from field notes added to understanding themes embedded in the interview data. In my field notes, I identified some speculations and initial interpretations based on the interviews. This information helped me have a reflective perspective while identifying themes from the data. The passion, emphasis, and attitude of each participant helped me validate what they were saying and identify how they responded to each identified theme.

During the student interviews, all the student veteran participants had a proud attitude. They were proud of their experiences and where they had come from. I noticed that most of the student participants were focused, straight forward, and willing to engage in conversation with me. I had two student veteran participants that seemed confused with the questions that I was asking. I think it was because they either had too much military culture and just accepted the community college culture as it was or did not have enough U.S. armed forces culture to embrace the differences fully. I had one student

veteran participant which I identified as having high self-esteem and full of self-pride. His responses were quick, frank, and straight forward. The remaining student participants were thoughtful, emotional, and careful. I felt their information was the most relevant because they were thinking about what they were saying. Seven of the eight student veteran participants expressed their enthusiasm about being selected for study and appeared excited to provide information about their experiences.

The faculty/staff participant interviews helped me see a different picture. Based on their responses and using the same observation matrix, I felt all the faculty/staff participants were passionate about students and student veterans. They wanted to do as much as they could to help not only student veterans succeed but all students. Three of the five faculty/staff participants ensured they indicated that they were only speaking about their own perspectives and not representing the department they worked in or their colleagues' perspectives or feelings. There were two faculty/staff participants that expressed options that did not feel any type of professional relationship was warranted within their higher education institution. They were focused on what they do best, prepare and train the student population. They were passionate about what they do and how they do it. All the faculty/staff participants were eager to provide the information they knew about their students and some, I felt, had empathy and compassion for their student veterans. Based on some conversations, not all faculty and staff express empathy or compassion specifically for their student veterans. They treat all students equally and without discrimination.

Findings Related to Research Questions

Themes identified in the data are directly related to the two research questions that guided

the study. Research Question 1: Why do freshman student veterans drop out or stop out

of community college? The first theme related to the mismatched environment appeared

to be an important factor in influencing the student veteran to drop-out or stop-out. Their

previous environment, mainly from the U.S. Armed Forces, helped them be focused. The

student veteran participants needed structure, organization, and direction. The U.S.

Armed Forces provided this to them when they were active within the service. They were

given direction and instruction. They knew what to do when to do it, and how to do it.

The community college environment is different. Students have freedom and choices.

This different environment was identified as an important factor in student veterans'

decisions to drop out or stop out pf community college.

SD5 indicated that if they had more structure, they would have continued and not

felt challenged by the system. Based on the participants' responses, the environment

greatly affected the student veteran's decision to remain enrolled within the community

college. The differences between the student veteran's experiences from military service

and the community college experience created a situation where the student veteran may

feel uncomfortable and not sure where to turn for assistance. Participants' responses

suggest that the community college environment needs to foster the same type of

environment for these students.

The second theme of the importance of leaders/mentors/friendships for student

veterans is also related to Research Question 1. Both the student veteran participants and

the faculty/staff participants indicated that having a mentor or person student veterans could engage with was important. Many participants indicated that the mentor was a positive influence while they were within the community college environment. Some student veteran participants indicated they had a similar leader during their military service and having one in the community college environment also helped. The staff and faculty participants also explained their experiences with helping and guiding student veterans through the community college environment.

The professional relationship that the student veterans experienced from their military services carries over to their expectations within the community college environment. The closeness and bond that the students experience are important. It is not just about the classroom and college requirements, but about the relationship to discuss personal matters. Student veterans need an outlet to discuss life challenges, their military experiences, and life successes. When they have this outlet, it helps them stay motivated, accountable to someone or something and focused on their goal while understanding they are not alone in their life chapter. SS3 stated, "it would be nice to have a classroom of just veterans". This mindset shows how much student veterans need each other.

During the interview, multiple student veterans described a relationship and the need for a relationship. They needed a mentor, a guide, or a friend. SS1 stated, "I still go see him. Still go see, not that I need to now, it's just like 'Thanks a lot' How's it going…' Those kind of things". SD1 stated, "I've been thankful for so far is that fact they were able to give me a counselor that wasn't just about school…". SD2 focused on the element, "He's not only the addictions specialist counselor for the school, but he was kind

of a guide for me, always gone above and beyond when I needed something - just to talk, trying to figure out where I want to *[sic]* go…".

All these student veterans spoke about having someone there to guide them and talk about other things. It was not about school. During these influential times, the students remained in school and moved forward with their goal. It was other factors that may have influenced their decision to leave. SD2 stated, "I've had no negative influences or interactions that would cause me to either want to leave MACC or . . . That's why I was doing poorly in classes or left. It was all on accord of myself and using drugs 'cause I struggled over those years…". That mentor and leadership were key to their success in the service and needed it also at MACC.

Overall, the bond between student veterans is a key motivator for student veterans because this is what they have experienced and know. It is the investment from the faculty and staff, as the leadership within the armed forces that help instill the passion for moving forward with their goals and objectives. Without reason, or driving force, the student veteran is at risk of losing their motivation to continue with community college.

Research Question 2: What changes do freshman student veterans and community college faculty and staff believe will help student veterans succeed at MACC? The third emergent theme of needed changes within the higher education culture and environment is related to Research Question 2. The needs were centered around the need of a community and connection among the student veteran population. The major change that I heard from both participants types was the need for a veteran lounge. MACC does not have a place for student veterans to engage with each other in an informal way. MACC

has a veteran affairs office, but not a place for relaxation, casual discussion, networking, or just to hang out. Both participant groups expressed the need for such a veteran-friendly environment. The student veteran participants discussed how the U.S. Armed forces was a family and how they worked closely together. A place for them to engage with each other, support each other, and motivate each other is an important element to their success.

Overall, the responses in this theme focus, link, and identity to the guiding research question, by addressing the changes freshman student veterans and community college faculty and staff want and need. This theme was centered around a more robust military and veteran affairs office for each campus at MACC while also providing dedicated staff to help student veterans move their way through higher education. Further, establishing a dedicated organization or lounge to facilitate bonding, motivation, and encouragement amount the student veterans. Finally, it would allow them to connect with each other and establish a place of their own.

Findings Related to Literature and Conceptual Framework.

Theme 1: Mismatched environment. Literature suggested that community colleges can establish a similar environment from where student veterans have had experiences. To further emphasize the need for change, Judge Russell indicated that some veterans were not responding to the regular court processes within the judicial system. He "discovered that veterans will 'open-up and talk to other veterans'" when placed into an environment that they have experienced and with others with whom they can relate to ("Linglestown Legion", 2017, p. 20). This concept helps support the mentorship and

relationships needed among the veteran population. They have all experienced something unique and allowing the opportunity to talk about it helps strengthen their goal and motivation.

Pierce (2010) also indicated that military service is structured with clear expectations, policies and interpersonal communication between the service members. The standards are the same, student veterans work together, grow together and support each other. The community college environment needs to establish the same concept. The student veterans come from a place where it was directed for them to learn and act. Creating a structured, military environment within the community college will help motivate them in the higher education environment because it was what they have been trained for and what the familiar with.

Taylor, Parks, and Edwards (2016) indicated that creating culture for students may be a perspective to support student veterans; the challenge is with institutional funding and resources. Many times, there are not enough resources, space, funds, and other policies to meet the needs of student veterans. There is a missing connection between the needs and the institutional leaders. Institutional leaders need to know what student veterans need while student veterans need to understand their role. There needs to be a communication line drawn between these two parties.

Heineman (2016) discussed eight keys to success within colleges to help assist student veterans. Some of these steps were centered around communication and an environment that supports student veterans. These support types were linked both to student affairs and academic affairs. The environment needs to be one of trust, awareness,

communication and engagement. Everyone, including institutional leadership, faculty and staff must be engaged to fully support the student veteran population.

Theme 2: Mentors and directions. Veterans experienced support and direction while they served. Creating a culture of mentorship and a path links the student veteran to their goal and objective. Richardson et al. (2015) showed how a personalized degree map linked their objectives to an established path. Service members are instructed and guided within their culture and organization. The participants indicated that they felt lost because of the lack of guidance and support from the community college people. It is an important element to support these students by establishing a directive environment, so they may know the direction they need to go and have the support to encourage, motivate, and show them the way forward.

Iverson et al. (2016) further indicated that female veterans having a connection may help with the integration into their new environment. They stated having a champion would allow for a stronger connection with their new setting. This fully supports the concept of having a mentor within the college environment.

Cass and Hammond (2015) focused student veteran connection via online mentorship. While not identified in the findings for an online connection, having a mentor within online body will may help student veterans connect with the resources they need when they need it. This connection may not be with an individual person but with a community like their military environment and culture.

