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## African American Male Veterans' Perceptions Regarding Factors That Influence Community College Completion

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*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Education

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Author Solomon

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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the review committee have been made.

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The Office of the Provost

Walden University

2019

Abstract

African American Male Veterans' Perceptions Regarding Factors That Influence  
Community College Completion

by

Author Solomon

M.S., American Public University, 2011

B.S., Morgan State University, 1998

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Walden University

November 2019

## Abstract

African American, male, veteran (AAMV) students are not completing their degrees at a local community college. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine veteran student perspectives regarding factors that influence community college completion to better understand their unique needs as veteran students. The conceptual framework was Bean and Metzner's model of nontraditional student attrition. The Schlossberg situation, self, support, and strategies transition model served as a foundation to examine each veteran student's personal experience of navigating available community college services to reach their educational goals. Data were collected from interviews with 10 AAMV students. Interview transcripts were coded, and an inductive data analysis was used to develop the study findings and identify emerging themes. The findings highlight veteran student service progress, identify challenges, and make recommendations for an overview of the key results of the data analysis. The project was an executive summary that addresses the experience of AAMV community college students who are not completing their degrees based on the data analysis of the research. The findings of this study may influence social change by helping veterans have a better understanding of resources and support that are needed to assist them in completing their community college degree. The results also provide information that may assist academic leaders in identifying ways to support AAMV students successfully complete their community college degrees.

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## Dedication

This research paper is dedicated to my mother, Millie L. Solomon, there's not a day that passes without thinking of you. Rest easy, Jane, Love Always, Author Solomon.

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## Table of Contents

Section 1: The Problem.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Definition of the Problem .....	2
Rationale .....	4
Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level.....	4
Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature.....	5
Definitions.....	8
Significance.....	9
Guiding/Research Question .....	10
Review of the Literature .....	11
Conceptual Framework.....	12
Community College Support of Veteran Students.....	15
Veteran Student Success .....	16
GI Bill .....	18
PTSD and Emotional Issues.....	19
Implications.....	19
Transition Statement .....	21
Summary of Section 1.....	21
Section 2: The Methodology.....	26
Introduction.....	26
Qualitative Design and Approach.....	26
Participants.....	28

Protection of Participant Rights .....	29
Ethical Considerations .....	29
Protection of Confidentiality.....	30
Data Collection .....	30
Participant Access.....	32
Role of the Researcher .....	32
Data Analysis .....	33
How and When Data Were Analyzed.....	33
Evidence of Quality and Procedures to Assure Accuracy .....	35
Procedures for Dealing with Discrepant Cases.....	36
Data Analysis Results .....	36
Veterans Taking a Break from School.....	37
Student Veterans have Support.....	37
Veterans using the GI Bill.....	38
Veterans without a Mentor.....	38
Veterans with Peer Mentors.....	39
Veterans Need Computer Lab.....	39
Veterans Feeling Alienated.....	40
Veteran Advisors .....	41
Summary .....	42
Section 3: The Project.....	43
Introduction.....	43
Rationale .....	43

Review of the Literature .....	44
Introduction.....	44
Position Paper .....	46
Provide Academic Support .....	46
Tracking Veteran Students’ Progress.....	47
Creating a Military Friendly Atmosphere.....	48
One on One Mentoring .....	49
Provide Student Programs and Support Services.....	52
Ways to Improve Student Retention .....	52
Summary of Literature Review.....	53
Project Description.....	56
Resources, support and barriers .....	57
Project implementation and timetable .....	58
Project Evaluation Plan.....	59
Project Implications .....	60
Conclusion .....	61
Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions.....	63
Introduction.....	63
Project Strengths and Limitations.....	63
Recommendations for Alternative Approaches.....	64
Scholarship.....	65
Project Development and Evaluation.....	66
Leadership and Change.....	67

Analysis of Self as Scholar .....	68
Analysis of Self as Practitioner.....	69
Analysis of Self as Project Developer .....	71
Reflection on the Importance of the Work .....	71
Local Community .....	72
Far Reaching.....	74
Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research.....	75
Conclusion .....	76
References.....	78
Appendix A: The Project .....	96
Appendix B: Interview Questions for Participants.....	110

## Section 1: The Problem

### **Introduction**

African American, male, veteran (AAMV) students may not be adequately prepared for college after combat. Many colleges experience a decline in enrollment of AAMV students in the course of an academic year (Harris & Lewis, 2019). One concern among community college observers is that as the colleges provide education services in nontraditional ways, the quality of these education services may suffer (Kane and Rouse, 1999). This problem has been identified among community colleges both nationally and locally. Rumann and Hamrick (2009) found that veterans encounter a vast array of transition issues as they arrive on the community college campus, including transition issues related to maturity, finances, and identity renegotiation. Persky and Oliver (2010) noted AAMVs need assistance in transitioning into the college classroom because research has shown that veteran students often feel isolated and disengaged when taking college classes.

The setting of this study was a small community college with two campuses in both urban and downtown areas of a large city in the eastern United States with an annual enrollment of approximately 5,000, 80% of whom are African American. The full-time student population comprises of 33% of the total student population, while part-time students make up 67%. The average age of the student is 22 at the college where the study was conducted. The community college offers exceptional learning and diverse, social opportunities to the students. The community college provides easily attainable, wide-ranging programs that incorporate technical skills, college transfer, and practical

training. The community college offers a range of support services for the student learner that promote diversity for all undergraduate students. The community college is a vibrant higher education institution that is receptive to the requirements of its stakeholders. There are both academic and vocational programs available. The community college has more than 60 off-campus locations throughout the state it is located in. The community college study site offers services in four primary areas for the student veterans: workforce development, community education, adult basic education, and English language services.

### **Definition of the Problem**

The U.S. Census Bureau (2014) reported that the 2012 American Community Survey (ACS) data collected does not track veteran student outcomes. The U.S. Census Bureau reports from the eastern state where the study site was located only show the age, sex, and veteran or nonveteran status. The ACS does not separate AAMV from other non-male veterans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). As a result, researchers cannot ascertain levels of education with certainty or whether there is a small difference between the education levels of veterans and nonveterans. In 2013, over 1 million student veterans used their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to pursue advanced educational opportunities, and 73%–80% of student veterans were males (Arminio, Grabosky, & Lang, 2014). Cate (2014) noted that contributing to the confusion regarding student veteran postsecondary academic outcomes is the fact that “national-level data on student veterans have been difficult to find, analyze, and interpret due to poor collection methods” (p. 11). Some AAMV students does not understand the requirements for attaining new skills at the

community college. “The fact that African American students are under achieving and lag behind their counterparts in the community college should come as no surprise to anyone who researched information for African Americans in the postsecondary schools” (Bush & Bush, 2010, p. 52). According to Humes (2006), some African American veterans were not prepared academically. In addition to student responsibilities, many student veterans take on work responsibilities that may distract from classes and school (Radford, 2009). Although the Post-9/11 GI Bill offers benefits in financing education, many contemporary student veterans feel the need to work during their time as a student to meet their family responsibilities (The Winston Group, 2008).

Community colleges are experiencing a problem with AAMV students not completing college degrees. A local community college was the site of this research study. As an alumnus of the local community college and a veteran student, I was interested in conducting a qualitative study to identify the perceptions of the AAMVs regarding factors that influence their college completion. The current veteran support services help veteran students transition from active military duty into the college environment. Veteran student services may not be easily identifiable when a veteran student is enrolled in the local community college, and some veteran students may be unaware of what types of student support services are available.

The gap in practice shows that AAMV are not completing college at the same rate as other veteran students. A review of 800,000 records for all veterans in college from 2002 through 2013 showed just over 50% college completion rates (Zoroya, 2014). Most colleges calculate graduation rates based on the number of students enrolled, so these

numbers reflect that most veterans are dropping out or failing in college. Zoroya (2014) noted that when comparing 10 years of records, the completion rate of veteran students varied by branch of service. Counting completion records this way does not give an accurate assessment of veterans using the Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB) or Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits.

Velasquez (2012) noted that of “approximately 800,000 military veterans attending U.S. colleges, approximately 88% drop out of school during the first year and only 3% graduate” (p. 37). The Colorado Workforce Development Council (2012) reported that thousands of veterans are failing. Veteran support services are key components to assist veteran students achieve their educational goals (Vaillant, 2012). Marcus (2017) identified community colleges that continue to receive federal funding to support soldiers in higher education. This author’s research focused on prior learning for veteran students and the effects of the GI Bill, particularly how it helps former active duty soldiers attend college (Marcus, 2017, p. 3).

## **Rationale**

### **Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level**

According to Watkins (2010), African American men graduating from college lag significantly behind other ethnic groups. There’s a direct correlation between the number of hours spent studying and the level of his performance; which means students do not spend enough time studying and focusing on schoolwork to get to the next level. Watkins also noted this level consists of educational advancement, job promotion, and recognition for completing assignments.



In this study, I explored the perceptions among AAMV students enrolled at a community college. The local problem is AAMVs not completing their degrees at the local community college. The director of student enrollment at the college stated the staff of the veteran support service department could use additional information regarding how the support services are used by veteran students to assist with their educational progress. The intent of this study was to investigate the experiences of veteran students at a local community college. The findings of this study offer helpful ideas for veterans support and veteran attainment to community college administrators, faculty, and higher education leaders, such as specific information about the AAMVs' transition experiences into the local college.

### **Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature**

Sander (2013) suggested that veterans should be viewed no differently than prospective students from other underrepresented groups (p. 1). Bush (2010) identified how the educational underachievement of African American students in California's community colleges "impacts the social positioning of African American men in a larger societal context as degree attainment being directly related to income and social mobility" (p. 53). Some community colleges have developed a resistance and retention department in order to help veteran students (Husain & Rios, 2012). These departments use data to improve the student success rate.

Stuart and Jenkins (2013) noted academic leaders have discovered a strategy that is improving the community college retention and graduation crisis with changes in remedial education, which is to shorten remedial classes and allow students to take credit

classes instead of noncredit classes. Adams argued, the students will take the class more seriously and perform better on the test (Stuart and Jenkins, 2013). Additionally, Stuart and Jenkins, identified the Academic Learning Program at a study site in California that started in 2007–2008 has been least beneficial for African Americans because there were so many remedial classes. More than half of the African Americans and Latinos who enter California’s community colleges are placed in remedial math (Stuart & Jenkins, 2013). Stuart and Jenkins found that

the state data showed, if a student is placed three or more levels below college-level math at the beginning of a semester only 6% of African Americans and Latinos complete enough remedial and required math course work in three years to enter a four-year college. (pp. 1–2).

There is a community college-wide concern regarding all students who are required to take developmental education classes and how taking these extra classes affects the community college student completion (Stuart & Jenkins, 2013).

In the larger population, recruiters from the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) are using the MGIB as a major recruiting tool to help students attend college (Smole & Loane, 2008). The role of the AVF is to attract high-quality youths with a marketing strategy on benefit opportunities for the military. Some AAMV did not have resources to attend the community college. Rostker noted that, “the military learned it had to offer money for education and bonuses to enlist for certain occupations and enlistment tours of different lengths” (p. 3). According to Simon, Negrusa, and Warner (2010), an educational benefit does attract enlistment of high-quality youth defined by military service. Forty percent of

veterans are still unaware of their educational benefits (Adams- McClatchy, 2012).

Adams-McClatchy found that the leaders from the Pentagon and academic leaders from Veteran Affairs (VA) have noticed this problem and are developing ways to track student feedback from colleges that are eligible for the MGIB in order to help improve veterans' transition into college.

Some colleges offer support counseling for students on campus; nevertheless, some students are not aware of these opportunities. Some universities and colleges are on the path to creating opportunities for veterans and others are using the veterans as business in order to collect funds and not create programs to support veterans attending college (Grossman, 2008). In order to promote the academic achievement of veterans, the Pentagon and VA created programs and policies that reflect awareness of the needs of veterans and share best practices with other colleges (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009). Additional programs, such as the Services for Transfer and Re-Entry Students (STARS), have been created to support veterans on college campus. A team of both professional and academic members collaborate with local, state, and veterans at the community college to create program STARS (O'Herrin, 2011). STARS is used in the University of California College campus to help veterans succeed academically. Rumann and Hamrick (2010) proposed instead of creating new services, colleges should create partnerships with community and government resources to provide services to student veterans.

The MGIB and the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 are two financial resources to help veterans attend school. Fazio (2009) highlighted the

enacted Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008, explaining that it offers veterans unlimited financial means to attend school. New and undecided student veterans spend thousands of dollars on unnecessary courses because of missed programs, such as orientation, or schools not offering makeup courses for students who need additional support because of deployments or military training (Military, 2019).

The most challenging task is to increase student veteran completion rates at the community college (Bundy, 2013). According to Bundy, family and job obligations and financial hardships often hinder veterans from completing college. Transition and isolation were cited as two of the biggest barriers to success for veterans (Wilson, 2010). Additionally, veterans indicated that sometimes administrators were not inclined to listen to their perspectives when drafting plans, while administrators voiced concerns that despite their best efforts, student veterans were not participating or providing feedback about their needs because the students were afraid of rejection by administrators (ACE,2010). The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of AAMV at the local community college who are not completing their degrees and develop a project to improve AAMV college completion.

