

AN EXPLORATION OF HOW U.S. ARMY OFFICERS ATTENDING THE U.S. ARMY
COMMAND AND GENERAL STAFF COLLEGE DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT TO
ATTEND GRADUATE SCHOOL: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

by

CHARLES DAVID VANCE

B.S., Pennsylvania State University, 1977

M.A., Webster University, 1988

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

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Abstract

This qualitative case study explored how U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC) students decided whether or not to attend graduate school. The focus was on how U.S. Army students made their decision. The purpose of the study was to illuminate the issues related to this decision in adult development, adult learning, career decision making, and participation in adult learning activities. These issues were explored using the students' own words during their interviews in which they described how they made their respective decisions.

This research analyzed interviews with 26 students, 12 who either decided to attend one of the graduate programs available to CGSC students or were already in a master's degree program, and 14 who elected not to attend any of the graduate programs offered. The analysis explored how U.S. Army CGSC students made their decision about graduate school, the process used in making their respective decisions, and the factors that influenced their decisions.

Analysis of the students' interviews answered the primary research question and the four subordinate research questions. Not surprisingly, all the students indicated that military career requirements, post-military career aspirations and requirements, family considerations, and previous academic experience influenced their decision whether or not to attend graduate school. The extent to which their decision was influenced varied, but everyone interviewed expressed some degree of influence of those factors. Not expected were the common themes that emerged from analysis of the interview transcripts of CGSC students. Those themes centered around self-efficacy and confidence, goal setting and achievement, persistence, time

management, life issues, guidance and mentorship, perceived quality of the degree or value, and the CGSC master's program (Master of Military Art and Science).

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Dedication

To my wife, without whom I would be a less complete individual and human being, and who gives meaning to my life and makes it complete.

To my children, Allison, Jennifer, and Michael, who are still pursuing their own academic goals; I hope I have provided a measure of encouragement and support, as it has been provided to me.

Preface

This dissertation was an exploration of how U.S. Army officers attending the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC) decided whether or not to pursue a master's degree. It is worth exploring because there is not a clear picture of how CGSC students make their decision. University graduate school directors enroll several hundred students at the beginning of each of the two class starts, in August and February. Faculty advisors discover their new students are enrolled in a master's program sometimes weeks after it has occurred. The college leadership exhorts its students to take advantage of the opportunity to experience "the best year of your lives," but not at the expense of the already challenging CGSC curriculum. This process repeats each year without a clear understanding of what motivates the students to undertake this additional challenge on top of an already difficult graduate level military academic experience, namely CGSC.

It was an exploration of how human beings, many of whom have experienced life-changing events in the course of their operational deployments, made decisions that would impact the next ten months of their lives. In some cases, the decision was easy and made in conjunction with a spouse. In other cases the decision was made tentatively, with perhaps less reflection on what it would entail than was warranted. But all made a decision, whether to enroll in a graduate program or not, based on a wide range of influences. The CGSC students who volunteered their time to be interviewed, described what influenced their respective decisions, and in many cases shared some very personal aspects of their lives for the sake of this research effort are the real heroes. They had nothing to gain, other than the satisfaction of knowing they may have contributed to a better understanding of a phenomenon that occurs every year at CGSC, enrolling in graduate school.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

U.S. Army officers increasingly find themselves in operational environments for which there are no clear solutions based on their previous experience, linear decision making techniques are inadequate, and the degree of uncertainty is unacceptably high (Dempsey, 2011). Over a decade of engagement in two overseas conflicts has highlighted the importance of critical thinking, rapid decision making, and awareness of unintended consequences to friendly actions. When adversaries and allies have a similar appearance, uniforms are non-standard or non-existent, and the conflict shifts from humanitarian assistance to combat in an instant, the demands on Army leadership are considerable. Experience in this environment and a degree of familiarity, if not comfort, with an ambiguous tactical situation and ever-changing threats contributes to their success. At the same time, the U.S. Army recognizes that some of the intellectual and cognitive skills needed to be successful result from advanced civilian education opportunities, such as graduate school (Petraeus, 2007). The Department of Defense (DoD) and the U.S. Army have always supported advanced civil schooling as reflected in policy, but have recently begun to increase their emphasis on advanced degrees as part of the career development progression of its officer corps.

The proportion of U.S. Army majors arriving at Fort Leavenworth to attend the Command and General Staff College (CGSC) who have already earned an advanced degree is fairly representative of the total force. There are 30,661 U.S. Army Majors in the Active Component, U.S. Army Reserve, and Army National Guard (Table 1-1). Over half (15,748) have earned an advanced degree of any type, defined as a master's degree or higher. Of that number, 11,104 have a master's degree, 4,644 have a post-master's degree (76), such as an

MBA; a first professional degree (3,209), such as LLS or DDS; a doctorate (1,355); or a post-doctorate degree (4) (DMDC, 2011).

Table 1-1. Army Majors with Advanced Degrees

Total US Army Majors	30,661	%
Master's	11,104	36%
Post-Master's	76	<1%
First Professional	3209	1%
Doctorate	1355	<1%
Post-doctorate	4	<1%
Total	15,748	51%

(DMDC, 2011)

Each new CGSC class roughly mirrors the total population of U.S. Army majors in terms of advanced degrees. Many of the students in each CGSC class arrive with an advanced degree; others enroll and successfully complete the requirements for a master's degree while attending CGSC. As shown in Table 1-2, at the beginning of academic year in August 2011, over 45% of U.S. students, including U.S. Army officers, arrived at CGSC with at least a master's degree. Some see an opportunity to take advantage of time away from a fast-paced operational tempo to get reacquainted with academia. Others see a dwindling force structure looming in the near future and want to position themselves to be competitive for retention and promotion.