Sportsman and Thomas (2015) also supported the concept of creating a direct mentorship with student veterans. They indicated the need to identify and work with

student veterans as coaches do with athletic players. They indicated understanding the student veteran's need and breaking down the challenges individually will help the student veteran overall with accomplishing the task. Having this one-on-one attention will allow the veteran student to focus and have someone to lean on in times of challenges or struggles.

Theme 3: Veteran community and connections. The force between veterans is the support and connections they made from their experiences. Evans et al. (2015) also argued the concept of establishing a unique space for student veterans. This allows "for veterans to congregate, receive services, and socialize" (p. 56). This emphasis and matches the needs that have been identified, such as establishing a relationship and creating a safe space for student veterans to continue to embrace their established culture.

Karp and Klempin (2016) further provided multiple insights for student veterans. They indicated that student veterans need more than just academic support and they need multiple different layers of support. They also indicated that colleges need to provide veteran-specific support to include mental health, academic support, and support. Karp and Klempin further emphasized the need for dedicated counselors to develop the student veterans. They recommended creating a central, single connection point for student veterans in order to help success through community college. Iverson et al. (2016) also supported the notion of establishing a community to provide the support and camaraderie for female student veterans.

Again, Cass and Hammond (2015) discussed the concept of establishing a community on campus in order to help prepare student veterans for the academic

environment. While, again, the findings did not address the pre-academic conditions, Cass and Hammond supported the concept of creating an online forum to prepare student veterans prior to their arrival to campus. This in-turn would help them establish connections, similar to the second theme while also preparing them for the next step in their academic career.

Heineman (2016) did not identify a dedicated space for student veterans to engage in. Heineman did identify linking student veterans to community organizations and having a dedicated and comprehensive support office to support student veterans. In addition, Heineman supported the notion of creating opportunities for student-veterans to engage in extracurricular activities. While student veterans are considered non-traditional students and have other competing priorities, engaging student veterans with participation in meetings, groups, and discussion may help them find a common bond and help create awareness to others.

Sportsman and Thomas (2015) also maintained the concept of having a veteran focused orientation and increasing a group-learning environment. While they supported group-learning within each classroom, the group-concept is what student veterans are accustomed too. Their culture was group engagement and supporting each other. The classroom help encourage this type of engagement and allow networking opportunities within the environment.

The 4 Concepts Applied

The findings from the participants indicate a direct relationship to Schlossberg's transition model with the four fundamental concepts of situation, self, support, and

strategies. Each of these concepts was directly linked to both the interview questions, the research questions, and the conceptual framework. The way student veterans transitioned from military service to the community college environment was key to their continued enrollment and ultimately their success in achieving their goals. Both the student veterans and faculty and staff responses are linked to all four concepts, situation, self, support, and strategies.

Situation. The community college environment and the situation the student veterans are in are important in their transition from military service to community college. The student veterans are starting community college with experiences, family, goals, and objectives. They are looking for ways to sustain their family while also moving towards their specific educational goal. The challenge for these student veterans in that they must determine the best way to balance family and education. If there is a family need, such as financial or sustainment, they will support their family first.

Self. The reflection of themselves and how they felt is also a key element to their transition from service to the community college environment. As SS1 indicated, it is about themselves and how they respond to the influences and the environment. The environment they have been trained in needs to be established in the same way in the community college. They need direction in order to achieve the goal they have already set. Student veterans are entering community college with goals and objectives; they just do not know how to get there.

Support. Their support structure and motivation are key elements to the student veterans' success and prevention of dropout and stop outs within the community college

environment. As indicated in the findings, a relationship with a mentor is important for their success. Many student veteran participants indicated they had a mentor. They spoke highly about the support structure and indicated it was needed. Further, the faculty and staff indicated that this is a need among the student veteran population. This population needs the support from the community college culture and environment that they received in the U.S. armed forces.

Strategies. The main strategy that the findings indicated was that of direct support and connection between the student veterans. Many indicated they needed a place to go, to talk, relax and collaborate. Faculty and staff also indicated a place was needed to allow this population to come together and relate. The second strategy that is needed is a direction and path for student veterans. These non-traditional students are coming into the community college culture with specific goals/objectives and responsibilities that were derived from their military experiences. The traditional community college culture does not experience that with traditional students, many who live with their families and are right out of high school. The traditional students' needs are derived from their expectation from secondary school experience, family and friend experience, and work experience. Traditional students may have an expectation that non-traditional students do not have. Student veterans come with experiences. The support strategy MACC needs to take is that of guidance, mentorship and provide direct support to the student veteran population. The needs of the student veterans are that of relationships and mentorship. They need the support that they have experienced and were unsuccessful in during their U.S. armed forces tour of duty.

Evidence of Quality

The data provided from all the participants indicate a passion and desire to do well and continue with higher education from both a student and a faculty/staff perspective. As described in the measures to ensure accuracy and credibility section, the research process followed the questioning as laid out on appendixes C and D. This helped ensure a structured questioning approach and a focused discussion. In addition, field notes, in appendix F, were taken to help provide a visualization of the interview and help validate the participant's responses. Finally, appendix H is a sample of a transcript showing the clarity and focus of the participants. The sample transcript provides appropriate evidence to show the participant's responses to each question.

Professional Development

The findings indicated a need for focused individuals to help a unique population within higher education. The student population, based on the responses provided, indicated a need for a stronger, supportive environment, a dedicated team of individuals to help motivate and encourage the student veteran population. In addition, they expressed the need for a place for student veterans to come together, like their U.S. armed forces culture, to talk, bond, and collaborate. This information led to a recommendation for a community college professional development and training program that governs how student veterans are treated, community college opportunities, and a collaboration area to allow them to support each other and allow for other faculty and staff to engage with them. This engagement may help student veterans stay enrolled and complete their goals. The mentorship is a critical element to the student veterans' success within the

community college environment. Heineman (2016) supported this concept as one of the eight identified keys to success for community colleges. Institutions need to have a comprehensive development program for faculty and staff in order to fully understand and support student veterans.

Summary

The research method and design provided the framework on how this project study would be accomplished and how the guiding questions would be answered. The most important element to the design and method for a study is the protection of the participants. Without their protection, undo harm and embarrassment may happen. This undo harm would be unethical behavior. Their privacy and security are at the highest level. I used a qualitative case study research design to help understand the challenges the participants experienced during their first year at a community college.

The outcome I expect will be that a reader will have a better understanding about how student veterans feel when they work towards the transition from a military culture to a new higher education culture (Merriam, 2009). Findings from the student veteran and faculty/staff responses will help readers and higher education leaders understand the challenges that student veterans face and how to help them transition smoothly into a new education culture.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The findings showed that a professional development project is key because it is designed to inform, educate, and encourage change within the community college environment. In addition, the findings guided me to this type of project because they support informing, training, and guiding stakeholders within higher education. Professional development will help higher education stakeholders, those who engage with student veterans, with how they can influence, guide and understand the unique needs of student veterans. Student veterans have needs and unique situations. This project is directly related to helping with moving toward a path of understanding, success, and higher retention within higher education.

In this section, I will describe the rationale for professional development and how it is linked to the findings. In addition, this section will show how current literature supports professional development. I will further describe different types of professional development while balancing stakeholder needs and time commitments. Finally, I will discuss challenges found for professional development and areas of success.

Rationale

I chose professional development/training curriculum and the material genre because it is an educational method to further support the need for understanding the needs of student veterans in the college environment. Student veterans are looking for guidance, structure, and support. Ensuring that higher education stakeholders understand these concepts will help meet these needs. The problem and data analysis addressed in

Section 2 are linked to the understanding and ability to engage with freshman student veterans. According to Derri, Vasiliadou and Kioumourtzoglou (2014), teachers need "full task demonstration, brief and comprehensive teaching cues and appropriate feedback" (p. 238) in order to capture what they learned fully. I identified the need as described in Section 2 and this project will support meeting that need.

The themes identified from the findings indicate the need for information and support. Using Appendix G, student veterans are looking for a structured environment, with mentors and a place to collaborate. These themes tie back to the needs as stated by the participants. Stakeholders need to be made aware of these challenges. Professional development is a way for higher education stakeholders to capture the information and learn ways to adapt and change. A professional development project is a way to meet student veterans' needs within higher education. Overall, professional development may help teachers succeed, and students are successful. Auten, Glauner, Lefoe, and Henry (2016) further emphasized the need for special and focused instruction when a problem is identified.

Review of the Literature

Higher education is the training of others. It is important to continue to develop and train others to ensure all stakeholders are proficient in their area. The findings from my research indicates that professional development is needed to meet the needs of student veterans. Educating the staff and faculty about the student veteran may help improve the student veterans' transition and experience from military service to higher education. In this literature review, I will link why and how professional development is

needed and how to influence others to obtain further education. Professional development can be done in different ways while balancing with established responsibilities.