### **Definitions**

*All Volunteer Force (AVF)*: The “military force composed solely of volunteers without resorting” (Rostker, 2006, p. 5) to the draft adopted by the United States during the Vietnam War in “1973 in response to protest by members of the antiwar movement” (Eikenberry, 2013, p. 7).

*GI Bill*: Formally known as the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, was enacted by the United States government prior to the end of World War II. The bill was designed to provide education benefits for returning veterans and help them transition back into the civilian population. Since the bill was signed into law, it has undergone many changes. The basic premise of the bill is still the same, but benefits have been increased to keep up with an evolving economy (Humes, 2006).

*Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)*: "PTSD is an anxiety disorder resulting from recurring instances of traumatic event(s), persistent avoidance of anything associated with the traumatic event(s)" (Barnard-Brak, Bagby, Jones, & Sulak, 2011, p. 29).

*Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC)*: Programs across the country responsible for identifying, training, educating, and inspiring future officers (Morgado, 2017).

*Student Veteran Associations (SVAs)*: These associations offer veteran-to-veteran interaction in the form of mentorship, support, scholarship, leadership outreach, and social gatherings (Webb, 2008).

*Veterans*: Any member serving or having served in the Armed Forces Army, Navy, Coast Guard, Air Force, and Marines with over 90 days of active duty (Romesser, Head, Richins, Molesky, & Griffiths, 2014, p. 3). In this study, I focused on AAMV from combat to classroom

### **Significance**

There is a significant lack of community college completion for the AAMVs at the college where I conducted my research. Over the past several years, national attention

has been given to assess student veterans' progress toward degree attainment, such as the Principles of Excellence, Operation College Promise, and the Pat Tillman Foundation (Lang & Powers, 2011). In this qualitative study, I focused on the perceptions of AAMV regarding factors that influence their community college completion. Through data analysis, I identified various reasons why AAMV students were unsuccessful completing the community college. All community college students are challenged to complete their degree (Tinto, 2012). Ford, Northrup, and Wiley (2009) noted institutions of higher education are challenged to meet the diverse educational needs of students who have served in the military.

The findings of this qualitative study may positively affect social change in the community college by helping academic leaders improve veteran retention. In addition, the results of this study can be used to improve veteran student success at the local community college. The local community college may benefit from using the findings of this study both to assist in program development and to mentor veteran students. Creating academic veteran mentoring programs will attract AAMV students and provide the college administrators with additional insights with which to revise current support programs to better serve the veteran students. The information obtained from this study could also be used to help current AAMV students who display signs of not completing college degrees.

### **Guiding/Research Question**

Community colleges are attempting to create a veteran friendly campus. Some colleges are not experienced enough to handle the influx of veteran students. In order for

veteran students to be successful in higher education, colleges need to provide them with useful resources. Elliott, Gonzalez, and Larsen (2011) noted some veteran students suffer from mental health issues, and others are alienated from fellow nonveteran students. The college campus experience is different for veterans than newly graduated high school students. One of the differences is veteran students are older with different life experiences, including combat experience. Veteran students believe they have more responsibilities than other students in balancing family, school, and work (Romesser et al. 2014). The purpose of this qualitative research study was to identify the needs of veteran students at the local community college. I developed the following research question to guide this study: What are the perceptions of African American male veterans regarding factors that influence college completion?

### **Review of the Literature**

To locate extant literature on the topic, I searched the Education Research Complete database, Google Scholar, and ERIC database. I searched the topics or key words of *veterans in community college*, *AAMV completing college*, and *veterans in higher education*. This review of literature includes discussions of the conceptual framework, community college support of veteran students, veteran student success, the GI Bill, barriers that influence veteran students, and PTSD and emotional issues of veteran college students.

In the literature review, I focused on the extant concepts, theories, and research related to veteran students' failure to complete college. Ackerman et al. (2009) identified areas that could affect student veterans' academic success. Once such area is SVAs or

other veteran-to-veteran interaction in the form of mentorship, support, and social gatherings because veterans have reported significant benefits from connection with veteran peers and mentors (Ackerman et al., 2009). Kelty, Kleykamp, and Segal (2010) suggested “quasi-military programs, public military academies, and Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps in secondary schools have recently become popular, especially in areas with large populations of vulnerable youth; they appear to be successful in leadership development” (p.181). Kelty, Kleykamp, and Segal recommended these types of programs are designed both to prepare high school students to enlist in the military after graduation or to continue officer training at a college ROTC or community college. The ROTC program offers opportunities for AAMV to succeed in college. College completion will depend on the veterans’ success at the community college with all departments working together to help the students succeed. Although the GI Bill is a major component to support veteran education, community colleges need to create a more veteran-friendly campus to track the needs of the veteran (Wheeler, 2012). Community colleges are challenged with graduating veteran students. Emotional issues, PTSD, and other challenges can hinder a veteran from completing college.

### **Conceptual Framework**

In this qualitative study, I used Bean and Metzner’s (1985) model of nontraditional student attrition and Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman’s (1995) theory of adult transition as the conceptual framework. These theories play a key role in better understanding veteran students’ college completion. The Schlossberg et al. situation, self, support, and strategies (4S) transition model served as a foundation to examine each



veteran student's personal experience of navigating available community college services to reach educational goals.

Bean and Metzner's (1985) model of nontraditional student attrition focused on the student environment and how various factors, such as social integration, academics, demographic background, and the environment, played a vital role in college completion for adult learners. Holland and Farmers-Hinton (2009) asserted that "the importance of social networks considering ways communities can help students of color to develop college aspirations" (p. 26). Other factors for consideration are work, financial stress, difficulty interacting socially with fellow students, and difficulty adapting culturally to their new environment at the community college (Olsen, Badger, & McCuddy, 2014). Working full-time can decrease the amount of study hours, dealing with family issues can prevent students from being able to complete school assignments, and being in class too long can prevent students from obtaining permanent employment. Using the model of nontraditional student attrition to study undergraduates, Bean and Metzner's (1985) showed how nontraditional students are more affected by the external environment which hinders their college completion. Bean and Metzner's model of nontraditional student attrition has been used to explain the difference between the outcomes of traditional and nontraditional students in higher education. In this study, I studied nontraditional veteran students.

My use of Schlossberg et al.'s theory of adult transition (1995) supported the relationship between adult learning and student veterans' transition into higher education. Schlossberg et al. examined how the adult transition theory has been an effective

framework with which to investigate and understand college students as well as adult transitions. Furthermore, Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) noted a theoretical construct identifies and reacts to any “change over time, depending on whether one is moving in, through, or out of transition” (p. 38). Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson et al. mentioned this theory focuses on the change that occurs during the transition. In this study, tracking veteran students’ movement into, through, and out of class produced data on their perceptions of their transition into college. This concept was employed in this study to show how veteran students transitioned from active military service, adjusted to living as a civilian, and adjusted to the college environment. I used the 4Ss to guide the interviewing process and help with data analysis (Goodman et al., 2006).

In this study, I used Bean and Metzner’s (1985) model of nontraditional student attrition to support theories on adult education and offered insights into adult learners balancing school and work and Schlossberg et al.’s (1995) theory of adult transition served as a lens through which to view veterans’ transition into life outside the military. Veteran students are nontraditional students because they served in the military before going to college. Some veterans attend community colleges after returning from combat because these higher education institutions cost less than 4-year colleges and universities (Moore, 2015). Traditional college students attend college directly after graduating from high school (Bailey, 2006). Some colleges have mentors in place to help veteran students transition and other community colleges do not. Schlossberg et al.’s theory explained the anticipated, unanticipated, and nonevents veteran students endure. For example: Going to

college can be an anticipated transition, getting deployed while attending college can be unanticipated. Nonevents were considered transitions that were anticipated but did not occur.

### **Community College Support of Veteran Students**

The history of higher education in community colleges is significant because these colleges are vital to economic growth. Rumann, Rivera, and Hernandez (2011) explained how higher education influenced the development of American democracy, reporting that community colleges were used as cultural centers to offer students opportunities to excel within the community. A community college is inexpensive to attend, and through them, veterans can capitalize on learning opportunities in higher education. Community colleges are positioned to support veteran students through providing a veteran-friendly campus, programs designed for veterans, and rehabilitation centers for military veteran students to use on campus (ACE, 2018). The community college campus contains a mix of both veteran and nonveteran students. Furthermore, ACE suggested student veterans returning from combat may be discouraged from attending or completing college due to combat-related injuries and may feel overwhelmed. According to Lake and Pushchak (2007), some military personnel describe the transition experience as difficult, frustrating, and disappointing. Colleges and universities attempt to meet the academic and personal needs of student veterans (Lake & Pushchak, 2007); however, some community colleges lack on-campus, veteran-specific resources. Some veteran students noted they were more comfortable with social support from fellow veteran classmates than with the academic leaders (Horton, 2012). O'Herrin,

(2011) provided an excellent transition for the community college academic leaders develop peer support to help veterans succeed in the new environment

### **Veteran Student Success**

The success of some veteran students requires a support team with representatives from different institutional offices. The 2010 National Survey of Veterans statistics have shown that institutions of higher education that offer veterans a sufficient amount of academic support assist veterans to degree or program completion. The extant problem is the identification of the resources to support and advocacy needed for veterans to succeed in higher education. Being away from the academic setting due to combat deployment and later integrating into a college environment can be difficult and challenging for veteran students (Gilbert & Griffin, 2015).

Veteran student success at the community college is enhanced when additional support programs are available to these adult students. Institutions of higher education are challenged to meet the diverse educational needs of students actively serving in the military. Community colleges should focus on “connections, partnerships, opportunities, and support programs to enhance success for military students” (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009, p. 61). Veteran service programs must be developed to help build and create counseling opportunities for students and faculty. In order for the college completion rate to improve, college leaders must offer alternative programs to attract and retain veteran students (Gast, 2013). A national program, SVA, was created to help veterans in transition to college (U.S. Department of VA, 2012). Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Eric K. Shinseki mentioned a vision for SVA showed leaders the future plans to promote

student veteran success that will lead to graduation. (Department of Veteran Affairs, 2013, p. 1).

Veteran peer-to-peer program interaction is key to their college completion with veteran services programs helping veteran students adjust to the campus environment. McBain, Kim, Cook, and Snead (2012) referred to the veteran service programs as making the institution welcoming and supportive for student learning through the creation of a positive campus environment to meet the specific needs of veteran students. McCasline (2014) noted academic leaders should develop a plan to support the veteran educational needs, such as training, and the academic success of veteran students on campus. Wheeler (2012) highlighted the challenges veteran students face when returning to the college landscape. The purpose of these programs is to ease veterans' transition and boost their chances of success in the classroom (Cook & Kim 2009).

Good faculty and student relationships can begin with a conversation. Faculty support students by displaying concern for their academic success and build relationships (Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Institutions can improve the education of student veterans through orientation and advising programs to acclimate student veterans to college life (Bialkowski, 2012). Belmont College (2010) emphasize the importance of proactive advising approach, especially in the form of reaching out to students at crucial points to ensure they are making steady progress toward their goals and addressing challenges before they become problems. Educators can “build a rapport and develop a relationship” with veteran students “to let them know they are welcome on campus and in the classroom” (Shea & Fishback, 2012, p. 61). Veterans, when possible, should be able to

work as a team in higher education classrooms and know the resources available on campus for veteran students so that anyone can direct the student to help as needed. These programs also offer information for to veterans leaving the military and attending the community college for the first time. The programs also show students how to navigate in the classroom.

Knowledge and understanding of VA and the numerous educational benefit program requirements is crucial to the success of veterans looking to transfer to 4-year universities from community colleges. Studies indicated that during the transition to college, student veterans experienced problems with school policies (Goodman, et al., 2006). Complicated enrollment requires an intervention by a student veteran representative on their behalf (Goodman, et al., 2006; Wheeler, 2012).

### **GI Bill**

The GI Bill provides resources for veteran students to attend higher education institutions (Bellafiore, 2012). Bellafiore explained that veteran students can return from combat and enter college using assistance from the GI Bill. The GI Bill can be a tool to help AAMVs reach their college and career goals. The U.S. Department of VA (2012) noted changes within veteran student enrollment by illness, serious injury, or too many attempted courses without completion and the community college serves as a viable option for utilizing veterans' Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. The Post-9/11 GI Bill helped pay for returning veterans to receive benefits for college enrollment (Barr, 2015). Sander (2012) showed how the Post-9/11 GI Bill can help veteran students receive educational benefits. Educational benefits clarified by Osborne (2014), for example, explained that a

veteran student “can receive allowance for housing, book stipends and, 36 months of tuition to cover the cost for any public college in his/her state” (p. 247).

### **PTSD and Emotional Issues**

Veteran students who have PTSD find it hard to communicate in a college classroom environment. College campuses need to promote PTSD awareness and how it affects the veteran student in the classroom environment. Elliott, Gonzalez, and Larsen (2011) studied college students with PTSD and how having this condition can alienate veterans on campus. Studies have shown how combat stress and PTSD keeps veteran students from participating in the classroom. The authors used quantitative survey data to test how combat stress causes alienation in the classroom. PTSD, alienation, and withdrawal disorders were identified by college students as reasons some veteran students did not participate in class discussion. Some students do not want to revisit their actions during combat. Elliott et al., used “quantitative survey data” to test a combat stress “model of what causes alienation” in the classroom (pp. 279-280). The results showed that combat stress interfered with learning and veteran students lacked interest in participating in any combat related topics.