Table 1-2. Advanced Degrees in CGSC Class 12-01

<i>Total Population (U.S. only): 984</i>		
<i>Type of degree</i>	<i>Number of students</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Master's	400	41%
Professional	45	5%
Doctorate	4	<1%
<i>Total Degrees</i>	<i>449</i>	<i>46%</i>

(U. S. Army Command and General Staff School, 2011)

Many find that adjusting to the CGSC academic environment is sufficiently challenging in light of competing personal and family issues resulting from extended absences on operational deployments. There are many different perspectives to consider, and the purpose of this research was to explore how CGSC students decide whether or not to attend graduate school. Regardless of what that decision is, to attend graduate school or not, the intent of this study was to capture the students' words and attempt to understand how they made their respective decisions. The purpose of the study was not to question the quality of their decision making process, the validity of their decision, or their level of dedication, but simply to explore how they made their decision. Exploring how they decide will improve the Army's understanding of a key leadership cohort, U.S. Army majors, those officers poised on the threshold between direct leadership and organizational leadership.

Some of the master's degrees earned by CGSC students were begun before the individuals arrived. In Class 12-01, 124 of the incoming students were already enrolled in a master's degree program when they began CGSC. Regardless, by the time the class graduated in June 2012, an additional 484 students had earned a master's degree as shown in Table 1-3.

Table 1-3. Class 12-01 Graduate Degrees Earned

Total U.S. CGSC Students: 984		
	Students	Percentage
Civilian Universities	405	41
Master of Military Art and Science	79	20
Total	484	49

(Registrar, Command and General Staff College, 2012)

This number is based on the Academic Evaluation Reports completed by each student's staff group advisor and summarized in the college registrar's database, and reflects master's degrees earned by all CGSC students, not only U.S. Army students. In some cases this was a second master's degree, so the number of students who arrived with an advanced degree cannot simply be combined with the number who earned one while attending CGSC to arrive at an accurate total, but the approximate numbers are still instructive. By graduation, nearly 87% of the class has an advanced degree of some kind, usually a master's.

This figure tracks closely with the overall number of advanced degrees earned by lieutenant colonels, the next higher rank, across the Army, as shown in Table 1-4.

Table 1-4. U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonels with Master’s Degrees

U.S. Army LTCs with Advanced Degrees Total Number of LTCs – 10,195		
Degree	Number with degrees	Percentage
Master’s	6,632	65
First Professional	1,381	14
Doctorate	380	4
Total	8,393	83

(DMDC, 2012)

Of the total number of lieutenant colonels on active duty in the U.S. Army, 65% have a master’s degree, an increase from the 36% of majors on active duty (Table 1-1). While the reason for the difference between the percentage of majors entering CGSC with master’s degrees and the total number of majors in the Army with master’s degrees is unclear, the perception on the part of CGSC students that a master’s degree is an “unofficial requirement” for selection to lieutenant colonel may be understandable. Majors see their commanders and other more senior officers with master’s degrees, and may view that as an expected part of their professional development. One of the CGSC students interviewed described how his boss advised him in no uncertain terms that “now would be a great time to get your Master’s

degree,” which for him was while serving as a training company executive officer at Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

The evolution from company grade officer, who is usually assigned at the company level, to field grade officer who is usually assigned at the battalion and brigade level, and eventually to senior commander requires development of different leadership skills, critical thinking skills, and decision making skills. The U.S. Army sees advanced degrees as key to the development of those skills in its leaders (Petraeus, 2007; Dempsey, 2011). Improved understanding of how each officer makes his or her decision will increase the ability of the Army to provide guidance and support to that effort.

Who Attends Graduate School

The specific question of who enrolls in graduate school has changed over the past several decades. The picture of a typical white, male graduate student has gradually been replaced by a more diverse population of graduate students (Crissey, 2009; Hayes, 2001; Mullen, et al., 2003; Nevill & Chen, 2007). More women than men enroll in graduate school, but the numbers vary according to the specific type of degree program. In addition, the proportion of graduate school enrollees is greater for Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Black students than for White students (Nevill & Chen, 2007). Demographic changes in graduate school enrollment reflect a shift in sociological and economic trends. The number of graduate students who return to school after having spent some time in the workforce has increased due to adverse economic conditions. They are seeking an advanced degree to improve their “employability” and, in many cases, to qualify for employment after having lost their job. These graduate students are characterized by a wide range of age groups, but the “nontraditional” students are usually older, working, and involved in a wide variety of

other activities in their lives (Wendler, Bridgeman, Cline, Millett, Rock, Bell, & McAllister, 2010). They do not view graduate school as a path to their first career, but rather as a path to move up in their current career path or to pursue another one. In a similar manner, many U.S. Army officers view graduate school as another milestone in their academic and professional development.

Military Needs for Graduate Degrees

As U.S. Army officers continue to serve in an era of persistent conflict, opportunities for them to broaden their academic experiences and develop new and better ways to think critically about the future operational environment are limited. Frequent and repetitive combat tours and deployments in non-combat roles to areas of conflict reduce the time and energy available for professional development through education. The DoD and the U.S. Army recognize the need for officers with advanced degrees. DoD policy on graduate education describes three fundamental purposes of graduate education programs for officers. The first is to “raise professional and technical competency;” the second is to provide incentives for officers with the “capacity for professional growth;” and the third is to “fulfill a present need, anticipated requirement, or future capability” (U.S. Department of Defense [DoD], 2008, p. 2). The DoD policy also requires the Secretaries of the Military Departments to “ensure graduate education programs develop critical thinking and decision-making skills” (DoD, 2008, p. 3).