Current literature indicates that professional development is needed within higher education to keep stakeholders efficient, effective and growing within their environment (Curwood, Tomitsch, Thomson, & Hendry, 2015). To grow, stakeholders must understand the needs of their students and develop ways to acclimate them into the higher education culture and environment (Kahraman & Kuzu, 2016). Kahraman and Kuzu indicated that online professional development could help educators balance their time demands. They also stated that professional development must be balanced with the organizational staff's workload. This can be challenging as educators are already multitasking in different areas such as teaching and advising. This is much different than just focusing on teaching and academic research. Professional development is another area where educators need to further continue in order to continue to meet the student needs (Richardson et al., 2015).

I researched this literature using the ProQuest and Eric database. I used the following keywords: *higher education, professional development, success, challenges,* and *veterans.* I used the resources generated by ProQuest and Eric to provide in-depth understanding about the types of professional development within higher education.

Online Professional Development

There is a need for professional development support in higher education. Richard, Ruckert, and Marion (2015) supported the notion of establishing degree maps for student veterans. Establishing these maps will help guide the student veteran through

the higher education enrollment and academic processes. Providing professional development to academic stakeholders will help create a connection between the stakeholders, the process/transition and student veterans (Dillard & Yu, 2018). Ndebele, Muhuro, and Nkonki (2016) indicated that if there was support from the institutional leadership, faculty could embrace professional development. There are challenges with professional development, due to academic workloads, but with support, there is a desire and drive for professional development. Ndebele, Muhuro, and Nkonki supported the notion of having content focused or specific professional development to help foster motivation and collaboration. In addition, depending on the geographical area, other modalities, such as online, will help allow flexibility and availability for the faculty and staff.

Online professional development allows for faculty and staff to balance both an increase in operational knowledge while also allowing for adaptability within their office and teaching schedule. Smidt, McDyre, Bunk, Li, and Gatenby (2014) explained how online education could create an environment that encourages active engagement and higher levels of thinking. While there is more work for both facilitators and students, there is an increase in value if done correctly. In addition, adding a personal element will help create interaction and personal engagement. Faculty addressed concerns about being anonymous compared to face-to-face engagement. The lack of face-to-face engagement and implied anonymity, faculty behind a computer screen, created some concerns regarding active engagement and active learning among students. Walters, Grover, Turner, and Alexander (2017) described the need for online education especially when

the organization and students are geographically separated and working asynchronously. Walters et al. indicated that faculty was satisfied with the online modality and support they received. They were less satisfied with the effectiveness of an online platform. Applying Walter et al.'s concepts and having a blend of online and face-to-face engagement may help increase the value and acceptance of a blended higher education platform.

To support faculty, organizations need to offer multiple ways of professional development. Synchronous, asynchronous, and expanding technology allow for greater adaptability and benefits for professional development (Premkumar, Moshynskyy, Sakai, & Fong, 2017). Wynants and Dennis (2018) explained the need for continuous engagement and on-demand information. They indicated there is a potential return on investment when creating and establishing online professional development for education stakeholders. Conducting online and face-to-face training is critical for active engagement and investment. Using the proper platforms allows for increased engagement.

There are different ways to conduct professional development. Different organizations host a yearly training while others provide just-in-time training. Haggerty (2015) argued that professional development needs to be done but under certain conditions. He indicated that "just-in-time training would be more appropriate rather than all-at-once or one-size-fits-all" (p. 202). This type of professional development should be geared and focused on targeted individuals. Haggerty supported the notion that professional development as a structured function will greatly support the educators and

organization. The key is having professional development on a regular and consistent basis. Faculty and staff employees are engaged in their primary duty and finding time to increase professional development can be challenging. Providing just-in-time, active, and flexible training may help them balance both development and their primary duties.

Higher education is about training others in a specific area or function. Higher education institutions should also continue to adapt this concept within their organization. For example, they need to provide focused training to their stakeholders. Scarpena, Riley, and Keathley (2018) detailed that professional development is a key component to higher education faculty and ultimately the students. Just as Bond (2016) indicated, communities of practice are key to help faculty collaborate and engage in an online fashion. They further reinforced the concept that if professional development was to be successful, it must be supported and engaged at all levels. Active and collaborative engagement allows for multiple perspectives and situations to be discussed. Ensuring professional development is engaging, stimulating, and focused will help ensure the training is relevant and of value.

Although Lattuca, Bergom, and Knight (2014) did not indicate the use of online professional development as a critical component, they did emphasize the need for development within higher education. They supported the notion of providing professional development prior to engaging in teaching. This development prior to actual engagement lead to a stronger student-centric approach. This professional development leads instructors to more student and instructor collaboration. It also helped create a

pattern of regular student feedback. This type of professional development prepared faculty members instead of a reactionary response.

There are many different types of higher education institutions. Many of these institutions have their own culture and way of educating. In addition, almost all of them serve different communities and cultures. This is a critical component of professional development within higher education. Higher education leaders must design professional development to be supportive and help faculty learn how to engage in the current culture (Borrero & Reed, 2016). They must know their stakeholders. Borrero and Reed emphasized the need to create a collaborative, professional relationship with students and organizational leaders. The faculty must embrace what they do not know and learn from the needs of the community. Borrero and Reed used a service-learning faculty seminar to teach this concept. They used shorter blocks of instructions but for an extended period. Their focus was to inform, engage, and create relationships to embrace stakeholder needs. Overall, time is constrained and stretching professional development over a period allows for consideration and adaptation.

While there are other modalities of offering professional development, the key concept of professional development is ensuring the stakeholders' needs are met. As Derri, Vasiliadou, and Kioumourtzoglou (2014) stated, there is not just one model, the type of professional development must meet the needs, be engaging, and help the facilitator improve the way to conduct business. This improvement is anywhere from communication to course work, evaluation, and teaching approaches. When looking at the need at MACC, understanding the impact need, developing training to meet that need

and educating the stakeholders is key. MACC has a different type of stakeholders from part-time to full-time, and they are not localized in one area. Having different modalities will help accommodate and meet the need while spreading the professional development course work across a large territory.

Design and Balance

Professional development is in many different forms. Part of professional development is communication and engagement. As part of the online professional development, online discussion is key. Smidt et al. (2014) indicated that active use of discussion boards, blogs, and other communication tools promoted a sense of trust, higher level discussion, and active engagement. Further, the students indicated they were overall satisfied and felt they had an efficient exchange of ideas. Some faculty members also supported the discussion board concept due to its function of creating higher level thinking among students. It also forced a collaboration effort within the discussion-board framework.

An online professional development course provides avenues for continued learner engagement. Walters et al. (2017) supported the elements of online learning but indicated the highest success was based on active student and instructor engagement. Further, Severs (2017) indicated the best practice for professional development was an active communication process and increased collaboration between faculty or facilitators. Walters et al. also explained that more experienced instructors supported online learning compared to those with fewer experiences.

Balancing professional development and current obligations can be challenging. Some institutions must change their culture in order to promote professional development. Kadlec and Rowlett (2014) supported change but warned that change and institutional readiness must come from the leadership and relationships. There must be support, engagement, credibility, and a positive shifting to include the change process. When rolling up a new process, active engagement and communication are key. Kadlec and Rowlett supported change but emphasized change with strategy. They discussed the process of exploring new options and asking the stakeholders what they needed and wanted in order to facilitate change.

Faculty and staff must balance their educational responsibilities while also balancing any other additional job requirements. Adding additional large meetings and engagement may add more challenges while also not providing focused training. Premkumar, Moshynskyy, Sakai, and Fong (2017) indicated that small groups and focused communication, such as common experiences, create a helpful environment for professional development. In addition, Wynants and Dennis (2018) emphasized the need for flexible teaching design and a flexible learning environment. In addition, they indicated that a smaller course spread over a semester would create a blend of material and experience. Scarpena et al. (2018) agreed that for faculty to be engaged, professional development needs to fit their workload and schedule and provide access to different types of engaging training.

Haggerty (2015) also fully supported professional development, just so it was directly related to the appropriate stakeholders. This is similar to Premkumar et al. (2017)

concepts and application. Having focused lessons will help professional development be more attentive for those that need to know and will benefit from training. Haggerty explained that all academic stakeholders should attend some type of basic orientation in order in order to have a complete organizational picture. He further stated that others should have more advanced instruction if the training is directly related to their primary occupation. If the training is indirectly related, advanced instruction may not be necessary.

There are other ways to offer professional development other than hosting face-to-face meetings and assembly type training. Due to advancement in technology, online professional development may be an option (Bond, 2016). Bond indicated that an online professional learning community (OPLC) would be successful if the focus was matching the stakeholder needs. He supported the concept of engagement, collaboration, and discussion compared to the standard classroom lecture. Learning something new can be challenging, and some can be resistant to change. Ensuring new ideas and processes are open and engaging will help break down the resistance. Using an online and engaging platform will allow others to see the engagement and help understand the training benefits.