### **Implications**

This study examined the experiences of the AAMV student at the community college. The perceptions of veteran students were explored. Academic leaders at the community college can provide guidance and course selection assistance. Veteran students can participate in VA activities and other professional organizational events to

develop their academic skills. Some projects that may emerge from the study findings are career day and veteran job development workshops in which students can participate.

Veterans can use the skills they learned in the military to receive credit to work toward their degree program. The community college where I conducted my study can develop support coping strategies for student veterans by offering a veteran mentoring program. Exploring how current veterans will meet the challenges and obstacles to graduate may benefit new and other veteran students. Developing a student veteran's center may provide additional academic support for veteran students. The findings of my qualitative study included some veteran students not using veteran services.

The findings might result in a veteran with disabilities program for new veteran students with specific learning situations or requiring special tools to aid in their learning. Establishing a dedicated veterans center on campus where there is a larger veteran population will provide the opportunities for veterans to congregate and receive tutoring and other services (American Association of Community Colleges (AACCC), 2013). The academic setting might “not be fully equipped to aid student veterans” (Cate, 2014, p. 59). For an example, Butte College in California, is helpful with student veteran success. The college established a Veteran Resource Center in 2008 which offers veteran services such as peer support, computers, and workshops (Butte College, 2016). This Veteran Resource Center at Butte College is working and helping with student veterans' academic success. Most importantly, students receive support from the counseling office and have quick access to counselors to assist students with mental health issues.



**Transition Statement**

This study examined the experience of being a AAMV student at the community college. AAMV students may not be adequately prepared for college after combat. Community colleges are receiving federal funding to support soldiers in higher education. There are some community colleges developing academic programs to help veteran students' transition. The lack of AAMV college preparedness, lack of mentors, and lack of in processing academic support could possibly be a factor of AAMV not completing the community college. The problem of this qualitative study is that African American veteran students are not completing their degrees at a local community college. The problem has been identified both locally and nationally because student veteran success is a critical policy issue at both levels (Gilbert & Griffin, 2015). AAMV are returning to campus without adequate educational guidance, mentoring, or academic tutoring. This research explored the academic experiences of AAMV attending community college. This research can be used to better understand the community college experience of veteran students to identify ways that these students attending this particular community college may realize higher completion rates.

**Summary of Section 1**

In summary, Section 1 consisted of the introduction of AAMV in the community college. Community colleges can provide a veteran friendly campus, programs designed for veterans, and rehabilitation centers for military veterans. The local problem is AAMV are not completing their degrees at the local community college. The definition of the problem shows there are several flaws in tracking student veteran outcomes. Many

student veterans are distracted in the classroom. A local community college will be the site of my study. The current veteran student support helps some veterans transition from active duty. Veteran student services may not be easily identifiable when a veteran student is enrolled in the local community college. Some veteran students may be unaware of what type of student support services that are available.

The most challenging task is to increase student veterans' completion rates at the community college. The MGIB and the Post-9/11 veterans' educational assistant Act of 2008 are two financial resources to help veterans to attend school. Creating academic veteran mentoring programs will attract AAMV students and provide insight for college administrators to revise current support programs to better serve veteran students. Other challenges occur when return to the college classroom. The adult transition theory has been an effective framework to investigate and understand college students as well as adult transition.

This study explored the perceptions among AAMVs enrolled at a community college. The rationale of this study is that AAMV student attending community college lag significantly behind other ethnic groups completing their degrees. Evidence of the problem at the local level shows there is a community college-wide concern regarding all students who are required to take developmental education classes and how taking these extra classes affects the community college student completion.

Evidence of the problem from the professional literature suggested that veterans should be viewed no differently than prospective students from other underrepresented groups and AAMV are still not completing the community college. The leaders from the

Pentagon and academic leaders from VA have noticed this problem and are developing ways to track student feedback from colleges that are eligible for the MGIB in order to help improve veterans' transition into college. Academic leaders have discovered a strategy that is improving the community college retention and graduation crisis with changes in remedial education. There is a community college-wide concern regarding all students who are required to take developmental education classes and how taking these extra classes affects the community college student completion.

The GI Bill, PTSD, Veterans, ROTC and SVA are defined in Section 1. The definitions of terms used are the AVF was volunteers adopted during Vietnam War, GI Bill was designed to provide education benefits for returning veterans, "PTSD is an anxiety disorder associated with witnessing or experiencing serious traumatic event" (Romesser, Head, Richins, Molesky, and Griffiths, 2014, p. 13.). ROTC is reserve future officer programs offered at the college level, SVA is student veteran associations formed to help veterans succeed and veterans are any member of the military service.

The significance of this qualitative study focused on the perceptions of AAMV regarding factors that influence community college completion. The local community college may benefit from this research both to assist in program development and to mentor veteran students. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to identify the needs of veteran students at the local community college. The guiding research questions consist of: What are the perceptions of AAMV regarding factors that influence college completion? and How are resources in place at the community college to support services needed by AAMV's to complete college?

The literature focused on the concepts, theories and writings to develop ways to help student veterans' complete college. Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchel (2009) identified areas that could affect student veterans' academic success such as SVAs or other veteran-to-veteran interaction in the form of mentorship, support, and social gatherings. Based on this fact, (Ackerman et al., 2009) veterans reported significant benefits from connection with veteran peers and mentors. Kelty, Kleykamp, and Segal (2010) suggested "quasi-military programs, public military academies, and JROTC programs in secondary schools have recently become popular, especially in areas with large populations of vulnerable youth, and they appear to be successful" (p. 181). College completion will depend on the veterans' success at the community college with all departments working together to help the students succeed. Although the GI Bill is a major component to support the veteran education, community colleges need to create a more veteran friendly campus to track the needs of the veteran. Emotional issues, PTSD, and other challenges can hinder a veteran from completing college. Bean and Metzner (1985) introduced the model of nontraditional student attrition. Farmers-Hinton (2008) asserted the importance of considering the social networks of support and guidance for students of color within school and neighborhood settings.

There are barriers that influence veteran students. While attending the community college, veterans struggle with obstacles that hinder their college completion. PTSD and emotional issues can hinder a veteran's classroom participation. Veterans want to be included in the classroom discussions but may hesitate to reach out (Shea & Fishback,

2012). A significant part of Shea and Fishback's (2012) study was to explore AAMV students' experiences while attending the community college.

Section 2 contains the methodology of research in which participants will be selected. The focus of the study was to examine the perceptions of AAMV regarding factors that influence community college completion. The study participants consisted of AAMV students completing community college. Interviews were key for data collection. During participant access each participant signed a written consent form before I conducted my interviews. The role as the researcher was to collect data and develop findings based on the data analysis. Member checking was used to make sure that the transcripts accurately convey the participants' answers to the questions.

Section 3 includes how the executive summary will address the experience of community college AAMV students who are not completing college degrees based on the data analysis of the research. The rationale explained the project and addresses the problem. The study findings from data collected and current literature were used to develop and define the executive summary.

Section 4 includes the reflections and the final conclusions. This section also provided an executive summary project that provided strengths and how to address the problem differently. Finally, this section provided reflections of the project on my experiences and thoughts as a research practitioner on social change and implications for future research.

## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Introduction**

Community colleges can significantly contribute to success of the AAMVs. According to the United States Census Bureau (2014) there are an estimated 1,340,015 living AAMVs, of which an estimated 7,384 Black, male veterans are between the ages of 18 to 34 years. The United States Census Bureau reported an estimated 90% of these 7,384 *Black*, male veterans between ages of 18 to 34 are enrolled in a community college in a large city. In this study, I focused on these AAMV students completing community college. Bush and Bush (2010) commented that “the two-year college often represents Black men’s first experience with postsecondary education, and for many, their last opportunity for obtaining a degree beyond a high-school diploma” (para. 1). The types of services provided by the community college do not support the veteran students enough to complete their 2-year degree (Radford, 2011).

In this study, I used a qualitative method to identify the needs of veteran students at the local community college. My study focused on the perceptions of the AAMV students regarding factors that influence college completion, including their concerns, , the support services for veterans, and how the GI Bill influences their higher educational process. The findings may offer insight into how veterans make use of campus veteran services.

### **Qualitative Design and Approach**

The qualitative tradition, or research approach, reflects how “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how

they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). The problem addressed in this qualitative study was that AAMV students were not completing their degrees at a local community college. In this qualitative study, I explored the perceptions of AAMV students regarding factors that influence college completion. I collected data by interviewing seven veteran students. The resulting data were analyzed to identify common themes and categories to develop the findings of the study. The qualitative approach was the most appropriate research method for this study because the interview data addressed the focus of the study by capturing the perceptions of the study participants.

I considered a case study as a possible research design for this study. This design was not used because there was not a bounded case identified (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Other possible participants, such as support staff, instructors, and the director of VA would not be able to explain the perceptions of the AAMV students regarding factors that influence their college completion. Only a qualitative research approach was suitable to explore the perceptions of the study participants.

A quantitative research study was not a suitable research approach for this study because the problem and study focus did not reflect a relationship or correlation that might be examined using a survey instrument that produces numerical data (see Creswell, 2013). In this study, I focused on the perceptions of seven AAMV participants. Collecting interview data yielded interview transcripts that were analyzed to identify the emerging themes and categories to identify the factors that influence college completion by the AAMV students participating in this study.

## **Participants**

The participants of this qualitative research study were seven AAMV students attending a local community college. To be eligible, participants for this study had to have completed at least two full semesters at community college. According to Taylor, Bogdan, and DeVault (2016), qualitative research is not only done with people, it is also accomplished through people from different disciplines and with different perspectives and life histories. Seven students with diverse experiences are a sufficient number of participants for a qualitative study (Malterud, 2012).

I received written consent from the dean of enrollment at the community college, which allowed me to post flyers on campus to recruit study participants. On the flyer, I provided a brief overview of the study along with my contact information to be used when a veteran student was interested in participating in the study. Once a potential veteran student expressed interest in participating in the study, I scheduled a mutually convenient time to meet with them to obtain a signed consent form and conduct the interview. The participant was informed that the interview would be audio taped.

I established a working relationship with each veteran student by informing the participant that I am a combat veteran. I shared information about my military background and college challenges. Providing my personal background information helped the AAMV to understand that my experiences as a combat veteran were similar to his experience. I told participants that I am a doctoral student conducting a research study. The interview was conducted to obtain answers that can aid the research process.



As a researcher, I posed questions so that each participant could explain his community college student experiences.

### **Protection of Participant Rights**

All research was approved by Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB approval number is 08-16-17-0351400. In order to participate or decline to participate in the research study, I provided the prospective research participants with an overview of the study. There was no pressure to participate, and the participants were given enough time to make a decision. *The Belmont Report* was established in 1978 to “identify ethical principles for conducting research involving humans” (Ryan, 1979, p. 1). The “*Belmont* principle of respect for persons is primarily applied by requiring that all human subjects research participants provide voluntary” (Ryan, 1979, p. 5), so I had each participant sign an informed consent form before interviewing them and including them in the research. *The Belmont Report* identified ethical principles that researchers must follow, including “respect for persons, [which] means the subject being researched requires informed consent” (p. 3) and involves protecting the participant being researched from society or being mistreated during the study. During the research, participants must be treated fairly and protected for participating in the research. Participants were able to leave the research study at any time.

### **Ethical Considerations**

In the informed consent form, I explained the purpose and outcomes of the study, the voluntary nature of the study, and the protection of participants’ confidentiality as well as their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. I was available if participants

had questions regarding the study via e-mail or phone. I provided my phone number and e-mail address on the cover letter. There was no anticipated or actual physical harm to participants in this study. The study involved semistructured, one-on-one interviews. The local community college offered a private room to conduct interviews on campus at the Student Center.

### **Protection of Confidentiality**

I maintained confidentiality of the data collected by keeping all research materials secure in my private home. I kept all audiotapes and interview transcripts in a locked cabinet in my office, locked behind a closed door. After completion of the study and in accordance with Walden University rules and regulations of research, the transcripts will be shredded and audiotapes destroyed after 5 years.

I invited any AAMV student to be part of the study. By returning and signing the informed consent, the participants indicated consent for the study. Participation was strictly voluntary. The seven participants' names and identifying information were kept confidential through assigning participant numbers for qualitative data (e.g., Participant 1, 2, and 3) and were not revealed publicly. A summary of the study findings will be presented as an executive report to the president of the local community college and the dean of enrollment at the conclusion of the study.

### **Data Collection**

An important step in this "research process is to find people to study and gain access to and establish rapport with participants so that they will provide data" (Creswell, 2013, p. 147). My recruitment process was to post fliers around the community college

campus and ask for veteran volunteers in the student study hall area. The data collection process consisted of asking the participants 11 open-ended interview questions. I obtained a signed consent form before conducting the interviews. In order to keep track of data collected, I created a Word document that served as a data collection log. This log included my notes and comments related to interview data collected and interview transcripts. Semistructured interviews (see Appendix B) were conducted to obtain AAMV students' perceptions of factors that influence community college completion. There was a private interview space identified that was comfortable for the participants. The interviews were approximately 1 hour. In order to develop a rapport with the participants, I explained the interviewing technique, data collection procedures, and the purpose of the study.