The DoD is specific in its support for graduate degrees. DoD Instruction No. 1322.10, *Policy on Graduate Education for Military Officers*, states that:

It is DoD policy that funded graduate education programs shall be established for uniformed military officer personnel of the Department of Defense. The intent of the

Department's graduate education programs are to provide fully or partially funded educational opportunities in disciplines that fulfill a present need, anticipated requirement, or future capability and that contribute to the effectiveness of the Military Departments and the Department of Defense. (DoD, 2008, p. 2)

In addition, the Secretaries of the Military Departments (defined as the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps) "shall ensure graduate education programs develop critical thinking and decision-making skills deemed vital in preparing military officers to work in the Service, joint, interagency, and international environments" (DoD, 2008, p. 3). Under the provisions of DoD Instruction No. 1322.25, *Voluntary Education Programs*, the Secretaries of the Military Departments are required to "Establish, maintain, coordinate, and operate voluntary education programs . . . leading to the award of undergraduate and graduate degrees" (U.S. Department of Defense [DoD], 2011b, p. 7). All the military services have similar policies that describe the requirement to support "education programs for Service members by providing worldwide staff, resources, facilities, and funding" (U.S. Department of Defense [DoD], 2005, p. 3). The individual services recognize the benefits of continuing education for their soldiers, airmen, sailors, and marines and address these considerations in policies unique to each Service's needs and requirements.

The Department of the Army regulation that provides guidance on the professional development of the officer corps states that "Officers should take advantage of opportunities for advanced education" (U.S. Department of the Army [DA], 2010a, p. 31). In fact, Army officers "are encouraged to pursue advanced degrees particularly when there is an opportunity to do so in coordination with resident training" (DA, 2010a, p. 31). This encouragement includes support for graduate education in its policy regulations. Army

Regulation 621-1, *Training of Military Personnel at Civilian Institutions*, describes the Army goal “To educate selected officers on a full-time basis to an advanced degree level” (U.S. Department of the Army [DA], 2007b, p. 1). The regulation describes Army “policies for full-time education programs” that “meet the Army’s need for . . . officers to be educated at the . . . graduate degree levels” (DA, 2007b, p. 1). These programs differ from the voluntary education programs offered to CGSC students, who attend classes on Fort Leavenworth during their off-duty time, rather than full-time, but the importance of graduate degrees is clearly stated.

Research on the benefit to an Army officer in terms of career advancement and promotion are clear: an advanced degree results in a 60% increase in probability of promotion to Lieutenant Colonel and Colonel (Chae, 2008). Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-3, *Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Career Management*, describes two objectives of the Army Advanced Civilian Schooling program: to meet Army requirements and to provide officers an opportunity to achieve their higher education goals (DA, 2010a).

Graduate school provides a degree of professional self-improvement and increased probability of promotion for Army officers. The U.S. Army encourages its leaders, particularly its commissioned officers, to obtain graduate degrees through many different programs, to include fully-funded, tuition assistance, fellowships, and scholarships (U.S. Department of the Army [DA], 2009). Chang Kyu Chae argues that increased probability of promotion is a good indicator of improvement in productivity and performance (Chae, 2008). His research “investigated the effects of a graduate education on promotion to Lieutenant Colonel and Colonel” (Chae, 2008, p. 3) and found a positive correlation between promotion

and graduate school. If these fundamental components of leader development are associated with promotion, then it is clear that graduate school contributes to improvement in both productivity and performance, and is an essential component of the professional development of U.S. Army majors.

The *United States Army Operating Concept 2016-2028* establishes training and education goals for Army officers in the future operational environment (U.S. Department of the Army [DA], 2010b). In that document, General Martin Dempsey, formerly the Army Chief of Staff and now the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, described the need for all soldiers to retain a competitive advantage over the enemies they will face on the battlefield. He said “The challenges of future armed conflict make it imperative for the Army to produce leaders and forces that exhibit a high degree of operational adaptability” (DA, 2010b, p. iii). “One of the best countermeasures against the uncertainty of the future operational environment is a well educated cadre of Army leaders” (DA, 2010b, p. 35). To retain this advantage, officers must be able to understand their environment and adapt faster than their enemies. Achieving this advantage requires the Army to “place renewed emphasis on training, education, and leader development” (DA, 2010b, p. 34). Dempsey describes the importance of promoting “the value of education and lifelong learning” to ensure Army officers can “think critically, operate in uncertainty, and adapt as needed” (DA, 2010b, p. 36). Therefore, the Army’s need for enhanced educated officers as well as the possibility of promotion for the officer are potential reasons an Army officer might choose to undertake graduate education.

Benefits of Graduate Degrees

The benefits to officers while still on active duty have long been recognized. Increased probability of promotion, more positive evaluations, and higher selection rates for promotion and key assignments all positively correlate with graduate education (Kabalar, 2003; Lianez & Zamarripa, 2003; Kahraman, 2007; Pearson, 2007). The National Academy of Sciences concludes that a graduate degree provides “career-long enhancement of the abilities of an officer” (Murray & Fletcher, 1997, p. 3). A Naval Postgraduate School thesis concluded that graduate degrees “have a positive effective on the retention and promotion of Marine officers” (Branigan, 2001, p. i). In a similar manner, DoD civilian employees with graduate degrees who are able to enter the civil service at a higher grade are “more likely to receive top ratings” (Celik, 2002, p. v) from their supervisors.

Graduate degrees can be important in post-Army career planning as well. The attractiveness of a graduate degree in the civilian population is supported by increases in both enrollments and awarding of master’s degrees over the past few decades (Wendler et al., 2010). According to the U.S. Department of Education, the number of master’s degrees awarded has increased steadily over the past 35 years (Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2009). In the 1969-1970 academic year, 208,291 master’s degrees were awarded; by 1989-1990 this number had increased to 324,301, and by 2007-2008 had reached 625,023, tripling over nearly four decades (Snyder et al., 2009). The magnitude of this increase attests to the increasing importance graduating college students and individuals returning to school from the work force attribute to a graduate degree. The U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) states that “prior educational attainment of adults was positively associated with participation in educational activities; the overall participation rate

increased with each level of education” (Snyder et al., 2009). The benefits of an advanced degree in the current economic environment, in particular a master’s degree, are positive and the numbers of degrees awarded continue to trend upward (Wendler et al., 2010).