There are many ways for online professional development to be successful. Baran and Correia (2014) proposed seven ways to foster online professional development success. These concepts focused on (a) knowing the material, (b) knowing the students' needs, (c) building and strengthening the student-teaching relationships, (d) having a structured learning program, (e) having established outcomes, (f) encouraging and

embracing instructor engagement, (g) establishing and designing the online material. These key concepts help provide for a stable online professional development. In addition, applying these concepts will help faculty and staff members have a stronger perspective on the student needs.

There are many benefits to having professional development. While this may be a difference in culture for higher educational institutions, these benefits may outweigh the cost and time. Harrill, Lawton, and Fabianke (2015) discussed seven different lessons learned by investing in professional development for faculty and staff. Some of these lessons included: encouraging communication, promoting meaningful work, supporting and working with faculty and staff while balancing their workload, and offering incentives to engage. The lessons centered around (a) stakeholder engagement and ensuring transparency, (b) provided effort gives value, (c) have supporters and gain additional support for the additional work, (d) ensure proper communication, (e) allow for data transfer/transparency, (f) allow for engagement and flexibility, (g) provide incentives for additional workload. It is important to have a direct investment in the faculty and staff because it will directly impact the students.

Educational leaders must support the intent and plans to support professional development (Wilks, Shults, & Berg, 2018). They supported the notion that anyone can learn anything if the environment is conducive to learning. This concept indicates that if there are support and dedication toward professional development, no matter the environment, students and faculty can learn and develop into more efficient and effective members within higher education. Higher education leaders supporting their faculty and

staff will directly impact the higher education mission. Higher education is training and creating an engaging environment for students. Professional development is an investment and opportunity for faculty and staff members to strengthen their skills to influence their students, specifically student veterans.

Grupp (2014) further supported and highlighted the need for professional development in higher education environments. Grupp explained there were three different elements within professional and organization development: "faculty development, instructional development, and organizational development" (p. 46). These areas all tie into focusing training on the needs of the stakeholders. In addition, institutional leaders need to ensure proper collaboration among the subject matter experts, understanding what the information is and the needs and encouraging and embracing participation. All these elements will help create a positive and effective environment for higher education stakeholders.

Success and Challenges

There is a balance and need to ensure there is an active facilitator when hosting online professional development. Smidt et al. (2014) revealed that there could be challenges with online engagement. They indicated (a) there could be a lack of student or faculty engagement within the course, (b) a discrepancy in material as there is more student or peer engagement and material versus faculty material, or (c) challenges with the course and material validation. Smidt et al. also emphasized the need to ensure diversity and inclusion are established to prevent "fear of being stereotyped" (p. 201). A structured professional development course will help show the stakeholders how effective

training can be. A blended approach to professional development will help with these challenges and may encourage attendance and engagement.

If institutions are to adopt professional development, they must establish ways to incorporate an active communication platform. Walters et al. (2017) also indicated, if offering online education, there is a need for a reliable and effective communication system, as well as support to run this system. Further, Walters et al. indicated that online professional is more successful with seasoned faculty and staff members versus newer faculty. Wynants and Dennis (2018) indicated that faculty was supportive of taking online professional development classes due to the flexibility and participative elements. Having a structured online platform is key and having supplemental material may also enhance the online environment. If an established online system does not exist, an online professional development is not an appropriate method. Balancing both online and face-to-face platforms may help supplements and reinforce the concept learned from each modality.

Professional and staff development needs to be balanced with institutional capabilities and faculty/staff needs. Technology can be used to help promote and encourage professional development. Bond (2016) explained when new technology is introduced and encouraged, there must be a value seen by the stakeholders. With value, there will be no persuasion to adapt to the new technology. In addition, once the value is shown, stakeholders may embrace the change. Bond showed the OPLC is an online social networking tool. While it is a way for the faculty and staff to engage, the instructors must be subject matter experts and must show value to the training and the usage of time.

Change and cultural changes are difficult for any organization. For higher educational institutions, this can be especially true. Brody and Hadar (2015) explained that when developing a professional development course that changes the way educators engage with students, there will be resistance and reluctance to change while there are others that will embrace the change. Morest (2015) further indicated that "forty-eight percent of full-time faculty typically spend 13 to 20 hours teaching in class each week" (p. 25). While this may indicate a high workload, Morest supported the concept that there is time for faculty to engage in other educational activities such as professional development. Although there are those resistant to change due to high workload, there are opportunities for growth if supported by the organization. Scholarly work, research, and engagement must start at the top and include the complete organization (Morest, 2015).

Harrill et al. (2015) indicated that investment and support in professional development lead to stronger faculty leadership and faculty "engagement in its student success initiatives" (p. 13). These types of initiatives encouraged faculty and student mentorships, guidance, and support. Professional development should be supported from the top. Leadership should be investing in and promoting training for the faculty and staff. Offering a blended professional development shows the investment and wiliness to support the faculty and staff. Professional development with benefits and incentives may also help encourage participation. In addition, proactive communication may also encourage engagement and participation. This, in turn, will have a direct positive impact on the stakeholders such as the faculty, staff, and student veterans.

A challenge that Edwards, Sandoval, and McNamara (2015) indicated was that most community colleges are not designed or regularly offer professional development opportunities. Their focus is on teaching and support and do not emphasise or highly encourage professional development. The key is to provide professional development in a way that meets their need, is specific and engaging. By using established modalities offered by the institution, professional development may be adapted to fit that model. As such, offering an element of online professional development and supplemental face-to-face training may enhance and use the available resources.

Professional development is used not just to improve instruction and facilitation but to establish relationships. Pate, Smith, Caldwell, Horace, and Zagar (2018) supported the concept of professional development to foster relationships encourage and relate to shared values. This culture of learning fosters creative thoughts, engagement, and success among the stakeholders. Faculty development, as well as mentoring among faculty members, is an important premise within higher education. While professional development is key for faculty to obtain tenure status and continue with promotion within academia, this concept can be applied to all higher education stakeholders such as staff members. Professional development, professional relationships, and mentors help grow and strengthen the higher educational core. Using different modalities, higher education leaders can influence, increase, and strengthen the faculty and staff engagement with student veterans. This strengthening may help increase and sustain student enrollment and engagement.

Professional Development Based on Student Veterans

Encouraging professional development to understand student veteran needs will help higher education institutional stakeholders embrace and identify these needs. Further, educating them about experiences, resources, and real-world situations will help develop an understanding about their needs. In addition, providing material from subject matter experts will help them identify and determine how to respond in different situations (Dillard & Yu, 2018). Dillard and Yu discussed ways higher education institutions can strengthen their professional development for faculty and staff. They focused on engaging with subject matter experts and hosting discussions and exercises that will further engage the stakeholders. This type of training will enhance the faculty and staff's understanding of student veterans. This type of training and perspective helps provide a better understanding and awareness of challenges within higher education.

Professional development is not a new concept or process within higher education. The VA is also running a program that links health care to higher education. This professional development program called Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership (VITAL) creates a link between the VA, the community and higher education. Not only does it allow for connections for student veterans but allows higher education institutions to link to the VA to gain knowledge and develop processes to help educate their stakeholders. It continues to be an objective to link student veterans to resources to help them be successful (McCaslin et al., 2014). Using the VITAL concept, organizations need to link and establish ways to engage the target audience. The VA had the same challenge, how to link veterans with the VA resources. To solve this, they

linked with higher education educations and made the connection. Establishing ways to link resources is critical to meet an established need. Using focused training, such has face-to-face engagement; higher education institutions can use this model to help educate the faculty and staff. This, in turn, will help them be more engaging with the student veterans.

Professional development for faculty and staff within higher education further allows them to realize and understand who student veterans are and what they expect. Student veterans have developed a process, a culture, a sense of responsibility and ethics. These student veterans do not just forget it when they work on transitioning from military to higher education. They bring it with them. Higher education faculty and staff need to understand that culture and be prepared on how to use and embrace it. Higher education stakeholders can learn this help make connections to the student veterans by understanding and learning about them (Hart & Thompson, 2016). Faculty and staff can benefit and have a greater understanding of student veterans when they understand their perspectives. Establishing formal training with student veteran experiences and perspectives will help develop this relationship and understanding. Hart and Thompson focused on providing veteran-focused educational classes to help increase student veteran enrollment. Their understanding and perspective lead to an increase in awareness and linkage between student veterans, classroom instruction, and faculty engagement.

Another important concept for higher education stakeholders is developing a plan that has focused objectives, goals, and learning outcomes. More specifically, learning outcomes directly focused on student veterans. Faculty and staff need to have specific

skills and thoughts processes to help specific student populations. The generic, cookie-cutter approach, such as the yearly required training is not focused enough. Faculty and staff need to be trained in the thought processes and culture of student veterans. This may in turn help create a more focused learning environment for student veterans (Harborth, 2015). Harborth discussed the needs for student veterans and indicated faculty and staff need to have an understanding about the population in order to assist and help educate them. Faculty and staff need to be trained, have an understanding, and have a focused objective in order to properly and effectively educate student veterans.