I collected data for the study by audio taping the participant interviews. Qualitative researchers should obtain consent from the participants to audio record the interview data (Creswell, 2013). Creswell also noted that researchers need to foresee ethical issues that can arise and be prepared to develop means for recording and storing information digitally.

I had challenges with obtaining interviews with the seven participants. Only two participants were interviewed before I went to the IRB to request an additional incentive using Subway gift cards. I realized that it would be helpful to have an incentive to obtain the remaining number of participants needed. I contacted the IRB to receive approval to offer Subway \$10.00 gift cards to the participants in my study. Five additional participants were interviewed after I offered the Subway gift cards. A total of seven

participants agreed to participate in the study after I obtained permission to offer gift cards.

### **Participant Access**

I established rapport with the dean of enrollment at the community college and received written permission to conduct my interviews. I posted flyers on campus to identify potential study participants. The flyer included information about the study and my contact information. When I was contacted by a potential participant, we identified a mutually convenient time to meet on campus. I had already secured a room at the college to conduct my interviews.

I disclosed to each participant that I am a veteran and discussed my experience which allowed them to relate and speak with me openly. Each participant signed a written consent form before I conducted my interviews. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. I kept their names confidential and they were not shared with the college staff. The study did not have any impact on the participants' classes or their performance at work. I scheduled participants' interviews during non-class times and non-working hours.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Currently, I am a retired veteran from the U.S. Army collaborating with the community college to conduct my qualitative research. I am an alumnus of the community college where the study was conducted. I do not have any supervisory role over the participants or any other type of relationship with the participants. Design flexibility can be found by researchers in qualitative studies. The researcher is considered

an instrument of data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). I modeled my interviews as common dialogue not as discussion of question and answer.

## **Data Analysis**

### **How and When Data Were Analyzed**

According to Creswell (2014), results should be evaluated for patterns across stories, experiences, and perspectives for a deeper understanding of how specific factors influenced the participants. For the purposes of this qualitative study, I examined data collected during the interviews of AAMV students to identify issues that affect veterans' achievement of their college degree. Qualitative research develops "concepts, insights, and understandings from patterns in the data rather than collecting data to assess preconceived models or theories" (Taylor et al., 2016, p. 8). These student experiences consisted of positive student capabilities that supported their achievement as well as student proficiencies that hindered their progress to degree completion.

I conducted a qualitative study where the participants were asked in-depth one-on-one interview questions. The questions included some demographic information as well as information related to their campus experience. The time of interviews varied from 45 to 60 minutes. Each face-to-face interview consisted of 11 open-ended questions (see Appendix B.). I posed these questions to elicit responses from participants that highlight their academic success, social, and support system experiences. The interviews were held in a designated room to protect the privacy of the participants at the local community college. Personal interviews with participants captured each participant's individual experience to link main ideas (Creswell, 2014).

I asked each participant for permission to audio-record the interview and I transcribed the audiotaped interviews. The transcribed interviews were reviewed to identify emerging themes and categories. A primary source for data analysis is recording “interview context for the development of the voice transcription techniques” (Matheson, 2007, p. 4) when participants interviewed are used in a qualitative study. Rubin and Rubin (2011) recommended member checking, which involves asking your interviewees to review interview transcripts and preliminary findings to ensure that the data accurately captures not only what they said but also what they meant when answering interview questions. Member checking allowed participants the opportunity to add any details or correct any errors on the interview transcripts. A Microsoft Excel spreadsheet was used to document emerging themes and categories from the interview transcripts. A coding matrix was developed reflecting the main theme, main idea, and conclusion of the data collected.

Glaser and Strauss (2009) showed data analysis using the method of constant comparison using strategies of grounded theory. Boeije (2009) agreed similar interviews can be grouped together by related norms. Codes form a pattern when they are combined. The constant comparison process identified patterns from the interview data and identified correlations reflected by participant experiences. Saldana (2015) also suggested that the collection, comparison, and coding of two major pools of data can make changes that can generate a more provocative analysis (p. 259). The codes and themes identified were similar. The data were coded, checked, and analyzed. Codes and themes were

improved and revised. The coding scheme and emerging themes were discussed and agreed upon with the participants so there were no misinterpretations of the data.

Several major themes have been identified. It was perceived that AAMV student taking breaks away from school between courses and semesters will hinder time to college completion. Also, it is perceived that most student veterans have support from outside the classroom to help with college completion; in addition, it was perceived that most student veterans were in the military and while attending school used the GI Bill to fund their education towards college completion. It was perceived that most student veterans do not have a mentor at the college which can hinder their college completion due to lack of support.

#### **Evidence of Quality and Procedures to Assure Accuracy**

I used member checking and a peer reviewer to assure accuracy. I provided a written transcript to the participant to proofread for accuracy. The transcript was used to show the participant interviewed that the information was accurate. Member checking was used to make sure that the transcripts accurately conveyed the participants' answers to the questions. Merriam (2002) suggested the "data collection strategy used is determined by the research question of the study and by determining which sources of data will yield the best information with which to answer the question" (p. 12). I used another doctoral veteran colleague as a peer reviewer to review the themes and categories that emerged from the data to ensure they made sense from a researcher's perspective. The purpose of peer reviewer is to provide evidence of quality. All spreadsheets, field

notes, and interview transcripts were stored and locked on my personal computer. I am the only one with access to this password-protected computer.

### **Procedures for Dealing with Discrepant Cases**

Discrepant findings were used to eliminate bias and verify the interpretation of the data (Morrow, 2005). Discrepant cases are themes and categories that are not similar to the other data collected. I found one discrepant case where a student identified the college needs additional parking spaces. Although this is important to note for other areas the school can improve, it was not identified by all students. The purpose of identifying this information is to point out that there is information or data that does not fit in the themes and categories. Discrepant cases were identified and this information is reflected in the study findings.

### **Data Analysis Results**

Creswell (2012) noted that “open-ended questions are used to gather information, which is grouped into codes, themes, and categories” (p. 45). This process allowed me to provide an understanding of participants’ capabilities by integrating common themes reflected in the data collection process. The interviews were conducted in a semi structured format allowing the researcher to collect information and ideas from the participants. The research question indicated what are the perceptions of AAMV regarding factors that influence college completion? Several major themes have been identified.



### **Veterans Taking a Break from School**

College can be overwhelming for student veterans returning to school in the search of a college degree. Some students cannot navigate responsibilities of attending school, studying, and working full-time. These students find themselves overworked by some of the college requirements and need to take a break from school.

It was perceived that student veterans taking breaks away from school between courses and semesters will hinder time to college completion. Participant A said, “One semester was so overwhelming he had to drop a class;” on the other hand, Participant B said, “More counselors were needed to help veterans navigate through college.”

Participants believe interacting regularly with mentors can motivate them as well as other student veterans to excel.

### **Student Veterans Have Support**

Some active and successful veterans’ programs have a collective purpose of producing a compilation of support services for veteran students within the college education and occupational preparedness. It is perceived that most student veterans have support from outside the classroom to help with college completion. Most participants had some type of family support. Participant E said, “My family is my support system and my cousin and I attend the same college.” While Participant D noted, “I have Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) support” and Participant G said, “Yes, he has a mentor who attends another college or university.” They perceived having a military veteran mentor can serve as a role model who would support their academic development because they could identify with their needs.

**Veterans Using the GI Bill**

The GI Bill was passed in Spring 2009, and as a requirement, the Academic Senate was challenged to work with local colleges to promote better awareness of the GI Bill and the best strategies for utilizing and maximizing its benefits for veterans using financial aid in pursuing higher education. It is perceived that most student veterans were in the military and while attending school use the GI Bill to fund their education towards college completion. Participant B said, “Without the GI Bill, I would not be able to attend college.” He concluded that he wants to use his GI Bill to earn an associate degree so he can transfer to a 4-year college.

**Veterans Without a Mentor**

Veterans without mentors find it hard to be successful in the college landscape. They do not have anyone who can advocate on their behalf or help them establish time to completion or help them avoid repeating classes and making unnecessary missteps. Veterans without mentors have no one to help point them in the right direction, answer quick questions, or give them a perspective of college, life, and work balance.

It is perceived that most student veterans do not have a mentor at the college, which can hinder their college completion due to lack of support. Only one student had a military mentor at the college. Participant C said, “No, I need a veteran military mentor at the college.” Some participants viewed mentors as role models who can positively influence student veteran learning, achievement and help hold them accountable for educational accomplishment.

### **Veterans With Peer Mentors**

Veteran students with mentors are more successful in a college environment. They know the organization better than the mentee, and can provide insight as to how to study, network, and establish short- and long-term goals for college completion. Peer mentors can assist veterans with personal and professional growth.

It was perceived that most student veterans who had mentors were more familiar with the college landscape and accessing resources on campus to help them transition to college completion easier. Participant A said, “the school should reach out to Veterans Administration, recruit Veteran college mentors, have an open house to help get students enrolled in school in order to create a holistic approach.” Participants perceived there was a connection between accessing resources and the academic achievement for AAMV. The college site offered resources to AAMV population that increased the probability of veteran students being academically successful.

### **Veterans Need Computer Lab**

According to McBain, Kim, Cook, and Snead (2012), space availability for veterans and military students was identified by institutions without a dedicated office. Various studies have shown that providing a space for veterans enhances performance and retention, which is the ultimate goal next to graduation (Perkins, 2017). These computer labs can be used by veterans only to do research, write a paper, check e-mail, or print out homework, research papers, and reports. Part of becoming more responsive to military and veteran students is understanding their needs, as well as providing the necessary tools and equipment for student veterans to be successful on campus.

It is perceived that most student veterans believe they need a specific veteran computer lab, and veteran (counselor) representative to assist with college completion. Participants believe the college should offer computer labs during hours' students are attending class. For an example the computer lab and library are closed during some night classes when evening students need resource support. Participants also mentioned the bookstore needed to accommodate Veteran student adult learners who attend evening classes.

### **Veterans Feeling Alienated**

According to researchers from the American Council on Education (ACE, 2012) "veterans are not necessarily asking to be isolated or have special programs created on their behalf. More than anything, they are looking for an educational environment that gives them tools and resources" so they can succeed (pp. 1-2). Although Cook and Kim's (2009) study identified more than 66% of community colleges offer programs specifically for military and veteran students, there are still some key administrative and "student support areas in which relatively few campuses provide services specifically for these student veterans" (p. 48). Some services include offering transitional assistance, tutoring, and academic support.

It is perceived that student veterans feel alienated on the college campus. Participant A said, "You have to ask for help or drop a class if needed." Participant F said, "I'm dealing with PTSD issues and I try not to stay to myself," and overall most students noted they did not want to ask questions in class and they did not participate in class when they feel alienated. Some participants rely on each other to help with class problems just like

they were trained in the military to use teamwork to motivate each other (Rudd, Goulding, & Bryan, 2011). The SVA found that “the ‘average’ student veteran participant reported experiencing moderate anxiety, moderately severe depression, and significant symptoms of PTSD” (McBain et al., 2012, p. 21). The challenges facing veterans who return to college are not limited to the classroom. PTSD, depression, and social adjustment are just a few of the noncurricular issues that veterans can face (Rudd et al., 2011).

### **Veteran Advisors**

A counseling office specifically for veterans is much more likely to provide basic veteran services, including financial aid, tuition, employment assistance, academic advising, and support services to veteran students. Most institutions of higher education with veteran advisors report that the most common challenges they see facing their veteran students are finances, retention, and degree completion. The college where I conducted my research has a veteran advisor but the same advisor is the coordinator of special population student affairs. A coordinator of special population student affairs offers assistance to student veterans, nursing, and other health professional student population. Therefore, a Veteran only advisor is needed to guide student veterans through enrollment, academic progress, and college completion. Veteran mentors can influence positive change by routinely checking up on mentees, supporting their academic success, influencing better decisions, tutoring, and encouraging AAMV to complete college.

## Summary

In summary the seven participants of this study were AAMV from one community college. The focus of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of AAMV regarding factors that influence community college completion. I conducted a qualitative study where the seven participants are asked in-depth one-on-one interview questions. The coding scheme and emerging themes were discussed and reviewed with the participants so there are no misinterpretations of the data collected. Member checking was used to make sure that the transcripts accurately convey the participants' answers to the questions. A peer reviewer supported the quality of the data analysis. The conceptual framework consisting of Bean and Metzner's (1985) model of non-traditional student attrition and Schlossberg et al. (1995) theory of adult transition served as a foundation for the findings of the study. The perception is that most student veterans who had mentors were more familiar with the college landscape and accessing resources on campus to help them transition to college completion easier. Finally, it is perceived that most student veterans believe they need a specific veteran computer lab, and veteran (counselor) representative to assist with college completion. These study findings offered insight into the perceptions among AAMV students regarding factors that influence college completion. Section 3 will provide an overview of the project, which is the executive summary. This section also includes a literature review related to the project, a project time table, implementation and evaluation plans.