Graduate school is increasingly important as a means to career advancement, increased status within one’s profession, and greater economic potential (Snyder & Dillow, 2011). The median annual income for a man with a bachelor's degree in 2009 was around \$62,440, as opposed to \$79,340 for men with a master’s degree (Snyder & Dillow, 2011). For a woman with a bachelor’s degree, median annual earnings were \$46,830; a woman with a master’s degree earned \$61,070 (Snyder & Dillow, 2011). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2004 master’s degree holders earned an average of \$2.5 million over a 40-year working life, while individuals with only a bachelor’s degree averaged \$2.1 million (Crissey, 2009). The average earning of individuals with master’s degrees in 2004 was \$1,102 per week, almost \$200 more per week than individuals with bachelor’s degrees. The Census Bureau’s *Educational Attainment in the United States: 2007* showed that a master’s degree increases average annual income 32% over a Bachelor’s degree (Crissey, 2009).

Given the monetary and promotion benefit to an officer’s career and potential benefit after leaving active service, the issue of why all officers do not pursue a graduate degree suggests that impediments or barriers to attending graduate school may play a significant role. The following section will address some of the issues associated with participation in adult education activities in a broad sense, and then focus on more specific challenges CGSC students face in that regard.

Participation Issues

An individual's self-evaluation plays a role in a CGSC student's decision about attending graduate school, but is only part of what Cross describes in her Chain-of-Response (COR) Model for Understanding Participation in Adult Learning Activities (Cross, 1981). She emphasizes the importance of recognizing that "participation in a learning activity . . . is not a single act but the result of a chain of responses, each based on an evaluation of the position of the individual in his or her environment" (Cross, 1981, p. 125). Current life transitions, attitudes about education, level of motivation, and the presence of special opportunities all contribute to the calculus of whether an individual will decide to attend graduate school. In *The Meaning of Adult Education*, Eduard Lindeman describes the impetus for adult education being centered around "the student's needs and interests" (Lindeman, 1961, p. 6) at that particular moment in his or her life. If a person is in a situation that calls for "adjustments," the motivation to engage in adult learning may be present and contribute to his or her motivation. Wlodkowski describes four conditions that "enhance adult motivation to learn: inclusion, attitude, meaning, and competence" (Wlodkowski, 2008, p. 102). Bandura describes participation in learning activities in terms of individual behavior being a function of interaction with the environment, which is in turn influenced by the individual, which also influences the way individuals behave (Bandura, 2001). This three-way interactive model contributes to an individual's level of self-efficacy, resulting in a belief of either success or failure as a result of participation in some activity.

For many military officers, the challenge of balancing family considerations, the impact of multiple deployments, and a lack of personal motivation to engage in additional

academic pursuits mitigate against graduate school. These potential barriers are discussed in the following sections.

Family considerations.

Factors that mitigate against enrolling in a graduate degree program are varied, and often include marital status and children. “Family responsibilities . . . may impose limitations on graduates’ . . . likelihood of applying to and enrolling in graduate school” (Nevill and Chen, 2007, p. 14). According to the 2007 Department of Education longitudinal study, graduates who were married at the time they completed their bachelor's degree or who married four years after completing their undergraduate studies were less likely to enroll in a graduate degree program than single graduates (Nevill and Chen, 2007). Thus, being married mitigates against attending graduate school, but since the vast majority of CGSC students are already married, another perspective on family considerations becomes relevant. In fact, the operational tempo, number of overseas deployments, and extended separations associated with those deployments are cited in interviews with CGSC faculty as major considerations when considering enrollment in graduate school (Appendix E).

Multiple deployments.

In the CGSC class, 12-01, approximately 97% of the Army students have deployed in support of ongoing military operations (U. S. Army Command and General Staff School, 2011). Of the 836 Army CGSC students, 813 had deployed at least once to a combat zone, and a majority (80%) had deployed more than one time to combat, as shown in Table 1-5. “Soldiers on their third or fourth deployment were at significantly higher risk than Soldiers on their first or second deployment for mental health problems and work-related problems” according to a report by the U.S. Army Medical Command Surgeon General (U.S. Army

Medical Command, 2008, p. 4). Such mental health and work-related problems may influence the ability of CGSC students who have experienced multiple deployments as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) or Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) to decide whether or not to attend graduate school.

Table 1-5. Multiple Combat Tours (Class 12-01)

Total U.S. Army CGSC Students - 836		
Combat Tours	Students	Percentage
1	169	21
2	350	42
3	204	24
4 - 8	90	10
Total	813	97

(U. S. Army Command and General Staff School, 2012)

There are many opportunities to explore the graduate school programs available to newly-arriving CGSC students. Two major events, Professional Development and Education and the Post Activities, Information, and Registration (PAIR) Day, comprise the initial exposure to graduate school programs available. Professional Development and Education consists of two half-day sessions during which tables, displays, and booths are set up in a common area of the Lewis and Clark Center, the main instructional facility for CGSC. Representatives from the graduate school programs are available to meet with CGSC students during and in between their in-processing activities. It would be virtually impossible for an incoming CGSC student not to see and become aware of the graduate school opportunities while attending Intermediate Level Education (ILE). PAIR Day is an

all-day Saturday, “country fair” event, at which all the installation activities and many of the local businesses and service industries welcome the newly-arrived officers and their families. Doctors and dentists, fraternal organizations, insurance and real estate companies, churches, and car dealers, along with installation Boy Scouts, Rod and Gun Club, Youth Activities, and post chapel organizations all have representatives at PAIR Day. Understanding the overall academic environment at CGSC contributes to understanding how CGSC students decide whether or not to attend graduate school.

Academic Environment

Fort Leavenworth provides a broad array of opportunities for continuing adult education. Understanding the graduate school-level experience of the ILE course and other graduate school opportunities available for CGSC students requires an understanding of the overall academic environment. A brief description of that environment follows.