Project Description

This project's purpose is to use the data obtained from the study and apply the concepts to higher education institutions. Applying these concepts will help higher education institution leaders institute a plan to support their student veteran population. This project's target audience is the faculty and staff at the higher education institution. In addition, the institution's administration should understand the background and process for this study. All other stakeholders are welcome to participate and engage in increasing their understanding of student veteran needs and expectations. This project's learning objectives are: (a) understand the culture and environment of student veterans, (b) learn ways to support student veterans, and (c) learn ways to engage with student veterans to sustain retention and completion.

This project consists of three modules. The first module will contain an online professional development program. This will be a self-paced professional development program designed to inform and educate the faculty and staff. The training will be six

academic hours. Once the training is completed, the faculty or staff member will be able to participate in the second module.

The second module will be a face-to-face panel with student veteran and subject matter experts. The panel should consist of a student veteran, a representative from the VA, and representatives from local military installations. This panel will engage with the faculty and staff to provide a live perspective regarding the culture, expectations and current challenges for student veterans. This second module will reinforce the concepts learned from module one.

Finally, the third module will consist of a newsletter distributed each semester. The newsletter will be no more than two pages and detail current events and current considerations for the institution. It will contain information from campus resources, new training opportunities, and information from local veteran affairs subject matter experts.

These three modules, together, will help higher education institutional staff and faculty with student veteran needs. It should also improve the condition and expectations student veterans have with higher education.

The resources for this type of project include technology such as the use of virtual learning platform and video recording software. In addition, subject matter experts who are willing to facilitate discussion and establish recorded lessons will be used to further emphasis and provide a professional experience to the learning environment. Organizations need to support professional development opportunities and embrace using an online platform. If there are challenges to using an online platform, this professional development can be adapted to a face-to-face over two days. The six-hour block can be

divided up into two, three-hour segments. A large conference or training room will need to be reserved and video conferencing established, if available.

To implement this professional development, there should be at least 3-6 months preparation. A facilitator or team leader needs to take ownership of this project. While the campus military and veterans' affairs office may fit the requirement, they may not have a good relationship with the faculty organization. A facilitator may come from the counseling office that has a direct relationship with the faculty organization. There may also be two co-leaders to help link all organizations. During this preparation year, subject matter experts must be located, and workload compensation discussed. If engaging with face-to-face veterans, arrangements must be made. In addition, technology development needs to work with the facilitator(s) to establish the online framework. The first six-months is putting together the framework and establishing the process. The second six-month is data-driven to take the information and put it online, ready for student engagement.

Project Evaluation Plan

This project will be evaluated by a feedback questionnaire provided at the end of each module (Appendix J). The evaluation will be outcome based and help identify if the learning objectives were accomplished at the end of each module. An online survey will allow the participants to answer honestly how they felt and what knowledge they gained from the training. The questionnaire will be submitted by the user when the last section of the module is completed. The submitter's name will remain confidential. The evaluation form will indicate: if learning objectives were met if the stakeholder felt the engagement

was productive, if their needs were met, the value of time and the benefit of the training. All the feedback received will allow for additional improvements and adjustments each semester.

The key stakeholders in this project will be the faculty and staff that have some direct connection with the student veterans. These stakeholders will obtain the most benefit, based on their time invested, because of their direct interaction with student veterans. Having a clearer understanding of a certain audience will help the communication process.

Project Implications

The elements of potential social change include a better understanding of a diverse student population and brings together subject matter experts and faculty and staff to develop an understanding of military culture. This professional development project will help bring potential social change adding collaboration between the student, the instructor, the leadership and experts in the field. The student veteran population is growing, and higher education institutions must continue to adapt and learn new ways to engage with this population. This project helps enhance awareness and discussion.

This project will help influence not only the local area but also the potential for all community colleges in the United States of America. As this project is limited to just one unique student population, it can used in a larger context by applying the concepts but focusing the content on other unique populations. The profession development project lays framework for a structured design and helps create awareness and opens discussion between key stakeholders within the higher education community. The local area will

benefit as the mid-Atlantic area has a need for an adapting education and understanding

for its growing and unique student populations.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

In this project study, I have shown the challenges that freshman student veterans face at a community college. It shows the student veterans' perspective and feelings during their freshman year. The data show administrators and staff where the educational environment can be adjusted to meet the need for student veterans.

Higher education leaders will be able to use this project to lay the foundation for training their faculty and staff about student veterans' unique qualities. I designed this project designed to maximize the amount of training time faculty and staff have and allow flexibility for training around their schedules. It will also give them the opportunity to hear, first hand, student veteran's challenges, perspectives, and cultures. In addition, faculty and staff can take this project and make it their own. They can adjust it to the needs of their organization, not just for community colleges but for universities and other higher educational institutions.

The limitation is that more data is needed from a more diverse population to address not only the community college level but university level. While the data may hold some generalized concepts to student veterans, it does not support conclusions for the whole student veteran population worldwide.

In addition, this study was limited to the mid-Atlantic area of the United States of America. Although this is a limited scope, the application of this project can be used across the United States and the globe. Education, training, and understanding about

higher education clients, the students is why they exist. Failure to meet the needs of the student veterans is a failure of the educational institution.

A limitation to this project is that it is limited to the time and resources of each higher education institution. The project cannot be standardized across the country due to the uniqueness of each higher education institution and its leaders. There are finite resources and maximizing those resources is key. Leaders may need to balance which portion of the project they can afford and based on their student veteran population they may be limited to whom is available to engage.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

An alternative method of helping student veterans enroll and stay enrolled in higher education is to focus on them directly, prior to their commitment to higher education. Callahan and Jarrat (2014) supported the notion that focusing on student veterans while they are still in an active military status will help start the transition process prior to their enrollment. The focus is training the student on how to be a student before they transition from the U.S. Armed Services.

The themes from this project study indicate the environment, mentorship and support are challenges for student veterans when they begin their higher education career at a community college. This is an after the fact outcome form the student veterans. What would be the impact if the student veterans were trained or informed prior to their separation from the armed services? If there was a detailed awareness or training for the student veterans prior to arriving on campus, this might lessen the shock and challenges they may encounter.

The local problem currently focuses on student veterans not completing their program. An alternate definition of this problem may focus on student veterans being uninformed regarding their roles and responsibility within the higher education environment.

An alternative solution to the local problem could be by providing a training course to student veterans who are separating from the armed services. Currently, most armed services branches offer Transition Assistance Program (TAP) briefings prior to separation (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018). These briefings help provide information, guidance, and direction to veterans who are separating. If an in-depth training could be integrated into these briefings, student veterans may have a better understanding and could prepare for their transition into the higher education community.

This problem for this study may also be addressed using a mixed-method approach. Understanding the student veterans' needs is important but using a survey to establish a baseline and applying qualifiable data to support the data may also produce a more focused response.

Understanding why student veterans drop or stop out from a university is another approach to understanding the student veteran need. Higher education institutions should identify and track the student veterans that may be showing signs of dropping out or stopping out. Institutions may use underperforming scores to identify potential students that may drop or stop out. These students may not leave the institution, but they may not successfully complete the program. Identifying and understanding why is a key concept

and may be suggested as another approach to helping student veterans be successful within their study program.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

The research process is a meticulous process. Everything must be thought out and detailed. The research process begins with a problem statement, research questions, and working towards understanding why. The applicability of the problem statement and the literature that supports it is key to the foundation of the research process. Finally, a researcher must pull the relevant and pertinent data to support the problem and research questions. It is important for me, as the researcher, to keep the research question and problem statement up front and applicable always. The basis of every step must be associated with those two critical pieces. In addition to understanding the elements of project design and research, this research projected helped me have a better understanding of being a scholar, project, developer, a leadership and change management.

Scholarship

This process helped me understand what being a scholar is within the higher education industry. It can be challenging to capture the true understanding of higher education as it is an interdisciplinary field. Fitzgerald (2018) stated, not only do scholars need to keep up with changes in their field of study but also in the areas of research. This process helped me develop to understand: how to conduct research, the proper way to understand a problem and how to use methods and theories to solve the problem. Being a scholar is not just seeing and identifying a problem, but it is locating the resources to

understand it, study it, and help solve it. Higher education is a large field, and as a scholar within this field, I started to understand some of the parts and see how they interact to make the whole. This interaction led me to an understanding of designing a research project and developing a training plan for others to use.

Project Development

The research project and this experience helped me understand what it takes to develop a project. There are many different elements that a researcher must consider when designing a project. First, a researcher must understand what the problem is and what question needs to be answered. I saw the question and problem in this study. I needed to know why a certain activity was happening. Second, once I determined why, I needed to develop a way to convey what I learned to others. This process led me to develop a project to help others see and understand a problem they may have at their institution. I used this project to help me understand the needs of others. Designing a research project requires a plan and educational details. The plan has guidelines to help others follow the same process. The detailed standardization will help solve the potential problem. I took this project and used it to gain my understanding of the problem and determined ways to fix the problem. Finally, using project design and clear directions, I can take this project and show others how to potentially fix their issues within their organization.