### Section 3: The Project

#### **Introduction**

In this study, I explored the perceptions of AAMV students regarding factors that influence community college completion. Based on the study findings, I chose the project genre of a position paper that was developed as an executive summary (see Appendix A). The goals of the project are to provide academic leaders and stakeholders with possible ways to increase AAMV student support on campus; increase faculty, staff, and student engagement; and identify ways to improve the college completion rates of AAMV students.

This section includes the rationale for the project and a review of pertinent literature to explain the appropriateness of the project to address the problem. The review of the literature highlighted relationships and offered suggestions on how to support AAMV matriculating on college campus. In addition, there is a complete description of the project, the implications of the project, and the evaluation plan used to make decisions regarding the project.

#### **Rationale**

The findings of the study may provide information to the stakeholders who make decisions about veteran services and outcomes of AAMV completing their college degree. In the position paper, I provide an executive summary of the study findings. The problem addressed in this study was AAMV were not completing their degrees at the local community college. The data collection focused on gathering the AAMV students' perceptions of what they believe they need in order to be successful at the community

college. Current services might be adjusted to institute a veteran-only resource center (VRC). The VRC would provide instructors, computer labs, and adequate day and evening hours for both full-time and part-time students. The day and evening hours will allow full-time AAMV students to access the VRC during the day and part-time AAMV students to access it in the evening with staff available to assist all veteran students.

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Introduction**

Higher education is paramount to the returning African American, male service member for self-improvement and economic stability (Ottley, 2014). According to the U.S. Census Bureau's (2014) ACS, to better serve the educational needs of the AAMV, Congress established the GI Bill in 1944, and currently 48.7% of ethnic men between the ages of 25 to 34 years old use their educational benefits. Overall, Black, male veterans are not taking advantage of these benefits (Ottley, 2014).

I chose the genre for this project based on the study findings. The study was grounded in Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) 4S transition theory, with transition defined as "an event or nonevent that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 27). I used the theory of adult transition as a lens through which to view how AAMVs depart from the military, return to college, change careers, and find new employment opportunities. The situation included the type of transition the AAMVs endured. This genre was appropriate to address the problem because AAMVs volunteered, completed a permanent change of duty, and ended their time in service by leaving the military to attend college. Some individuals were supported by the



community college, and others were supported by family, mentors, and friends. Anderson and Goodman (2014) argued “veterans may feel isolated as they move from support shared to loss of support” (pp. 43– 44). While attending the community college, AAMVs need to foster support and create transitions to successfully navigate through college campus. I used the criteria of this theory to guide development of the project by framing the perceptions of AAMV attending the community college. Academic leaders and stakeholders offer AAMVs resources for the best chance of success to complete the community college. strategy

To locate extant literature for this review, I accessed the Education Research Complete database, Google Scholar, journal websites, and the ERIC database through the Walden University Library, University of Maryland, and Morgan State University. I searched the topics or key words of *veteran mentors in the community college*, *executive summaries*, *demographics and characteristics of different populations attending college*, *student retention*, *research*, *theory*, and *practice*. I also searched using the terms and phrases of *race and gender support services programs*, *the impact on mentoring*, *minority veterans report and male veterans’ vs nonveterans*, *serving veterans in the community college*, and *AAMV in higher education*.

As colleges and universities create or increase campus services for military students and veterans, attention to serving AAMV population must be a critical component of their development efforts. Some community colleges are developing new programs to provide support services for veterans to complete their degree program because higher education has identified the need to help veterans complete the

community college. In this literature review, I provide a discussion of the following topics: position paper, provide academic support, tracking veteran students' progress, creating a military friendly atmosphere, one-on-one mentoring, recommendations, provide student program and support services, ways to improve student retention, and best practice for academic leaders.

### **Position Paper**

I chose the genre of a position paper for this project, in which I outlined the perceptions of AAMVs completing the community college. A position paper is sometimes called a point of view topic (McGregor, 2017). A position paper presents opinions about a topic from one side of an arguable view (McGregor, 2017). Stockwell (2015) stated that "students create a list of assumptions to disprove or support an argument" (p. 94). The purpose of a position paper is for a writer to persuade the audience that their view is valid and justifiable. McGregor noted position papers are based on research, and the writer/researcher responds to that to come to an opinion (p. 470) In an effort to establish credibility, a position paper should be based on credible research and should have all sources cited (Northey, Tepperman and Albanese, 2018).

### **Provide Academic Support**

In higher education, most colleges and universities provide student veterans with a variety of support services throughout their degree program; however, AAMV participants in this study communicated that these services could be enhanced to better meet their needs. For example, offering an individual who has been trained to assist student veterans with the complete admissions process or a representative who is familiar

with evolving government Post-9/11 GI Bill policy changes as it relates to military students. Veteran students may experience several lifestyle changes that can be caused by their added educational goal. Veteran counselors are needed to support veteran students returning from combat to help guide student veterans as they navigate higher education (Granger, 2016). Rumann and Hamrick (2010) found that “student veterans will often undergo simultaneous work, individual, and relationship transitions because of the combination of identity roles, functions, and environments” (p. 435). Veteran students also have to realize they are not the same people they were prior to joining the military. Bellafiore (2012) identified “some types of psychological distress can affect concentration, which will further increase the time required to accomplish school work” (p. 14). Struggling with completing academic courses, some veterans find it difficult to interact with other students, ask for support, so the integration of support services for military veterans is critical to their success at a community college (Borsari et al, 2017).

### **Tracking Veteran Students’ Progress**

AAMVs’ decisions to attend community college can be educational and rewarding. Community colleges should track AAMV student progress to ensure students’ success. Tracking can be done by exploring veterans’ success through state level data base systems. The majority of student veterans choose not to participate in a dedicated campus veterans’ association (Woosley, Cock, & Lipnicki, 2011). Nontraditional students such as veterans may not seek out or even connect with their peers in order to be successful in higher education. Vacchi and Berger (2014) suggested that this might be an indicator that student veterans either tend to seek nonveterans as peers to pursue a

perception of being normal or choose not to seek any peer relationships and merely pursue the academic aspects of college degree. Ryan, Bauman, & the U.S. Census Bureau (2016) observed that “a recent trend showed the number of Black military members and their average level of educational attainment steadily increase as time goes by” (p .5).

### **Creating a Military Friendly Atmosphere**

Veteran students may be challenged with balancing work and school. Most often AAMV students are not aware of the amount of time that is needed to study and meet college course requirements (Castro, 2015, p.104). Since this is the first college experience for these students, the lack of time management skills may cause academic challenges. Interactions with other student veterans can ease facilitate transition on the college campus (Castro, 2015). Ensuring student success depends on campus student veteran organizations (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011).

Church (2009) noted adjusting to a campus community involves shifting from an atmosphere dedicated to duty, honor, and country to a community that values freedom of inquiry, questioning, and tolerance for uncertainty. The White House went so far as to issue an executive order last year in response to reports that colleges, particularly for-profits schools, were cashing in on the G.I. Bill by aggressively marketing to veterans and not providing the support they needed to complete their studies. Veterans are used to following orders and meeting expectations in order to accomplish a mission; however, higher education may appear much more unattached and it may be challenging to understand what is expected from veteran students.

Additionally, veterans are selective about their campus life and academic activities. Veterans' campus life will involve students focusing primarily on academic areas necessary for academic progress rather than college life and activities (Kim & Cole, 2013). Campuses are encouraged to provide adequate training to staff who will assist with processing education benefits (Steele et al., 2010). Hitt et al. (2015) suggested campuses implement flexible practices, such as rolling admissions, course enrollment without penalty for lateness or wait time, and preferential course registration, so that all veterans, regardless of year in school, are allowed to register with upper-level students.

### **One-on-One Mentoring**

Many institutions offer peer-to-peer mentoring. A mentoring relationship occurs when both the mentor and mentee exchange information for the benefit of both individuals (Boags, 2013). Gibson (2013) suggested that mentors be supportive, caring, and creating ways "to enhance the access of minorities to information networks in organizations that are required for success" (p. 484). For example: Bellevue College (Washington) offers a peer-to-peer mentoring and volunteer program that connects first year students with successful continuing students with whom they are likely to identify (Ward-Roof, 2010). According to Ward-Roof, new students who participate in a mentor program are assigned to peer or faculty/staff mentors. Select continuing students take the lead in designing, planning, and delivering the student presence at new student orientation, in first-year experience programs, and the throughout the first three days of school (Ward-Roof, 2010, p.72). Having overwhelming support of veterans' mentors who actively participate in the mentoring process is significant to a successful mentoring

program (Persky & Oliver, 2010). AAMVs encounter major hurdles trying to navigate through the community college without a mentor. Veterans learn from mentors' commonalities and shared experiences that could lead to a growth process for the student, a healthy campus relationship, and college completion goals (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009).

The AAMV mentee can meet with a mentor and be matched one-on-one.

Although past research may not include all facets of the veterans' population, current research has consistently painted a picture of the differing needs and characteristics of students (Berg, 2005; Macari et al.) The mentors uniquely understand the stresses their peers are facing and offer support to incoming veteran students in a way that other students cannot (Headden, 2009). Veteran mentors can help mentees determine how veterans' prior learning and course credit can be applied toward a variety of degrees to help veterans make a faster transition into higher education (Evans, Pellegrino, & Hoggan, 2015). They can also conduct one-on-one meetings with AAMVs to further understand their goals, experiences and needs and help identify avenues for them to be successful (Castro, 2015, p.35). On contrary, Castro believed veterans can act as informal mentors to new veteran students on campus. They can be involved, encourage participation, and receive feedback from instructors to help the AAMV succeed in the classroom (Ackerman & DiRamio, 2009). Castro (2015) identified the social stigma prevented veterans from accessing academic accommodations; therefore, changing the name of the counselor to veterans' accessible advisors helped student receive the benefits, mentoring and services that was available to them at the community college. Castro also described how Parkland Community College created learning communities

where students enroll in the same set of courses and are supported by their mentors and advisors (p.101).

Formal and informal mentoring offer encouragement for Black males in a variety of areas (e.g., academics, social emotional well-being, positive brotherhood). (Jackson, 2012, Brooms & Davis, 2017; Pope, 2006). Mentors can offer strategies to help mentees navigate through difficult courses or how to avoid a difficult instructor altogether. Formal mentoring can be used as an instrument to identify some challenges veteran students have such as isolation and academic development. A formal mentoring program is an organized tool that is intentional in matching mentors/mentees based on similar interests, goals, and organized activities (Phelps-Ward & DeAngelo, 2016; Sinann, 2016). On the other hand, informal mentoring is established when people meet and develop a common interest. The goal of both the AAMV student and the mentor student is to help him measure academic achievement, define college expectations, navigate on college campus, and graduate. Other goals are to set the example, be the model, inspire mentee, prepare for new goals, and focus on completing assignments. Mentors can be put in place to help AAMV graduate, be successful, and give student veterans some type of support system. Without support, the challenges that Black male students encounter can compromise their academic achievement, leading to their overall dissatisfaction with college (Strayhorn, 2008).

Peer mentoring is a combination of formal and informal mentoring that takes place through peer-to-peer interactions (Blount, 2011). Often times, peer mentoring takes place in a group or one-on-one setting where individuals share their experiences,

challenges, and opportunities for the purpose of solving problems. Bonding with peer veteran mentors will give AAMV opportunities to express themselves freely without fear of judgement. Having a veteran mentor will allow them to dispel stereotypes about combat. Veterans are often older and other ethnic groups as compared to traditional college students (Radford, 2009). Traditional students can learn from class discussions about veterans' personal experiences and living abroad. AAMV can show faculty and academic leaders that they are engaged in learning and trying to excel on campus.

### **Provide Student Programs and Support Services**

Community colleges should offer resources and student support programs to help veterans stay on track, identify shortcomings, and be aware of students who suffer from disabilities. Schiavone and Gentry (2014) points out, individuals who can experience cognitive deficits of varying severity of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), including difficulties with learning. TBI can interfere with a student's ability to concentrate. "TBI and PTSD do not appear to be preventative barriers" for veterans who wish to attend higher education; however, support is needed with connecting peer veterans are significantly higher among those in the community college" (Aikins, Golub & Bennett, 2015 p. 491). Additionally, accommodation support is needed in higher education to help student veterans succeed who are having academic disabilities challenges.

### **Ways to Improve Student Retention**

Some suggest veteran concentrated classes are needed to help veterans succeed. Concentrated classes are mostly populated with veteran only nontraditional students



(Grasgreen, 2012). In concentrated classes, veterans are engaged in learning and participate more frequently in class discussions. Follow up meetings with AAMV would be helpful to ensure they are completing course work successfully, comprehending assignments, and following their academic degree program. Proposing a VRC will give student veterans a place to collaborate, share ideas, and study between classes. College support staff need to build rapport with student veterans, facilitate great working relationships by keeping communication open. Assisting AAMV in creating a schedule of classes, activities, and goals can be helpful when retaining AAMV. Recognizing the skills and presenting opportunities that allow AAMV to utilize their educational skills acquired can be beneficial in retaining the student-veteran. Early enrollment will ease the stress of veterans not being able to get in desired classes needed for graduation. Community colleges should offer credits for military training and allow students to apply them toward their academic program of study. Instructors work with veteran students because veterans are sometimes easily discouraged, withdraw or drop out of the course and quit attending college. Student collaboration can influence and often encourage veterans to be successful.