In virtually all instances, U.S. Army CGSC students have arrived at Fort Leavenworth from high-stress, fast-paced assignments, whether overseas or stateside. Some have recently returned from Afghanistan or another hazardous duty assignment, while others have been assigned to a major staff position that consumed the majority of their personal and professional waking hours. Unlike a civilian graduate school program, attending CGSC is their new job; their “place of duty” is in the classroom. Many they find themselves struggling with achieving balance between work and family, work being defined as attending ILE classes. They find themselves struggling with new relationships both within and outside their families, with adjusting to being part of a 16-person staff group that often meets outside of class for social activities that involve spouses and children, and in many cases reacquainting themselves with a more or less “normal” day-to-day routine. Many Army

officers have not been in an academic environment for over a decade, and find the new context somewhat disorienting.

U.S. Army Command and General Staff College.

The U.S. Army Command and General Staff College is located at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. It is the U.S. Army's center for educating its mid-grade officers, predominantly majors, but also some captains and lieutenant colonels (Dean of Academics and Command and General Staff School (CGSS), 2008). It has two sessions that run simultaneously for most of the academic year. One begins in August and ends with graduation in June; the other begins in February and graduates in December. Nearly one thousand Army officers attend and graduate from CGSC every year. Approximately 200 officers from the U.S. Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and sometimes the Coast Guard attend each year, as well as two dozen civilians from various government agencies, such as the State Department, Border Patrol, or intelligence community. In addition, approximately a hundred officers from other nations attend under various state department and international military training and exchange programs. The college is accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA) and is a master's degree-producing institution.

CGSC faculty.

The CGSC faculty consists of both active duty military personnel and civilian instructors. The active duty military personnel are mostly from the Army, but each of the other three major services (Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps) has an element on the college staff and approximately a dozen instructors on the faculty (Dean of Academics and CGSS, 2008). The civilian instructors are overwhelmingly retired military officers, usually lieutenant colonels or colonels, who successfully completed careers that ranged from 20 to

over 30 years in length. The faculty is organized into five teaching departments for administration and curriculum development: Tactics, Joint and Multinational Operations, Command and Leader Development, Logistical Operations, and History (Dean of Academics and CGSS, 2008).

CGSC student population.

Over half of CGSC students already have a master's degree or higher when they arrive, as shown in Table 1-2. In Class 12-01, for example, the U.S. student population was 984. Of that number, 585 either already had a graduate degree or were working on one (U.S. Army Command and General Staff School, 2012). CGSC students' participation in graduate degree programs should be positively influenced by their previous successful completion of undergraduate degree requirements (Nevill & Chen, 2007). Other characteristics of CGSC students that indicate a likelihood of pursuing a graduate degree according to the NCES Study are employment status (all are currently employed), professional continuing education requirements (officers in all the services have such requirements), and household income (all students are in the \$50,000 to \$75,000 annual income bracket or higher) (Nevill & Chen, 2007).

Master of Military Art and Science program.

As part of ongoing professional development afforded to all military students, the Master of Military Art and Science (MMAS) is the master's degree associated with the Command and General Staff Course curriculum. It is administered internally by the college, has its own diploma and examination requirements, to include a thesis on a military-related subject, and is accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (Dean of

Academics and CGSS, 2008). The MMAS degree can be in either a subject related to military operations or a historical subject, but in either case must be a military-related topic.

Graduate programs.

Because officers are stabilized in a school environment, numerous universities, such as Kansas State University, University of Kansas, Central Michigan University, and Webster University, offer graduate degree programs that an officer can complete in the time he or she is attending CGSC. These programs impose additional academic requirements on the students: one or two classes a week, either in the evenings, on weekends, or both, in addition to the ongoing CGSC curriculum. Online degree programs are also available to CGSC students who prefer more flexibility or greater autonomy in their academic pursuits. This convergence of institutional opportunity and time encourage many officers to decide to begin a graduate program, but little is known about the decision making process that determines whether an officer makes a positive decision as opposed to a negative decision and declines to pursue a graduate degree.

Characteristics of Adult Learners

Adult learners are different than younger learners, and CGSC students are different from other adult learners as well (Kasworm, Polson, & Fishback, 2002). As adult learners, CGSC students have accumulated life experiences that are different from those of traditional-aged college and graduate students and from other adult students. Adult learners have “diverse goals and motives” (Kasworm et al., 2002, p. 27) and may have a great need “to develop an understanding of alternative actions and resources” (Kasworm et al., 2002, p. 27) relating to participation in learning activities. They often have well-established opinions and beliefs that have developed over time and reinforced by stressful life experiences, in some

cases more so among CGSC students who have experienced multiple combat deployments. Adult learners are usually mature, and prefer to be treated as adults; likewise, they usually prefer not be lectured to, and learn best in a democratic, participatory, collaborative learning environment (Knowles, 1980).

Adult learners need to know why they are learning something, how it fits in with the greater scheme of things, and how it is relevant to their current life situation (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). They are more self-directed, more autonomous, and usually able to determine an appropriate course of action. However, they are also somewhat impatient in the pursuit of learning objectives, and likewise intolerant of work that does not have immediate and direct application to their own particular learning objectives (Knowles et al., 2005).

Adult Development

CGSC students are continuing to develop as adults and can be thought of as being somewhere along a spectrum or range of development. Determining precisely where along that continuum they are may be less important than recognizing and appreciating the concept of adult development as it applies to CGSC students and being aware that not all students are at the same stage or level of development. For some adults, change is a normal stage of life that presents itself when appropriate, whereas for other adults it is not normal at all, but rather a response to various new conditions (Hoare, 2006), either positive or negative. Carol Hoare writes that “adult learning is a change in behavior, a gain in knowledge or skills, and an alteration or restructuring of prior knowledge (Hoare, 2006, p. 11). Merriam and Clark describe adult development as “change over time . . . generally growth-oriented,” but

that some changes “represent perspectives that are more inhibited, restrictive, and less developed” (Hoare, 2006, p. 30).