Leadership

I used this project development process to help me see where I can be a leader in the higher education industry. As a leader and problem solver within higher education, it

is important to show others that problems can be solved, and solutions can be determined once we become aware of the problem. I identified a question and a potential problem earlier in my career. It took me a while to understand the question fully and to develop a way to answer that question. As a leader within higher education, we must be willing to identify problems and questions and work with other collaborators to solve or answer the question. This process helped strengthen and identify my leadership traits to help motivate the higher education industry into making some changes in order to meet the customers, student veterans, needs. It is a change in process and thinking, and it takes a leader to push for change.

Change

Thompson and Miller (2018) indicated leaders are shifting higher education institutions from one type of governance and business model to another. This shift is leading to a more successful higher education institution because it is meeting the needs of the consumer, the students. This project helped me see the need for change within the community college, higher education industry. The need for change is continuous, and I need to identify that this project is just a solution for the present and short-term future. The industry will shift, and needs will change. In order to continuously meet the needs, I need to recognize the need for change and continue to advance forward the awareness of the customers' needs. This project helped me see what the student veterans' needs were and identify ways to meet those needs. I understand the need for change and adaptation based on the needs and awareness of the student population.

The whole process helped me understand the level of detail it takes to fully comprehend a problem and seek out the answers or solution. All areas must be considered, and all interested parties must be protected. It is important, for me as the researcher, to remain bias-free. My own thoughts and ideas can taint the whole process and could void out the solutions. This research allowed me to connect to my desire to help with change and my commitment to becoming a change agent within higher education. I enjoyed looking at a problem and working towards a solution and helping, in the long term, provide a solution to better the lives of others.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

I learned from this process and the work within this project that nothing is as simple as it may seem. There are details and new ideas that I must consider while I research and develop the thought process. It is important to ensure transparency and complete openness to ensure that others understand my process and can trust the data that were provided. This project requires a considerable amount of coordination, communication, and active engagement from higher education institutional leaders. Completing this project showed me that if I failed my part to provide clarity, focus, and support; it may ultimately remove the ability to help and support positive change within the higher education industry and ultimately student veterans. Overall, I learned that as a researcher, I need to be engaged, understand all elements, and have a clear perspective on what I need to review and understanding. This type of work is about creating change and moving in a new and clear vision to help solve a problem or question within higher education.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

This study, project, and future research can be used to impact positive social change within the higher education industry. More importantly, this study and project focused on the community college industry and a unique population within higher education. This population is unique not just to the United States of America, but to the world. There is a military influence in almost every country, and this study could be applied to all community colleges across the globe. The impact at a community college level will help start and sustain student veterans' drive to pursue and complete higher education. This may be the foundation for their higher education careers.

Community colleges are the starting blocks for many student veterans. Expanding and creating positive social change may impact and influence other higher educational institutions. Further, by increasing responsiveness to student veterans' needs and removing barriers, higher education leaders can continue to train and guide both the faculty and staff, but also the students. Just as community colleges feed into other colleges and university, these research questions and project can feed and create change across the industry as student veterans transition into the higher education culture.

There needs to be continued discussion using qualitative research to fully understand any population within the community college, higher education industry. These types of studies will help garner and direct how community colleges engage their current and future students. More specifically, it can be tailored to understand any population within their organization. It is important to fully understand who the customer is and what their needs are. A qualitative research study will help organizations focus on

the needs of the student by obtaining their responses directly and analyzing them to form a focused conclusion.

Future research, using qualitative research methods, will help organizational leaders pinpoint the needs, desires, and direction of their student population. Using a qualitative research method while changing the population size will enhance their ability to understand their current and future student needs. Organizational leaders must be willing to listen, analyze, and understand the needs of their student population. Thompson and Miller (2018) indicated that for-profit schools are understanding the needs of their students and strategically aligning with business practices in order to meet that need. Community college leaders can use this project and study to benchmark their next student in order to fully understand a specific need within their organization.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study is a foundation for community colleges to use to help understand their current and future student veteran population within the higher education industry. It is important for higher education administrators, staff, and faculty to understand who their current students are, who their future students are, and what their needs are. Higher education institutions must learn to adapt, be a learning institution, and build on who they serve in order to make a change and help their students succeed. This project shows a student veteran perspective on why they stopped attending community college during their first year. Although it is a small study, it provides an important perspective on what higher education institutions can do to help this unique population.

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Appendix A: Project

Challenges Faced by United States Student Veterans Transitioning in a Community

College

Online Professional Development Training Plan

Adam Walter

Spring 2019

Table of Contents

Module 1 - Higher Education Perspective and Analysis

Module 2 – Panel Discussion

Module 3 – Semesterly Student Veteran Engagement Newsletter

All Modules - Training PowerPoint

Introduction

This study is based on two research questions. First, why do freshman student veterans drop out or stop out of community college? Second, what changes do freshman student veterans and community college faculty and staff believe will help student veterans succeed at MACC? This study uses Schlossberg's 4 S's: situation, self, supports, and strategies. The objective is to use this data to help higher education institutions make decisions to support the student veteran population.

This project is intended to help inform, educate, and support all higher educational institution stakeholders. These stakeholders include

- administration - to review the proposal and understand the background and learning objectives;

- faculty and staff members who engage with freshman student veterans to understand the student veteran perspectives;

- everyone engaged in higher education and the community as they all have a vested interest in higher education and military service members.

This project is centered around a job related, professional development training program by blending training and incorporating both online and in-person discussion over the academic year. The project was designed based on the results of this study. This professional development training is divided into three segments to be completed over the academic year, usually between August and May of the next year. The three training

segments will help faculty and staff members to reflect on the workshops and develop ways to apply the concepts discussed within their organizational areas.

The first training segment will be online training to be completed independently by each faculty and staff member. The scheduled academic hours will be six academic hours and can be self-paced. This training will help provide new perspectives and the culture of student veterans. It will be supported using the available online platform at the educational institution. The second segment will consist of a lecture/forum training where faculty/staff and academic stakeholders can come together to discuss the concepts they learned. This forum will be hosted by a panel of student veterans and subject matter experts from the VA and other veteran resources. This forum will be scheduled for about an hour and a half. The final segment will be a semesterly newsletter providing updated supplemental information regarding student veterans to all stakeholders. This newsletter may include updated information and related data associated with the adapting military and student veteran culture.

Purpose

The professional development training's purpose is to help community college stakeholders further help understand and engage with freshman student veterans to help lower stop out and dropout rates of freshman student veterans. In addition, this increased faculty understanding, and engagement may help to increase student veteran retention and completion rates. This training is designed to be offered at the start of a semester during preparation week in order to help faculty and staff understand their student veteran

population. In addition, the online component will allow the faculty and staff to continue engagement during the year.

Learning Outcomes

There are three learning outcomes from the professional development training. They are:

- Understand the culture and environment of student veterans

- Learn ways to support student veterans

- Learn ways to engage with student veterans to sustain retention and completion

Planned Audience

This professional development training has two main audiences. The first audience is the community college staff. Staff members include anyone who has direct or indirect engagement with freshman student veterans. This includes, but not limited to counseling and advising staff, financial aid staff, military, and veteran affairs staff. The second audience is community college faculty. These are members who have direct contact with freshman student veterans in a classroom setting. The professional development training will impact these two audiences the most. There may be others who may participate such as other support staff or administrators within the community college environment. The third audience is anyone that may benefit from the material being taught and explained during the training sessions. This may include community members, members of the local and state government or other local areas higher education institutions.

Implementation Timeline:

Timeline	Activities	Platform	Resources Needed
Module 1, (self-driven) (7-8 hours) Higher Education Perspective and Analysis	• Study description • Baseline Questionnaire • VA Briefing • Higher Education Culture • Higher Education Goals • Collaborative discussion and experiences • Higher Education Expectations • Recap • Evaluation	Online Engagement	o Conference room with recording capabilities o Computer o Projector o Microphone o Sign-in computer o Agenda o Printed PowerPoint Material with Notes o Evaluation Form o Instructor Notes and Plans
Module 2: (5 hours) Panel discussion Leadership committee discussion	• Student Veteran Culture • Development plan • Collaborative discussion	Face to Face Engagement	o Conference room with recording capabilities o Computer o Projector o Microphone o Sign-in computer o Agenda o Printed PowerPoint Material with Notes o Evaluation Form o Instructor Notes and Plans

Module 3: Semester Student Veteran Engagement	• Higher Education expectations vs. student veteran expectations • Collaboration for development • Engagement with student veterans • Improvement process • Evaluation • Moving Forward and Change	Newsletter and yearly panel discussion	o E-mail platform o Newsletter format o Panel meeting discussion

Professional Development Training Plan

Module 1: Higher education perspectives and analysis.

Time: 7-8 hours

Objectives.