### **Summary of Literature Review**

Best practice allows academic leaders to support traditional and nontraditional veteran students. Higher education leaders must listen to veteran students and campus administrators to determine the most important steps to help veteran students succeed academically. Academic leaders must collaborate with academic departments to develop

a tracking system to track incoming veteran students and monitor their progress by providing support, resources, and guidance to completion.

This literature review supports ways that AAMV can be helped to complete college. Ryan et al. (2011) recommended providing veterans with a student veteran mentor to interact with more often, which can be a great coping mechanism for veterans putting life into perspective and relating to peers as they help transition on campus. Student mentors can help with the orientation process, student schedules, and develop strategies for class completion.

Academic leaders need to understand the resources available at their institution that can help veterans better manage the transition and should ask themselves, and their respective institution, how they can better serve the veteran student population. To provide the best learning atmosphere for veteran students, academic representatives must implement best practice to assist them in any way possible. Leaders should consider priority registration for veterans, a simplified readmission application, flexible enrollment, and course schedules. Also, community colleges could develop counseling targeted for veterans and design a web homepage to help newly admitted veterans create online searching opportunities. In addition, academic advisors should discover if other resources are necessary to help veterans (Ryan et al., 2011).

Stakeholders can provide scholarship opportunities for veterans, create a committee to voice the concerns for veteran students, and develop strategies for helping the veteran students. Reassuring veterans of their abilities will inspire most veterans to work toward degree completion attainment. “We know institutions across the country are

increasing support services,” said Meg Mitcham, director of veteran’s programs at the American Council on Education. “We don’t know the effectiveness of those programs and services.” (ACE, 2015)

Dillard and Yu (2016) noted students are taught how to think independently, how to ask the appropriate questions and how to apply theories and guide techniques best practice for academic advisors. In contrast to the literature, the findings revealed collaboration and support when advisors, faculty, and staff know what resources exist for veterans, and show indications to be sensitive to, and how to advocate for this population. Using best practice in colleges and institutions across the country can be proactive to assist veterans become successful in their academic endeavors, and future aspirations (Kuh, 2008).

The veteran’s office should model other institution’s and educate the demographics of the veterans they serve. The community college organization should appoint academic leaders within each department to build student rapport, foster student outreach and create a veteran friendly campus with challenging educational programs in order for student veterans to be successful. A new lens has been created to identify veterans in “transition to higher education by creating a new web-based group to provide social media outlet and not be restricted by distance. They wanted a mechanism to identify colleagues and support systems specific to student veterans” (Adams, Lee, & Holden, 2017, p. 27).

### **Project Description**

The problem of the study is AAMV are not completing their degrees at the local community college. This project description will identify the ideas of AMMV, goals background and other data collected from the findings. The project description includes an overview of the project and details of “how the research project or program will be conducted and its methodology “in context to clarify the goals, methods and objectives. (Alred, et al. 2011, p. 240). Some downfalls can include method of execution or other relevant information needed to create the project. The summary of the study findings showed AAMV students have difficulty connecting socially with traditional students. Veteran students are unaware of useful services that are provided on the community college campus. Other findings identified that AAMV need a designated space to work, area to rest between classes, and veteran dedicated computer study lab. In addition, the community college needs to provide counselors and personnel who are experienced in dealing with veteran students by establishing a veteran group and learning communities. The support staff needs to be available during the hours that the veteran students are on campus.

The executive summary for academic leaders and stakeholders of AAMV students is the project that was best suited based on the study findings. An executive summary was chosen for this project because this was the best project to reflect the outcome of the study findings. Christensen (1997) identified how writing of executive summaries so students can practice synthesizing and writing about the contents of comprehensive research studies for external stakeholder groups. An executive summary will provide

information to academic leaders and stake holders on the perceptions of AAMV students experiences while attending the local community college. The executive summary will assist academic leaders and stake holders to make decisions regarding what support services are needed to help AAMV complete the community college. The executive summary is divided into six sections: Introduction, The Problem, Theory of Adult Transition, Purpose and Design, Study Findings, Recommendations, and Conclusion.

### **Resources, Support and Barriers**

There are several resources needed to present this executive summary to the veteran student stakeholders at the community college. An appropriate location to hold the meeting will be needed. It also may be helpful to make copies of the executive summary to hand out at the meeting. If recommended by the veteran student coordinator, I will develop a PowerPoint presentation to use at the meeting. A laptop computer, projector and screen will be needed to support the presentation.

AAMV need support to transition through the community college. The existing supported to present the executive summary to the stakeholders are a meeting room at the community college and equipment if a PowerPoint is used for the presentation. I will also need to assistance of the veteran student coordinator to coordinate the presentation to the stakeholders at the community college.

One barrier might be that all the stakeholders will not be available to meet at the same time. If there are stakeholders that are not available at the designated meeting time, I will offer to meet these stakeholders individually. A solution is to work with the veteran

student coordinator to schedule the meeting so that as many stakeholders as possible may attend the presentation. I am not aware of any other barriers at this time.

My role is to present the executive summary to the stakeholders of the community college. I plan to make this presentation in September 2019 or during the fall 2019 semester to the stakeholders. Immediately following the presentation, there will be an opportunity for questions and any feedback from the stakeholders. I will follow up in 6 months to find out if there are any changes in support services and if those changes have been effective. I will follow up in a year for fall 2020 to determine if any additional adjustments to support services for veteran students.

The veteran student coordinator will assist with contacting all stakeholders, schedule the meeting, and locate a room for the meeting. It is desirable that all of the stakeholders that support veteran students attend the presentation.

### **Project Implementation and Timetable**

The steps for project implementation are:

1. Present in September 2019 and fall 2019 semester to the stakeholders and provide an opportunity for questions.
2. Follow up in 6 months to find out if there are any changes in support services and if those changes have been effective.
3. Follow up in a year fall 2020 to determine if any additional adjustments to support services for veteran students.
4. I am willing to schedule another meeting with the stakeholders, if requested.

### **Project Evaluation Plan**

The evaluation plan provides the overall approach to the evaluation and to clarify the intent of the evaluation (Rossi, Lipsey, & Henry, 2018). A formative evaluation plan will be used for this project. Linfield and Posavac (2018) described how the formative evaluations explicitly look for ways to improve the program. The overall goal is to present and receive feedback from the academic leaders and stakeholders. Programs are refined using feedback; however, frequent feedback is still needed to maintain the quality of the program. The key stakeholders are the college president, dean of enrollment, the veteran student coordinator, and director of student success.

The focus of the executive summary is to present ways that AAMV students may be better prepared to meet the academic requirements needed to successfully complete their educational goals at the community college. The evaluation plan will follow these steps:

1. To receive feedback from presenting in the Fall September 2019 to the stakeholders and provide an opportunity for questions.
2. Follow up in 6 months to find out if there are any changes in support services and if those changes have been effective.
3. Follow up in a year Fall 2020 to determine if any additional adjustments to support services for veteran students.
4. I will obtain feedback should an additional meeting is requested by the stakeholders, if requested.

The goals of this project on AAMV students' perceptions of their campus experience are to provide information to academic leaders and stakeholders. The project can encourage support and help AAMV improve their academic completion. Additional goals include: possible ways to increase AAMV student support on campus; increase faculty, staff, and student engagement; and, identify ways to improve the college completion rates of AAMV students.

It is my intent that the recommendations of the project will provide academic leaders and stakeholders with opportunities to better serve the AAMV students. Stakeholders and academic leaders might develop assessment tools to reflect upon their current practices, affirm the college strengths that resemble the exemplary practices used and pinpoint changes needed to be made in order to help AAMV students graduate. The recommendations of this project may also help leaders focus on the AAMV needs, strengths, and interest for all students. Academic leaders might create a more inclusive campus culture, coherent school design, and develop best practice for AAMV student completion. The ultimate goal is to help AAMV students be successful in academic courses and help them meet graduation requirements.

### **Project Implications**

The importance of social change in community college is to build new and effective relationships between students, peers, and professors. Community college staff needs to help build relationships between the traditional and nontraditional students. AAMV students can share their experiences from being in combat in the classroom. This



exchange of ideas will benefit traditional students and help them better understand the past military experiences of AAMV students.

The importance of the executive summary to stakeholders in a larger context, will provide information to assist academic leaders to seek ways to create a more cohesive academic community for all students. Students can build strong bonds by interacting, building teams, and collaborating within their college community. AAMV students and community college students' interaction may create the social change needed to collaborate with support services to provide ways for students to succeed and graduate. This collaboration will provide a means to improve the campus climate at the community college.

### **Conclusion**

Finally, the executive summary identifies possible ideas that may assist to support the AAMV students at the community college. The mentors will learn how to use skills, knowledge, and resources they received from the veteran support services to achieve academic success. The findings indicate new best practice recommended to help AAMV at the community college. The veteran support services program can achieve its goals by helping veterans complete their degree program. The research findings indicate new trends in veteran support services. Veteran support services are being used at some community colleges to support social change. Some community colleges are matching student veterans with veterans on campus, individual support, and veterans in the community who can serve as mentors. Having a dedicated veteran support service center will allow AAMV the opportunity to study, mingle, and learn. Academic leaders can

observe, create new programs, and implement policy changes in order to help AAMV complete their degree program. Section 4 will consist of reflections; project strengths and limitations; and conclusions of this project study. Finally, an explanation of how the executive summary will offer academic leaders the opportunity to reevaluate support programs to help AAMV students' influence college completion.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Introduction**

Community colleges need to build, create, and provide effective resources to help all veteran students graduate. In this section, I provide reflections on my experience writing and developing this doctoral study and highlight my experience conducting research and developing an executive summary based on AAMV students' perceptions of factors that influence their college completion. The project strengths and limitations along with my experience developing the project and evaluation are also included. I also discuss and reflect on my experience as a scholar, practitioner, and agent of social change. My concluding comments complete this section of my doctoral study.

### **Project Strengths and Limitations**

The project is an executive summary that will be used to help stakeholders identify services needed to help AAMV students complete their community college degrees. My data analysis resulted in an executive summary that will be shared with stakeholders at the community college. In the executive summary, I provide an overview of the study, make recommendations based on the perceptions of the AAMV students, and highlight specific services that were identified by the participants to help these students successfully complete their degree programs. One benefit of an executive summary acknowledged by Hughes et al. (2005) is that it gives the study participants anonymity. AAMV participating in my research will remain anonymous.

This project was limited due to the small number of participants ( $N = 7$ ) from only one community college. Due to some of the challenges I faced recruiting AAMV

participants, the study site time restraints, the depth of participant meetings may have been limited. Adding to the limitations, the project was limited because there was very little existing research available that focused specifically on the community college experiences of AAMV students.

Including the perceptions of AAMV students attending other community colleges could have strengthened the findings of the project. A major strength of this study was gathering the data in a field setting and identifying and paying attention to an individual perspective (Fletcher, DeMassis, & Nordqvist, 2016). The findings may be useful to help understand AAMVs' perceptions; however, they are not intended to characterize all veterans' perspective of factors that influence community college completion.

### **Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

The local problem was AAMV are not completing their degrees at the local community college. An alternative approach to researching the problem would have been to conduct a qualitative case study that included collecting interview data from staff, the coordinator of veteran students, faculty, and administrators who make decisions regarding AAMV student services. I could have included a focus group interview with veterans to obtain additional information about their college experiences. Additional data might have included observations of veterans interacting in the class with instructors. These alternative approaches were not selected because the most suitable approach for this study was to collect interview data from the AAMV students to better understand their perceptions of factors that influence college completion. Another alternatives

measure could have been to use an expanded participant sample that included AAMV students from multiple community colleges.

Some alternative solutions to the problem for the community college are to monitor the progress of the AAMV students and ensure the students are administratively and academically supported by the staff and faculty. Other alternative solutions to approach the topic are to speak with the faculty for support options noticed during class interactions. Bailey, Smith-Jaggars, and Jenkins (2015) recommended improved advisement by using technology to provide feedback to students on their progress. These researchers stated that student support concerns should be a primary part of colleges' policies in order to increase college achievement rates.

The community college at the research site offered reasons for low veteran student success rates. The low rates of veteran student success are challenging, complex, and academic. Holzer and Baum (2017) noted that low completion rates at community colleges were a result of financial limitations and students being inadequately prepared for college. Some scholars have attributed poor outcomes to student academics, while others identified student support by improving the outcomes of these programs benefit student veterans (Berger & Fisher, 2013). Nevertheless, little research has been conducted to address the crucial needs that influence veteran students' community college completion.

### **Scholarship**

The doctoral process introduced me to a higher level of thinking, study engagement, and promoted scholarship, which allowed me see the problem through the

lens of a doctoral student. Concerning scholarship, I discovered existing theories and how new research is important. This study is a contribution to existing research because few studies, if any, have explored the relationship between student support and addressing the needs for AAMV positive educational outcomes in community colleges. Alternatively, there were so many other factors to consider such as delayed college enrollment, demographics and income; however, I discovered I had to gain expertise in research by interviewing AAMV participants and collecting information to help solve the problem. Reflecting on writing my doctoral manuscript, I discovered that this process helped me develop into a better research practitioner and scholar.