Jack Mezirow takes a cognitive and rational view of adult development that includes ten phases, some or all of which may apply to the situation in which CGSC students find themselves (Mezirow, 1991). He describes a process of perspective transformation that begins with some event, a “distorting dilemma,” that triggers personal appraisal or self-examination. Such an event could be arrival at Fort Leavenworth and beginning the CGSC school year, an event that may highlight the contrast between the high operational tempo and constant danger of a recent deployment and the relatively slower pace and security of an academic environment. The distorting dilemma is followed in many cases with self-examination and feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame, any of which may also relate to previous operational assignments, soldiers and friends left behind, and anxiety over learning to adapt to a new environment. CGSC students may find themselves struggling to cope with the unfamiliar academic environment and begin to explore options for new roles (as a student), new relationships (as a member of a CGSC staff group or class), and new actions (reading, discussing, argumentative writing, and taking examinations).

Merriam and Clark describe the sociocultural context as a determinant of “what people need to know, educational opportunities that are offered, the ways adults learn, and how this learning affects development. How an individual ‘develops’ is a function of historical and cultural norms in conjunction with chronological age” (Hoare, 2006, p. 38). However, chronological age refers to an individual’s age, as opposed to “social time,” or the timetable applied to the sequence of life events. Attending CGSC may be occurring at the expected chronological and social time; graduate school, however, may still be an event an

individual still views as far off in the distant, dim future; he or she may not be ready from either a chronological or a social time perspective.

Career Development and Decision Making

How CGSC students decide whether or not to attend graduate school may be better understood by exploring the various theories of career development and decision making. Career development theories help explain how and why people decide on the particular career they pursue. Part of career decision making entails career change decision making, career development, as well as career stages, any of which help explain and inform the graduate school decision making process. Deciding to attend graduate school may be viewed in terms of a stage or phase of a person's career development. Whether viewed as a continuous progression, a series of steps or stages, or phases along a continuum, the decision to attend graduate school is a career development decision.

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) describes "how people develop vocational choices, make and remake occupational choices, (and) achieve varying levels of career success and stability" (Brown and Lent, 2005). It is based on Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory which emphasizes the complex ways in which people, their behavior, and environments mutually influence each other (Bandura, 2001).

Linda S. Gottfredson developed a theory of Circumscription and Compromise in which she looked at how career aspirations developed. She describes four stages of circumscription in which an individual narrows the choices available based on sex type, prestige, and accessibility (Gottfredson, 2002). Based on her theory, conclusions about what kinds of work are suitable or unsuitable are made by individuals as children before they fully understand them. In the final stage, occurring at age 14 and above, the individual identifies

which of the previously-determined acceptable choices are “most preferred and most accessible” (Gottfredson, 2002, p. 100). Compromise occurs as individuals adjust their aspirations to fit the reality of the world in which they live and work; they abandon some of their hopes as they perceive barriers to implementing “their most-preferred choices” (Gottfredson, 2002, p. 101). This phenomenon can be extrapolated to pertain to decision making about graduate school if a person has unduly restricted occupational choices due to lack of self-knowledge, knowledge about occupations, or unexamined sex-role or racial-ethnic stereotypes (Gottfredson, 1981). A CGSC student may perceive his or her abilities to be insufficient to meet the academic requirements of a graduate school program, or may be influenced by “unexamined sex-role or racial-ethnic stereotypes.”

Irving L. Janis and L. Mann state that conflict is caused whenever a person is faced with making a decision, thus producing stress and uncertainty (Brown, 2007). CGSC students may view making a decision about graduate school as a conflict that entails some level of risk and that requires either action or inaction, depending on the individual’s preparation to make that kind of decision.

One of the determinants of whether or not a person will attempt a task and persist at it relates to individual self-efficacy (Lemme, 2006), or beliefs and expectations about whether one has the ability to successfully accomplish a particular task. According to Carol Hoare, individuals can exert intentional influence over their experiences and actions, the circumstances they encounter, the skills they acquire, and thus ultimately the course of their development (Hoare, 2006). People develop beliefs about what the future may bring, a subset of which is the belief in one’s capacity to control significant life events (Hoare, 2006).

A CGSC student has a choice about graduate school and the impacts it may have on his or her time at the college.

Statement of the Problem

The problem this qualitative case study addressed was the lack of understanding about how CGSC Army officers decide whether or not to attend graduate school.

Approximately half of each new class already has an advanced degree of some kind, whether a master's degree, a doctorate, or a professional degree such as what is earned by doctors, dentists, lawyers, and so forth. According to senior Army leaders, the remainder of each class would benefit from an advanced degree in terms of leader development and preparation for future duty assignments (Petraeus, 2007; Dempsey, 2011). In *A Leader Development Strategy for a 21st Century Army* (ALDS), senior leaders describe the importance of developing “the ability to reason, to think critically and creatively, (and) to anticipate consequences and to solve problems” (U.S. Department of the Army [DA], 2009a, p. 8). *The United States Army Operating Concept 2016-2028* describes graduate education as critical to meeting future operational challenges. With respect to the full spectrum operations over the past decade in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, “Education will provide the intellectual grounding that contributes to effective decision making in ambiguous operational situations” (DA, 2008, p. 31). The importance of attending and successfully completing a graduate school program is recognized.