By the end of the day and module, faculty and staff will be able to:

- Identify higher education standards and cultures

- Identify student veteran cultures and environments

- Identify higher education needs

- Identify freshman student veteran challenges

    Components.

    Guest Speakers and stakeholders.

Develop an understanding about veterans and what they have been through, inviting a guest to this module will allow for a more in-depth discussion. Consider inviting:

- A representative from VA administration such as VA hospital, Veteran Center, or Veteran affiliated organization. Invite this representative for the first hour; they may stay and listen to the rest of the training.

- A representative from a local U.S. active duty, reserve, or national guard bases. Invite these representatives for the second, third and fourth hour; they may stay and listen to the rest of the training.

- Student veteran representatives. Invite these representatives for the fifth and sixth hour; they may stay and listen to the rest of the training.

- A representative from school's veteran's affairs department/office/ or VA representative.

Registration.

Encourage registration for the training program. One week prior to course, send out baseline questionnaire focused on higher education and veteran cultures. Questions should focus on what the attendee knows about the higher education culture and veteran culture. Questions should include:

- What is the average age of community college students?

- What is the average age of student veterans?

- How much prior work experience does freshman student arrive with?

- How much prior work experience does a student veteran arrive with?

- What do you think the impact is for student veterans entering the community college is?

- What do you think the needs are for freshman student veterans?

- What are ways you can help transition student veterans into community college?

Training Description.

The training introduction needs to include elements that discuss the reasoning for offering this training. Explain the rationale of offering the training and why leadership supports it. Use the study to set the foundation for having the training. Explain the study results and the themes that are determined.

Host a face-to-face and recorded online video session with the following stakeholders:

- Academic Dean or Vice President Level

- Student Affairs Dean or Vice President Level

- A Veterans Affairs (VA) representative from the local area

- A representative from U.S. active duty, reserve, national guard base (up to 10) representative – each branch component. Branches of service include:

  o U.S. Air Force

    ▪ Active Duty

    ▪ National Guard

    ▪ Reserve

  o U.S. Army

    ▪ Active Duty

- National Guard

- Reserve

  o U.S. Marines

    - Active Duty

    - Reserves

  o U.S. Navy

    - Active Duty

    - Reserves

  o U.S. Coast Guard

    - Active Duty

    - Reserves

- Student veteran representative – at least three

- School's veteran affairs representative

Ask someone to be the moderator between the stakeholders. The objective of the training session is to address each topic per hour and to address questions as asked by the audience.

- First hour

  o Ask VA representative to provide their perspective and input about veterans, specifically student veterans.

  o Expect their presenation to be based on veterans as a population and addressing issues from the local area and region

  o Ask them questions such as:

- Please describe and explain your perspective about veterans returning from duty and entering a non-military culture/environment

- Please describe and explain your perspective about veterans returning from duty and entering a higher education culture/environment

- Please describe and explain your perspective about veterans' goals and objective when returning from duty

- Please describe and explain your perspective about veterans' challenges and needs when returning from duty

  o Address questions from the audience

- Second, third, and fourth hour

  o Ask representatives from U.S. active duty, reserve, and national guard bases to provide their perspective about being a service member and veteran in the current environment

  o Ask them questions such as:

    - Please describe and explain your perspective about veterans returning from duty and entering a higher education culture/environment

    - Please describe and explain your perspective about veterans' goals and objective when returning from duty

- ▪ Please describe and explain your perspective about veterans' challenges and needs when returning from duty

  - o Address questions from the audience

- Fifth and sixth hour

  - o Ask the student veteran representatives to provide their perspective about being a service member.

  - o Ask them questions such as:

    - ▪ What were your goals while in the service?

    - ▪ What were your goals when you left the service?

    - ▪ What were your higher education goals?

    - ▪ Explain the culture, you experienced while in the service

    - ▪ Explain the culture, you experience when transitioning into the civilian status

    - ▪ Explain your current experiences within the higher education environment

  - o Follow up with any questions

- Seventh and eighth hours

  - o After all discussion and representatives have spoken, recap what was discussed and describe any common themes or perspectives from the discussion. Allow for further development, discussion, and engagement among the stakeholders.

- After all discussions, engage with educational stakeholders regarding a panel discussion, module 2. The panel discussion is to create a perspective/awareness, and engagement within the higher educational institution.

- Provide an evaluation for the attendee. Ask the following questions.

    - What did you find most useful from this training and presentation?

    - What did you find not as useful or informative from this training and presentation?

    - What is the average age of community college students?

    - What is the average age of student veterans?

    - How much prior work experience does freshman student arrive with?

    - How much prior work experience does a student veteran arrive with?

    - What do you think the impact is for student veterans entering the community college is?

    - What do you think the needs are for freshman student veterans?

    - What are ways you can help transition student veterans into community college?

Module 2: Panel Discussion – Perspective/Awareness Engagement Training

Time: 5.0 hours

Objectives.

By the end of the day and module, faculty and staff will be able to:

- Identify self-awareness techniques

- Identify departmental concepts and perspective

- Identify higher education approaches

- Identify freshman student veteran needs

- Identify freshman student veteran cultures

  Components.

  Stakeholders.

- Academic Dean or Vice President level

- Student Affairs Dean or Vice President level

- Institutional VA representative

- Student affairs leadership representative

- Faculty administration representative

- Certified counselor to assist with self-awareness techniques

- Student veteran representatives from module one

  Training Description.

This panel will be designed to take the information that was provided module one and

adapt it to the institutional priorities and strategic direction. The panel will need to

address what areas need to be improved in order to help veteran students complete their academic program. Areas to address:

- Student veteran services within the institution

    o How to provide direction to student veterans

    o Help identify and create self-awareness within faculty and staff

    o What changes need to make to help apply student veteran concepts and perspectives

    o Adapt and transition from military culture into a veteran-friendly higher education culture

    o Student veteran mentoring program

    o Student veteran collaborative environment

    o Faculty engage with student veterans

    o Staff engagement with student veterans

    o Initiation into higher education for student veterans

Module 3: Student Veteran Engagement

Time: Semester Supplemental Newsletter and yearly academic and administrative meeting to discuss current higher education culture and current veteran culture.

Objectives.

By the end of the day and module, faculty and staff will be able to:

- Identify how to relate to higher education needs, and student veteran needs together

- Identify ways to improve the retainability and completion rates of student veterans
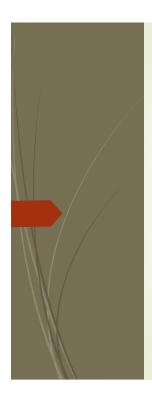
Components.

Stakeholders.

All faculty and staff within the higher education institution.

Training Description.

The semesterly newsletter should include updates and changes within the higher education community regarding student veterans. The newsletter should include abstracts from stakeholders in module one. This will help ensure training and awareness stays relevant to all stakeholders. In addition, the regular communication will help ensure the student veteran needs are being made aware of and continue adaptation within both the institution's academic and administrative sides. The recommended newsletter length should be no more than two pages to help create a captive audience.

In additional to the semesterly newsletter, a yearly panel review and discussion should be done. This discussion will review current and changing needs from both higher education industry and the student veteran perspective. This will help ensure awareness of potential changing need from the student veterans' population.

Student Veteran Transition Guide

By: Adam Walter

Objectives/Plan

MODULE 1 - HIGHER
EDUCATION PERSPECTIVE
AND ANALYSIS

MODULE 2 - PANEL
DISCUSSION

MODULE 3 - SEMESTERLY
STUDENT VETERAN
ENGAGEMENT

Identify higher education standards and cultures

- In depth discussion with institutional faculty and staff
- In-depth discussion with institutional veterans affairs representatives

Identify student veteran cultures and environments

- In-depth discussion with currently enrolled student veterans
- In-depth discussion with VA representatives

In depth discussion with U.S. armed forces component members

Identify higher education needs

Review of study

Review of discussion with all key stakeholders

Identify freshman student veteran challenges

Objectives:
- Identify self-awareness techniques
- Identify departmental concepts and perspective
- Identify higher education approaches
- Identify freshman student veteran needs
- Identify freshman student veteran cultures

Module 2 - Panel discussion

Panel discussion with academic counselor and stakeholders

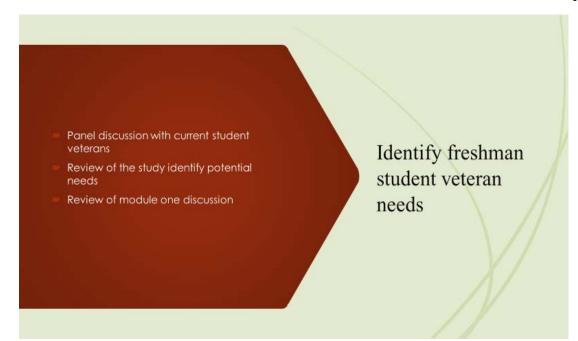Identify self-awareness techniques

Panel discussion with academic and administrative leaders regarding ways to develop a process to support student veterans

Identify departmental concepts and perspective

Panel discussion with academic leaders on different approaches to support veteran students.
- Mentorship opportunities
- Leadership opportunities
- Engagement opportunities

Identify higher education approaches

Panel discussion with current student veterans

Review of the study identify potential needs

Review of module one discussion

Identify freshman student veteran needs

Panel discussion with student veterans

Panel discussion with key institutional discussion

Review of discussion from module one

Identify freshman student veteran cultures

Identify ways to improve the retainability and completion rates of student veterans

- Continued/annual discussion with academic and institutional leaders regarding process and procedures
- Ensure current information is being used to discuss trends and needs assessments
- Awanress

QUESTIONS

Appendix B: Transcriptionist Confidentiality Agreement

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Name of Signer: _____

During the course of my activity in collecting data for this research: "Challenges Faced by United States Student Veterans Transitioning to a Community College", I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement, I acknowledge and agree that:

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant's name is not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
6. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
7. I will only access or use systems or devices I'm officially authorized to access, and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with

all the terms and conditions stated above.