### **Project Development and Evaluation**

The high intensity of this doctoral process was challenging in the beginning. I was not prepared for the research and writing that was required during project development. Through this project study, I researched the problem and offered realistic solutions to help solve it. I had to coordinate with the community college administrators, adjust to their working environment, and evaluate what was working in terms of support programs for the AAMV students. My expectations were to collaborate and build relationships between the AAMV students and academic staff and administrators.

In project development, I learned from the AAMV student experiences. Students need resources and tools as they transition through community college. I learned how to document my research from veteran students' experiences and learned that veteran college students need educational help to achieve their academic success. With the

firsthand knowledge I gained from this study, I know that I need to oversee efforts to help veterans complete their community college education.

The executive summary was a challenge for me as a doctoral student. I developed rapport with AAMV students by letting them know I am a fellow veteran. I gave them examples of my experiences while attending the community college under study. Using the literature to identify best practices was challenging because I had never organized an executive summary before; however, I found some examples to help me organize the document in a logical fashion. Having an evaluation plan will allow me to examine the effectiveness of a program. Evaluation will also allow me to communicate the performance measurements, improvements, and evidence of what is needed to help veterans achieve their academic goals to the stakeholders.

### **Leadership and Change**

Leadership is taking responsibility and accountability to get the assignment completed. Change is hard, and countless factors can get in the way, particularly at community colleges where academic leaders try to improve student quality and efficiency. Factors that influence student success get in the way, such as work, time management, and experiencing significant cost that can prevent them from completion. As a leader, I had to accept change in order to grow. As a doctoral student I had to strategize and set priorities in order to meet program requirements. As a new doctoral student, I went into this research experience with unrealistic expectations. Completing the doctoral degree online at times felt isolating. Maintaining my accountability as a student

was challenging. There were times I procrastinated and did not always do my best work during the writing process.

During my change process, the college library became my closest ally. I was able to navigate sources and obtain the books needed to complete my writing. I also received tools and guidance from the writing center on how to communicate my ideas in writing. I felt supported at the doctoral residencies and participating in webinars to help with my writing process.

I reminded myself daily that I can complete the program. There were times I started to feel stressed out, and it was a challenge to balance family, school, and work. I developed a routine so I could focus and motivate myself in order to get through this program. I adapted to change and successfully embraced the process.

### **Analysis of Self as Scholar**

My experience of completing this doctoral project study is articulated by this statement from Nelson Mandela (2013), “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to help you change the world” (p. 4). This doctoral process has given me the tools, strength, and encouragement to help make life better for someone else. I have always been a giving person. My primary love language is giving, and I will use my education as my vehicle to transform and create a new learning environment for others. Being in the military, I have used many weapons. I never thought that I could use my gift of education to have an impact on other people lives. My weapon will not be used to destroy and kill but to foster meaning, change, and opportunities to educate and grow a better world for the higher education landscape.



As I reflect on my process as a scholar, I learned that I have to lay the foundation for investigating a problem as a researcher. As a scholar, I had to develop good study and organization habits early. I had to manage my time, which included numerous trips to the library or bookstore for scholarly reading material. I had to learn how to write and find my scholarly voice because I had never done it before.

One of the hardest adjustments to make as a scholar was staying on track. This process allowed me to apply my time and energy unparalleled in an educational setting. Applying my critical thinking skills to practical applications increased my vocabulary and helped me to develop confidence as a scholar and professional in the higher education research setting. This process helped me to gain the confidence to use my leadership in and knowledge of academic achievement in any field by using my scholarly expertise in higher education. I have learned how my scholarship will allow me to contribute to the body of knowledge by adding, introducing, and offering relevant knowledge and best practices. I can continue my professional growth by publishing in scholarly journals, working in different areas of higher education, and conducting research.

### **Analysis of Self as Practitioner**

As a practitioner, I learned that it is important to address trends, keep up with the changes in higher education, and apply best practices. Being a practitioner will give me the opportunity to collaborate with other colleges and universities to help with student support, community outreach, and veteran-supported programs. I enjoy collaborating, educating, and exchanging ideas to improve student success rates at community colleges.

My previous job as an education officer/instructor in the military allowed me to teach courses to aspiring young scholars to be successful in higher education. This experience as a teacher allowed me to see the avenues I can take as a doctoral professional, namely giving AAMVs the tools and guidance to help make decisions to improve their quality of life. As a teacher, I have always taken the responsibility of getting the hard assignments or teaching the unteachable. I was able to create a classroom atmosphere where I challenged student thought patterns intelligently. As an education officer, I worked with the administration to help students register for the correct courses, select housing accessible to campus, and both track and monitor their education and military performance. Simms (2013) noted,

Teachers do not want to be told what to do but develop practice as educators, we need to work with teachers so they can experience how practitioner research can inform, affirm, and sustain their classroom practice and give them voice in their profession. (p. 7)

In the writing process of a doctoral study, I learned self-discovery, how to organize my own research, and to apply lessons learned on how to conduct research. I learned that conducting research allows me to present relevant educational topics that can enhance my learning experience and the learning experiences of others. I found new gaps in the literature and offered recommendations for change and further research. I learned how to revise specific methods for gathering data. Merriam (2009) emphasized, “For most practitioners, doing research means designing a study that addresses some problem arising from practice, collecting and analyzing data relevant to the problem, and finally,

interpreting the results” (p. 267). Some doctoral students try to answer the problem before conducting the research. When conducting research everything is a process. As a practitioner, I can use my education and training to build community outreach opportunities and help influence the lives of others.

### **Analysis of Self as Project Developer**

The project genre was easily established but the project development was not an easy task. I considered three different projects topics before deciding on an executive summary; the evaluation report, position paper, and executive summary. I was feeling self-doubt and thoughts of quitting. I could not believe I collected and analyzed the data and was challenged by determining a project. As a project developer, I learned how to be organized, more understanding of a project, and how to develop the project. I needed to create suggestions based on the data analysis to share with the stakeholders at the community college.

Even though developing the executive summary was a challenge for me, I believe this position paper will be beneficial for stakeholders of the community college to use when supporting AAMV students. As a researcher I had to create personal contact and positive interaction with AAMV students and the community college academic leaders. I had to reflect on the students’ contributions to determine the best approach to develop my project.

### **Reflection on the Importance of the Work**

Stroebe, Wang, and Wright (2015) noted that social change is an alteration in human behavior; they observed how people communicate and how people develop

interactions that build relationships between groups to improve cultural and social differences within an organization. When AAMV transition from the military to the college environment, this is a major life event for these individuals to transition into civilian life. The executive summary will have impact on the local community college and the veteran students. After transitioning from military service, AAMV students return to engage in their local community. The community college can enrich the lives of these veteran students. When AAMV students engage in the college, they build relationships, which leads to significant social impact on the veterans, as well as their family at large to develop a new way of life.

### **Local Community**

Community colleges can offer an affordable education for students who are not ready for the four-year college or university. Like traditional college students, many student veterans face barriers to higher education such as the need for remediation, financial issues, and the challenges of balancing school with other aspects of life (Jenner, 2017, p. 3). O' Herrin (2011) observed, “as veterans arrive on campus, they will continue to look to administration, faculty, and other student veterans for support.” (p. 18).

The community college experience plays an important role to assist in the socialization for AAMV. The student experience may provide the opportunity to network in the community college environment. These students can use their training to become productive members in the community.

Earning a college degree will better equip AAMV to have a better quality of life outside the community college and provide increasing opportunities for meaningful

employment. A higher level of education is needed to compete for more complex jobs. Completion of technical training or other community college programs offered will assist AAMV to achieve professional goals beyond their former roles in the military. Community college completion offers AAMV students the opportunity to impact social change by applying the knowledge, skills, and education they receive to give back to the community.

Higher education is going help AAMV to have a better life for themselves and their family. Having a college degree may inspire change for AAMV. Obtaining a community college degree will enable these community college graduates to attend four year colleges or universities and seek fulfilling employment opportunities. They will have a better quality of life. Some AAMVs already have the experience from their military training to participate in a school forum. Having a college degree will prepare them intellectually and socially for career opportunities to earn significantly more money throughout their lifetime. “A college education is strongly connected to success in the labor market, not only do more jobs in the labor market require advance degrees, but the demand is projected to outstrip the supply” (Mukamal, Silbert, & Taylor, 2015, pp. 18-19). Earning a college degree will help AAMV students realize their career goals and prepare them for a challenging and prosperous career. The college completion will allow them to have so much positive change. I believe that education can considerably shape their decisions and actions to help change and make the world a better place for AAMV.

## **Far Reaching**

AAMV students earning a community college degree can share ideas that they learned with other veterans, they can be mentors to other veterans. Students influence each other by making recommendations for employment, teacher selection and to get students out of their comfort zone. This will build partnerships with the community and encourage future students to enroll in the community college. They will influence the jobs where they work by encouraging collaboration during projects and leadership skills learned at the community college. AAMV students can develop networking communities while attending college. These contacts can help them learn more about their field and network in order to obtain possible job opportunities. Earning a college degree is about opening up opportunities in life. Contributing to the effect of a broader community, “the more educated the citizens of a country are, the more likely their personal and societal economies are to develop and succeed” (Japee & Oza, 2018, p. 4).

The benefits of a college degree can improve employment outcome and earnings for students who graduate with a college degree. Community college completion provides a pathway to stability, to career opportunities and to earn additional income using their newly learned skills. The benefits of having a college degree will offer families a chance to excel. Additionally, with employment opportunities, students will receive benefits of health care and retirement investment and opportunities to succeed. AAMV completing college will have increased competitiveness to be promoted with the assurance of having a secured and satisfactory job.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

The importance of social change in community college is to build new and effective relationships between students, peers, and professors. The findings of this study will offer recommendations for the community college staff to help build relationships between the traditional and nontraditional students. AAMV students can share their experiences from being in combat in the classroom. This exchange of ideas will benefit traditional college students who went to college after graduating from high school and help them better understand the past military experiences of AAMV students. The findings of my study will help the stakeholders better understand the needs of AAMV students. My study addressed ideas on how AAMV students can complete their college education. These students will be more prepared to participate in employment, help develop the community with civic engagement, and influence leader skills in decision making of any organization. Additionally, my study will encourage AAMV to use skills to network and interact to make a difference in society.

Future research may offer a better understanding of how to effectively support AAMV students on campus; increase faculty, staff, and student engagement; and, identify ways to improve the college completion rates of AAMV students. Veteran resources need to be available for all veterans attending the community college. This research may be considered for publication so that all educational institutions that serve veteran students might benefit from this new knowledge.

## **Conclusion**

As I reflect on what I have learned through this doctoral research process, my findings indicated there is a need for relevant veteran student support services. AAMV students have a clear goal of completing the community college but express the need for additional resources and educational accommodations to help them achieve that goal. Stakeholders must take the lead to support AAMV community college completion by using their administrative influence to develop educational planning, access, counseling, and accommodations for AAMV students attending the community college.

Writing and developing this doctoral study allowed me to understand how to conduct research and to develop an executive summary based on AAMV students' perceptions of factors that influence college completion. Veteran students who participated in this study admitted that they were elated someone took the time to allow them to voice their concern to improve the community college for veteran students. When interviewed, AAMV students reported that someone needs to teach instructors, staff, and administrators how to help veterans to stay in school and be successful at the community college in order to graduate. The participants enjoyed giving feedback to improve their success of completing the community college.

With first-hand experience as a veteran and student, I will be using the results from my findings in the future when working with the student veteran population in the community college. AAMV should collaborate on the college campus, develop study partners, and connect with faculty on campus to use resources for class completion. I am hoping that my executive summary project will contribute to the body of knowledge to



assist those working with veteran students in higher education. The executive summary will contribute to the body of knowledge to support the AAMV student. I hope that other doctoral students will be encouraged to grow, build on my research, and develop scholarly conversations about AAMV students' successful completion of the community college.

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## Appendix A: The Project

### **Executive Summary**

Helping military service members and veterans' completing the community college can be challenging and rewarding at the same time. Veterans like most students are challenged with work, family, and military service. Receiving a community college degree can help veterans receive a promotion, earn higher wages; as well as, advance their career. AAMV may face educational setbacks, challenges, and obstacles while trying to complete the community college. The executive summary was developed from the findings of the study.

The setting of this study is a small community college with two campuses in both the urban and downtown areas with an annual enrollment of 4,864, 80% of whom are African American. The full time student population consists of 33%, while the part-time is 67%. The average age of the student is 22. This community college offers a variety of degree plans. Students can pursue an associate arts degree and/ or certificate programs in business, general education and health services. Situated in a large city, the community college offers exceptional learning, diverse campus climate, and community engagement for the residents of a community college. The community college also has inexpensive programs, vocational training, career planning and students can fulfil requirements to transfer to a 4-year college or university. In order to support the learning environment, the needs of the diverse learners, the college offers additional student support services.

The themes from the data analysis were: veteran students taking a break from school, student veterans have support, veterans using GI Bill; veteran students without a

mentor; veteran students with peer mentors, veteran students need computer lab, veteran students feeling alienated, and veteran advisors.

A list of the recommendations was created as a strategy to help AAMV succeed.