Most Army officers pass through CGSC at some point in their careers, and for many it will be their last educational opportunity for professional development. After CGSC, many complete a successful career without attending any further military schools, such as the U.S. Army War College or the war colleges of one of the other services. Likewise, it may be the

last opportunity many of them will ever have to obtain an advanced degree. Understanding how CGSC students decide whether or not to attend graduate school may enable the Army and CGSC leadership to determine how to encourage more to do so. Research on field grade officers' enrollment in graduate school across all the armed services has addressed the pros and cons in terms of increased income, promotion potential, and personal satisfaction. However, no research exists that specifically addresses how officers attending CGSC decide whether or not to attend graduate school.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how U.S. Army officers attending CGSC decide whether or not to attend graduate school.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research question: How do U.S. Army officers attending the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College decide whether or not to attend graduate school? The question of “how” versus “why” is based on Creswell’s guidance: “*Begin the research questions with the words what or how to convey an open and emerging design.* The word *why* often implies that the researcher is trying to explain why something occurs, and this suggests to me a cause-and-effect type of thinking that I associate with *quantitative* research instead of a more open and emerging stance of qualitative research” [italics in original] (Creswell, 2009, p. 130). As an exploratory study, the intent is to “explore a process” (Creswell, 2009, p. 130), specifically the process of CGSC students making their respective decisions about attending graduate school. Why they decide may become interwoven with how they decide, and the “cause and effect” mentioned above may

play a role, but the intent is to “focus on a single phenomenon or concept” (Creswell, 2009, p. 130), how they made their respective decisions.

Subordinate questions that served to inform the primary research question were:

1. Do military career requirements influence a CGSC student's decision to attend graduate school? If so, how do they influence the decision? If not, why not?
2. Do post-military career aspirations and requirements play a role in a CGSC student's decision to attend graduate school? If so, how? If not, why not?
3. Do family considerations influence a CGSC student's decision to attend graduate school? If so, how? If not, why not?
4. Does previous academic experience influence a CGSC student's decision to attend graduate school? If so, how? If not, why not?

These subordinate research questions were developed from the literature review and from interviews with both graduate school program managers and CGSC faculty members who counsel and advise CGSC students.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted with four CGSC students. The first two interviews were not recorded, no interview protocol was used, and the data was not included in the analysis; they were conducted to get a sense of how the interview process would actually occur. The second two pilot interviews were conducted to verify the efficacy of the interview protocol. Each student was asked to sign an informed consent form (Appendix C), their interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed, and their narratives were analyzed and included in the research data. Significant changes were made to the interview protocol as a result of the *second* two pilot interviews. Specifically, the COR model described by K. Patricia Cross

(1981) was adopted as the template for the questions in the interview protocol in order to provide a framework upon which the participants' response could be organized. The researcher realized after conducting the two pilot interviews that despite the richness of the responses from the CGSC students, without a framework for organizing their narratives it was difficult to determine if or how they were answering the research questions.

Methodology

This research used a qualitative case study methodology. The case study methodology involved interviews with CGSC students that provided them an opportunity to describe how they made their respective decisions about graduate school. The student interview protocol was informed by interviews with graduate school program directors and CGSC faculty who coach and advise their students throughout the academic year. Purposeful sampling was used to identify appropriate study participants who met the selection criteria and were best able to help answer the research question (Creswell, 2009). In a case study, the sampling strategy of maximum variation enables the researcher "to fully describe multiple perspectives about the cases" (Creswell, 2007, p. 129). Demographic criteria differentiated the participants, who were selected for participation in the interviews based on the extent to which they represented the greater student body demographically. This purposeful selection was intended to increase the reliability and generalizability of the data while also increasing "the likelihood that the findings will reflect differences of different perspective" (Creswell, 2007, p. 126). Study participants came from a sample of Army CGSC students who indicated in an on-line survey that they are either enrolled in graduate school or not, and were willing to share their experience in how they made their decision

(Appendix B). The survey was sent to a portion of U.S. Army students in Class 12-01, approximately 250 students, thereby excluding the sister service and international students.

This research methodology used semi-structured interviews. The case study methodology allowed individual students to tell their story in their own words, and those words informed and helped answer the research question. The interview protocol guided the researcher, kept him focused and on topic, and specific questions from the guide were used as prompts to generate input from the respondent. The interviews included open-ended questions during data collection to capture in the participants' own words how they decided whether or not to attend graduate school. As Merriam describes it, such a structure is appropriate when the intent is to be "flexible (and) exploratory" and when the "researcher does not know enough about phenomenon to ask relevant questions" (Merriam, 2009, p. 89). Additionally, each interview helped inform subsequent interviews in and, to some extent, was an evolving process (Merriam, 2009).

The researcher used the student interviews as the primary data collection vehicle. The researcher conducted interviews until no new information appeared to be forthcoming. This occurred after 26 interviews, although it was a challenge to ascertain if an additional interview might yield some unexpected piece of information. Additional interviews were not required because the respondents were not "hesitant to speak and share ideas" (Creswell, 2007, p. 133).

Interviews of CGSC students took place in a private setting, were conducted individually, and continued until no new information appeared likely. Gender, race, ethnicity, and other demographic variation resulted in under-representation in this case study due to their per capita representation in the overall population and representation in the U.S.

Army and CGSC. Every attempt was made to obtain a sample of a demographically representative group of students. Chapter 3 will provide additional information about the CGSC student sample population from a gender, ethnicity, and branch perspective.

Interviews were tape recorded (audio only) and transcribed by the researcher. Transcripts of the interviews were member checked for “accuracy and palatability” (Stake, 1995, p. 115) by the respondents. The researcher allowed participants an opportunity to add to the transcribed interviews or “to provide alternative language or interpretation” (Stake, 1995, p. 115) in order to more fully communicate their thoughts about how they made their decision. A sample of the interview transcripts were peer reviewed during the data analysis phase of the research.

Additional interviews took place with university program administrators and faculty staff group advisors prior to developing the student interview protocol. Directors from the three major graduate school programs on Fort Leavenworth were interviewed. These interviews were informal; the intent was to solicit the perspectives of university graduate school directors and CGSC faculty on how students decide whether or not to attend graduate school. “Corroborating evidence from different sources” should help “shed light” (Creswell, 2007, p. 208) on the research question. Input from six CGSC instructors who are responsible from coaching and mentoring members of their staff group provided additional insight into how CGSC students decide whether or not to attend graduate school.