Signature: **Date:**

Appendix C: Interview Questions for Students

Challenges Faced by United States Student Veterans Transitioning In a Community

College Interview Questions

1. Please describe who you are and your home environment as a student veteran? (R1 – situation, self, support)

2. Can you describe a specific situation where you felt that the military culture was especially effective in supporting you? (R1 – situation, support)

3. Can you tell me about the specific ways in which the college culture affected you? (R1 – situation, support)

4. What support and strategies did the college use that were helpful for you? What support and strategies were not helpful? (R1 – support, strategies)

5. What were your expectations when you arrived on campus? What type of support did you receive? Can you describe specific situations that were or were not helpful in supporting you? (R1 & R2 – self, support)

6. Think back again to your first classes at HACC. Can you describe a specific situation that stands out in your mind that shows how you felt during that first month? (R1 – situation, self)

7. Regarding your first few classes, did you feel the faculty were sensitive to student veteran needs? Can you provide an example of a situation that made you feel this way? (R1 & R2 – situation, self, support)

8. Overall, after your first few classes and first interactions with the college staff, please describe your perspective of the community college culture as it relates to being a student veteran? (R1 – situation, support)

9. During your first year at HACC, what type of challenges, if any, did you encounter both from student affairs (financial aid, veterans affairs, etc) and from academic affairs (your instructors, and the classroom environment)? What support and strategies would have been especially helpful to you? (R1 & R2 – situation, self, strategies)

10. What are some changes HACC needs to make to help student veterans like you succeed? (R2 – situation, support, strategies)

Appendix D: Interview Questions for Faculty and Staff

Challenges Faced by United States Student Veterans Transitioning In a Community

College Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me about the specific ways in which the college culture affected student veterans? (R1 & R2 – situation, support)

2. Please describe a specific situation where you knew the college culture affected a student's decision to stop and/or drop out? (R1 – situation, support, strategies)

3. What support and strategies did the college use that were helpful for student veterans? What support and strategies were not helpful? (R1 – support, strategies)

4. Can you describe a specific situation that stands out in your mind that shows how student veterans you felt during their first month? (R1 – situation, self)

5. Please describe how you feel faculty were sensitive to student veteran needs? Can you provide an example of a situation that made you feel this way? (R1 & R2 – situation, self, support)

6. Please describe how you feel faculty were insensitive to student veteran needs? Can you provide an example of a situation that made you feel this way? (R1 & R2 – situation, self, support)

7. Overall, after your first interactions with student veterans, please describe your perspective of the community college culture as it relates to the student veteran? (R1 – situation, support)

8. What support and strategies have been especially helpful to student veterans? (R1

    & R2 – situation, support, strategies)

9. What are some changes HACC needs to make to help student veterans succeed?

    (R2 – situation, support, strategies)

Appendix E: Demographic Data Collection Form

Identification Number for Study: _____

Gender: _____

Age: _____

Racial Group: _____

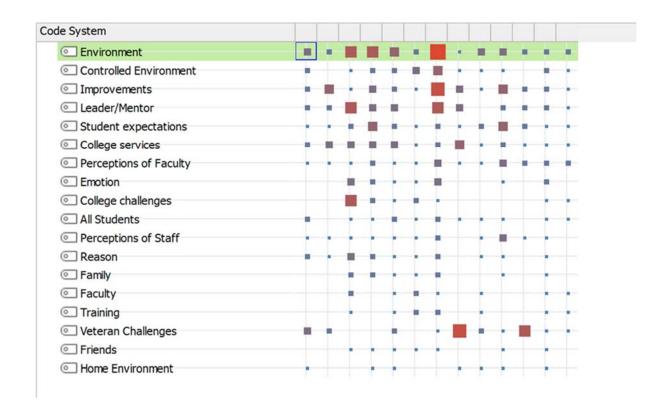Were you full-time student or part-time student: _____

Appendix F: Field Notes Form

- Time of interview:

- Place of interview:

- Purpose of interview:

- Participant:

- Setting description:

    o Sounds:

    o Area layout:

    o Other factors:

- Researcher's:

    o Feelings about participant's:

        ▪ Attitude:

        ▪ Expressions:

        ▪ Impressions:

        ▪ Manner:

    o Speculations:

    o Initial interpretations:

    o Working hypotheses:

- Other thoughts and impressions from interview:

Appendix G: MAXQDA Sample

Appendix H: Sample Transcript

SD2:   I think they knew I was, I had a camouflage backpack, so most people knew.

Adam Walter: Okay. Any kind of . . . Did you get any vibes from faculty that knew you were a veteran that made you feel funny, not funny, that it was normal business, that you were just another student?

SD2:   I think if anything, it gave a better level of understanding, 'cause they knew where I was at with my background, and more respect.

Adam Walter: Really. What makes you think that? What made you feel that way?

SD2:   Just the small interactions with teachers. A lot of my papers would be on my military history.

Adam Walter: Oh, okay. Okay.

SD2:   So, I would get great feedback and there's nothing but respect from most professors.

Adam Walter: Anything during class, feedback over your papers you mentioned, anything during class where you knew they were being sensitive?

SD2:   Sensitive, how do you mean? Are they trying not to go there, because they're worried.

Adam Walter: Could be.

SD2:   Or more so kinda giving me a little slack?

Adam Walter: No, not really looking for the slack side, you know. We're gonna go . . . Turn it in next week, if that's what you saw them do because you were facing challenges, that's fine too. I'm leaving this completely open. My objective is just to get information, just to see correlation. But if you're like, "Well, they knew I was a vet, and they knew I was facing some hard times. They did grant me a couple extensions to get a paper in, or they didn't really talk about it." I knew this guy who was real adamant about the war, and I knew he never talked about it 'cause he knew I was in the classroom, so we stayed off of that topic. If that was how you experienced . . . If not, then I'm okay with it. You just tell me what you can remember, recollect.

SD2:   No, at no time was any professor or staff member ever pushing any boundaries as far as being too pushy in the sensitivity aspect, not at all.

Adam Walter: Okay.

SD2:   And no, to answer your question, nobody's ever played favoritism.

Appendix I: Sample Field Notes

- Time of interview: 4:45 p.m.; 9/19/2017

- Place of interview: MACC – Library Conference Room

- Purpose of interview: Participant (Student) Interview

- Participant: SD2

- Setting description:

  o Sounds: HVAC Air movement (soft)

  o Area layout: One computer table

  o Other factors: Sat across from each other; at a diagonal

- Researcher's:

  o Feelings about participant's:

    ▪ Attitude: Self-aware; understanding; happy; casual

    ▪ Expression: Some language; passionate language

    ▪ Impressions: Level-headed, understanding of work, school, and life

    ▪ Manner: Controllers; thoughtful with words; used works to emphasise points; asked follow-up questions

  o Speculations: Thoughtful, explained, looking to succeed

  o Initial Interpretations: Not fully understanding the term "culture": I explained what I was looking for and appears to understand

- o Working hypotheses: Challenges in life; class stopped; looking for mentor or bond/link/connection with another person (peer or faculty). Similar to NPR interview

- Other thoughts and impression from interview: Very informative; provide detail and explained his thoughts/ideas/concerns. Similar situation as with others.

Appendix J: Module Feedback Form

Thank you for attending the student veteran awareness training. Please take a few moments and answer the following questions. These questions will help us improve the training. Your identity will remain confidential.

1.) Comparing what you knew about student veterans prior to coming to this training and what you know and understand know, explain how you will be better prepared to engage with student veterans.

2.) Please describe your engagement in this training. What specifically captured your attention or caused you to have a lack of interest?

3.) Was the material covered in this training valuable to you?

    a. If yes, please explain.

    b. If no, please explain

4.) Do you feel the time you invested in this training was valuable to you?

    a. If yes, please explain.

    b. If no, please explain.

5.) Please explain the strengths of this training course.

6.) Please explain the areas of improvement for this training course.