Recommendations include:

- Provide Academic Support
- Track Student Veterans
- Create Military Friendly Atmosphere
- Develop One-on-One Mentors to help Veterans
- Provide Student Programs and Services

### **The Problem**

The enrollment of active-duty service members and veterans attending the community college has increased because of the Post-9/11 GI Bill. This bill was introduced in 2008 as the Veterans Educational Assistance Act. A majority of the Veterans are enrolled in the community colleges and for-profit colleges. In 2013, over one million student veterans used their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to pursue advanced educational opportunities and the characteristic of the student veterans were 73%-80% of student veterans were males (Arminio, Grabosky, & Lang (2014).

The Post-9/11 GI Bill is a major component to support veteran education and community colleges need to create a more veteran friendly campus to track the needs of the veteran (Wheeler, 2012). College scholars, military leaders, and Department of Veteran Affairs are concerned that AAMV's are not completing their college degree. In a National Survey of Student Engagement NSSE, a survey was conducted where data from

2009 and 2012 was compared where college and university administrators were asked whether their institutions had geared up campus programs and services specifically designed to support the unique needs of veterans McBain, Kim, Cook, & Snead (2012).

Relatively “little research has been conducted on effective campus programs and services that successfully aid veterans in their college transition” (McBain, Kim, Cook, & Snead, 2012, p.11).

Community colleges need to identify the time to complete degrees, veterans’ challenges and characteristics of veterans attending college. The problem addressed in this study is AAMV’s are not completing their degrees at the local community college.

### **Theory of Adult Transition**

This study utilized Bean and Metzner (1985) model of nontraditional student attrition and Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) theory of adult transition to comprise the conceptual framework. These theories played a key role to better understand the veteran student’s college completion. Bean and Metzner (1985) model of nontraditional student attrition focused on how various demographics, social factors played a key role for adult learners in college completion. On the other hand, Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman’s theory (1995) supported the relationship between adult learners and student veterans’ as they matriculate into higher education.

### **Purpose and Design of Study**

The purpose of my research was to examine the veteran student perspectives to better understand their needs as veteran students. The participant interviews were conducted at a local community college, I obtained permission from Walden University

Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the local study site's IRB to collect data for this research study. The research question was: What are the perceptions of AAMV's regarding factors that influence college completion?

The data were collected utilizing qualitative methods. The qualitative tradition, or research approach reflects how "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam, 2009, p.5). Eleven research questions related to student experiences, effectiveness of the programs, interpretation of practices, and program impact on student learning, and mentorship guided my research. These questions identified the perceptions among AAMV's population regarding factors that influence community college completion. I had one on one interviews with seven participants. Participants were identified by posting fliers around campus to participate in the research study.

### **Study Findings**

I compared the interview transcripts from the participants to identify the common categories and themes. The focus of this study was to examine the perceptions of AAMV regarding factors that influence community college completion. I developed coding schemes and emerging themes to accurately convey the participants' answers to the questions. I organized the data from similar information. The data analysis resulted in these themes: Veterans taking a break from school, student veterans having support, veterans using the GI Bill, Veterans without a mentor, veteran with peer mentors, veterans needing a computer lab, veterans feeling alienated, veterans' advisors, and

veteran mentors. These study findings offered insight into the perceptions among AAMV students regarding factors that influence college completion.

### **Veterans Taking a Break From School**

Some veteran students find it hard to go back to school full-time. College is a place where AAMV can develop their skills but veterans cannot be overwhelmed by the academic course load. Veterans indicated difficulty in starting and stopping their education at varying points throughout their careers (American Council on Education, 2010). Participant A said, “You have to ask for help or drop a class if needed.” Some veterans receiving the GI Bill therefore, they cannot withdraw or drop a class without being penalized.

### **Student Veterans Having Support**

Student veterans having support were able to expand their new career and network. Student veterans and administrators also cautioned against using feedback from veterans at another institution to formulate plans— what works at one school may not be effective at another. Participant F said, “I’m dealing with PTSD issues and I try not to stay to myself,” and overall most students noted they did not want to ask questions in class and they did not participate in class when they felt alienated.

### **Veterans Using the GI Bill**

All AAMV participants in the study said, without the GI Bill they would not have an opportunity to attend college. Participant A stated, “the GI Bill is the only resource he has to complete his degree.” Some laws supporting veteran education have changed with the veterans using their GI Bill which can be challenging for student veterans trying to



use their GI Bill for college. It is not unusual for veteran students to be unaware of their educational benefits (Jones, McBain & Eagan, 2017).

### **Veterans Without a Mentor**

Some veterans without a mentor try to collaborate in groups with other veterans. However, some veterans pointed out that minimally engaged student groups may not be having their academic needs met. Participant C said, “he needs a Veteran military mentor at the college, because without a mentor it’s no one there to influence him or encourage him to college completion.”

### **Veterans With Peer Mentors**

Most mentors can create a dialogue and foster a friendly relationship to help AAMV succeed. Participant G said, “he has a mentor who attends another college or university.” He agreed that having a peer mentor allows him to have a positive influence on matriculating on campus. They already experienced some class hurdles and can point the mentee in the direction to receive academic success. Additionally, the mentors can identify shortcomings and pitfalls by serving as a positive role model on campus.

### **Veterans Needing a Computer Lab**

Most participants I interviewed, believe the college should offer computer labs during hours’ students are attending class. Shared resources can be difficult when most students are trying to use the college library computers at the same time. Having a dedicated computer lab just for veterans can eliminate some of the stress some veterans have completing their assignments. Participant A said, “he believes the college should offer computer labs during hours’ students are attending class.” At the community

college where I conducted my research, the computer lab and library are closed during some night classes when evening students need resource support.

### **Veterans Feeling Alienated**

Learning new environment and participating in class discussions can be stressful to veteran students returning back to the college environment. Wendy Lang, director of Operation College Promise, cautions about the lack of a one-size-fits-all response for the challenges student veterans face (Schnoebelen, 2013). Some student veterans who participated in the needs assessment at institutions of higher education expressed frustration about the difficulty of making connections with other students. Being alienated is uncomfortable in a college classroom and a crowded setting (Elliott, Gonzalez, & Larsen, 2011). Participant F said, “When he feels alienated, he does not like to be alone on campus.” Three participants also said, they did not want to ask questions in class and they did not participate in class when they feel alienated. Participants prefer to work in groups on a collaboration assignment. Student veterans can be instrumental in helping other veterans on campus and encouraging a more military-friendly college climate.

### **Veterans Advisors**

Participants B said, “More counselors were needed to help Veterans navigate through college.” Advisors need to follow up with AAMV as they progress through the community college. Dedicated veteran advisors are able to better support the AAMV at the community college, make appropriate recommendations to department chairs, and help build tools the veteran will need in order to be successful.

### **Veteran Mentors**

Participant C said, “he needs a Veteran military mentor at the college.” Some participants viewed mentors as role models who can positively influence student Veteran learning, achievement and help hold them accountable for educational accomplishment. Individuals will be available to help support student learning and promote collaboration between Veteran students, mentor and foster a positive transition from the military mind set to the classroom.

### **Recommendations**

The recommendations for future use at the community college are to provide academic support, help veterans choose their classes, help students develop good note taking skills, study habits and class participation activities. The following are recommendations that community college may be used to help veteran students complete their college degree:

- Provide Academic Support
- Track Student Veterans
- Create military Friendly Atmosphere
- Develop One-on One Mentors to help Veterans
- Provide Student Programs and Services

### **Provide Academic Support**

The ultimate goal is to update the community college Strategic Plans by encouraging program to help AAMV succeed by earning a college degree. It is key to have current student veteran perspectives when creating Academic Support. For an

example having key offices for veterans, such as the veterans school certifying official, academic affairs, admissions, bursars, counseling, financial aid, housing, and disability service. From a student perspective these services are needed when students are on campus.

Higher education leaders can provide Academic support by meeting with student veterans and their representatives to help assist with their educational concerns. Community colleges can implement program and services such as advising to help student veterans. These advisors need to be trained on veteran issues in order to help minimize confusion and stereo types. Faculty members need to be aware of veterans issues in order to support them in the classroom. For example, ensuring that instructors/faculty members use best practices and are aware of current policies, benefits and educational needs in order to support veteran students (Kim & Cole, 2013).

### **Track Student Veterans**

One recommendation by the American Council on Education (ACE) (2010) recommends that higher education organizations track veteran students by incorporating questions as it pertains to their military service during the application process. ACE also identified transition and isolation were cited as two of the biggest barriers to success for veterans. Identifying and tracking veterans and establishing an open line of communication is the first step in addressing these barriers to success. Organizers should continue to strengthen how they track veterans and evaluate pre-and post-college outcomes. Scholars believe the student military data lead to confounding issues and bias assessments from the researchers. Without data on military college and employment

experiences, we have yet to learn how service members and veterans access and succeed in higher education, and how they experience the workforce (ACE, 2015).

### **Create Military Friendly Atmosphere**

Veterans have unique life experience and have often spent a significant amount of time in military, overseas and abroad. Many AAMV expressed how difficult it can be in completing the community college after leaving the military. Community college leaders and veteran stakeholders can help AAMV complete the community college by creating a military friendly college atmosphere and finding out the services that many veterans need. Having a point of contact for veterans on campus can help them navigate their way reducing time spent lost and eliminating confusion. In addition, the Computer Lab staff need to be trained on how to help veterans while using the computers. Another recommendation is to include the veterans in a military friendly open discussion panel. According to ACE (2010), several veterans indicated a strong disconnect with other students, faculty, and staff. Create a dedicate lounge area for veterans only. Veterans and college staff agreed that student veteran labs are an extremely effective way to support veterans on campus (ACE, 2010). Northup Grumman Corporation, aerospace and defense company, had a representative attend this summit and offered support for computer science training that will help with transition and development for student veterans to adapt to civilian culture (ACE, 2015).

### **Develop One-on-One Mentors to Help Veterans**

Based on the comments of my participants, a one-on-one mentoring program is needed for Veteran students to be successful and complete the community college.

Offering a mentoring program will support students to interact with faculty, accomplish academic goals and benefit them financially. Mentoring for students in college helps students to feel more connected and engaged on campus, which can ultimately improve student outcomes (Pascarella & Terezini (2005). Students who serve as mentors to their peers may alleviate some of the workload of an academic advisor, match with a peer who can relate to the challenges faced in the transition from military into civilian culture, and share their experiences having already gone through the college matriculation process (ACE, 2015). This can be an opportunity for the community college to try to offer assistance to align AAMV students with mentors. The community college Veteran counselor can pair mentors with the Veteran Administration VA, business partners and students. The college must encourage mentoring participation with volunteers, students and faculty to ensure they are meeting regularly. Mentors should give one-year commitment and devote at least three hours per week for one-on-one mentoring.

### **Provide Student Program and Services**

Another recommendation that can contribute to AAMV success is allowing discussions to build the gaps between nontraditional students and veterans. Some veterans will find support groups very helpful, but others may feel overwhelmed. Promoting veteran services on campus. Nothing is more powerful than one veteran telling another that they may need to seek help. Some of the veterans' participants said it is not enough parking on campus. Veterans may need to have an open discussion with the veteran counselor regarding issues and concerns related to their community college

experience. Offering campus benefits and services, such as a day care at the community college might be helpful for working adult veteran students.

### **Conclusion**

The results of this study provided insight into factors that influence successful completion of African American Veteran students at a local community college. Bean and Metzner (1985) model of nontraditional student attrition and Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) models served as a foundation for my study on college students and adult learners in higher education. Recent research on student veterans has produced varied results (Moore, 2015). For an example the theories explained the anticipated, unanticipated, and nonevents veteran students endure. Going to college can be an anticipated transition to obtain a civilian job after receiving a college degree.

This executive summary displayed the AAMV students' perceptions regarding factors that influence community college completion. The data analysis identified some concerns of the African American male veteran students at the community college, the support services for veterans, and how the Post-9/11 GI Bill influenced the veterans' funding higher education process. There were numerous recommendations from the participants that suggest the college transition process should be simplified, students should be aligned with mentors and Academic support is needed to help student veterans navigate on the college campus easily.

Successful completion of the community college will help the students transition from being a veteran to being a civilian. Steps should be put in place for AAMV to learn and grow. The significance of AAMV completing the community college matters

because, both the community and the college will benefit. The findings of this study may assist Academic leaders to make informed decisions on veteran students. As community college graduates, these men may become productive members of society, educate others service members who might not be familiar with the college completion process, and contribute to the growth of their community. Finding ways to bridge the gaps and helping AAMV to become more empowered will strengthen the community, support the community college and its educational mission, and encourage AAMV students and graduates become self- advocates for their transition from military service to the life of a civilian.

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## Appendix B: Interview Questions for Participants

1. What specific support systems from college, home, and work contribute to your academic achievement?
2. What are the motivating factors that influenced you to enroll in college?
3. How does the GI Bill affect financing your college education?
4. What student services programs are you currently attending to help you complete college? Probing Question: Are there some programs that are available to you that you are not using? If so, explain the reason that you are not using a particular program.
5. Are you working with a veteran mentor as a college student?
6. How do you believe that a mentor could assist you?
7. What does receiving a college degree mean to you?
8. What programs should the college offer to help veteran students?
9. When you need additional support, where do you go to receive assistance?
10. Do you have any additional comments that might help me better understand your experience as a veteran student?
11. What do you do when you feel alienated on campus?