Significance of Study

An examination of how CGSC students decided whether or not to attend graduate school may inform the efforts of both the CGSC leadership and the civilian institutions that offer graduate programs for officers attending the course. CGSC students were the focus of

this for this research for several reasons: (a) some CGSC students pursue a graduate degree, while some do not; (b) how they decide whether or not to attend graduate school is unknown; (c) the U.S. Department of Defense and the U.S. Army have a vested interest in officers' advanced education; and (d), the factors that impact CGSC students' decisions are of value to the U.S. Army, CGSC and CAC leadership, and the university graduate schools associated with CGSC. The study began by describing the characteristics of CGSC as a professional development institution, as well as describing the students and faculty, in order to set the stage for further analysis and discussion.

This research addressed a lack of information on a particular group of adult learners, U.S. Army CGSC students, with respect to their decision about attending graduate school. Recent CGSC surveys have begun to ask questions relating to this issue, but do not provide an understanding of how U.S. Army CGSC students actually decide whether or not to attend graduate school. Research on other demographic groups and other services exists (Branigan, 2001; Celik, 2002; Chae, 2008; Crissey, 2009; Filizetti, 2003; Kabalar, 2003; Kahraman, 2007), but little research of the resident CGSC course has taken place. Understanding how U.S. Army CGSC students decide whether or not to attend graduate school will inform the graduate school directors at the installation Education Center who supervise and implement graduate programs for CGSC students. The universities that conduct the graduate programs may be able to use the results of this study to improve the accessibility or enrollment levels of their respective programs. Perhaps most importantly, this research may help improve the academic achievement and potential advancement of all officers attending CGSC if it results in changes that increase the number of CGSC students who enroll in graduate school.

A better understanding of how CGSC students decide whether or not to attend graduate school could be useful to several entities: the college administration, the U.S. Army Human Resources Command (HRC), the organizations and institutions responsible for administering graduate degree programs to CGSC students, the School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS), the U.S. Student Division (USSD), and CGSC students overall. The results of this research may inform the faculty advisors in terms of the guidance they provide to their students in the initial coaching session when they discuss, among other topics, graduate degree programs while here at CGSC.

Assumptions of Study

The following assumptions were made for the purpose of this research:

1. That respondents will provide honest and accurate testimony during the interviews.
2. That students will be willing to discuss their decision making process with the researcher.
3. That the factors impacting a CGSC student's decision exist and are identifiable through analysis of student interview narratives.

Limitations of Study

The following limitations applied to this research:

1. The method for selecting participants will be purposeful sampling. Obtaining input from U.S. Army CGSC students will override consideration of representativeness with respect to gender, branch of service, national origin, ethnicity, and so forth.

2. Only U.S. Army CGSC students will be interviewed. No sister service (Marine, Air Force, Navy, or Coast Guard), international military students, or civilians will be interviewed as part of the research.
3. The results will be limited by the accuracy and truthfulness of the participants' interview responses.
4. The results of the research will be limited by the ability of the researcher, as the interviewer, to be focused, unbiased, and objective.

Definition of Terms

Active Guard and Reserve (AGR). National Guard and Reserve members who are on voluntary active duty providing full-time support to National Guard, Reserve, and Active Component organizations for the purpose of organizing, administering, recruiting, instructing, or training the Reserve Components (U.S. Department of Defense, 2011a).

Additional Skill Identifier (ASI). Additional skills, training, and qualification a soldier may possess in addition to his or her Military Occupation Specialty (MOS). Some ASI's are awarded only to a soldier in a specified MOS, while others can be awarded to Soldiers in any MOS (U.S. Department of Defense, 2011a).

Advanced Degrees. A university degree, such as a master's or doctorate, that is higher than a bachelor's. Advanced degrees may be master's, post-masters, such as a Master's of Business Administration (MBA), first professional, such as LLS or DDS, a doctorate, such as a PhD or EdD, or a post-doctorate.

Branch. An arm or service of the Army. A branch is a grouping of officers that comprises an arm or service of the Army in which, as a minimum, officers are commissioned, assigned, developed and promoted through their company grade years.

Officers are accessed into a single basic branch and will hold that branch designation, which is later augmented between the 5th and 6th years of service with a functional area (U.S. Department of Defense, 2011a).

Career Field. The Army has structured officers in the Army Competitive Category (ACC) by grouping branches and related functional areas into personnel management categories called Career Fields. The establishment of Career Fields will build an officer corps that is both skilled in combined arms operations in the joint and multinational environment and fully experienced in the technical applications that support the Army's larger systemic needs. Officers are designated into a branch or functional area (FA) in a Career Field by a HQDA-centralized selection board immediately following their selection to major (U.S. Department of the Army, 2010a).

Combined Arms Center (CAC). The higher headquarters for CGSC. The Commanding General, CAC, is the Commandant of CGSC, although the day-to-day running of the college is mostly left to the Deputy Commandant (U.S. Department of the Army, 2010c).

Company (Field) Grade Officer. A lieutenant or captain; an officer who usually serves at the company level, as opposed to battalion or brigade level, where field grade officers are assigned (U.S. Department of the Army, 2010a).

Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC). The Department of Defense human resource information source, serving as the authoritative source of information on over 42 million people now and previously connected to DoD. DMDC provides secure services and solutions to support DoD's mission of serving service members and their families with

identity management (<https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/dwp/getLinks.do?category=home&tab=0&clOn=home&rowNumb=0>).

Department of Distance Education (DDE). DDE develops, distributes, and administers the Command and General Staff College's distance education programs, including the Total Army School System (TASS) hybrid course (on-line and on-site classroom instruction), and the Distance Learning-Advanced Distributed Learning course (on-line classroom instruction only) to Active and Reserve Component officers from all services and allied nations (Dean of Academics and Command and General Staff School [CGSS], 2008).

Deputy Commandant. The senior military officer responsible for leading and providing guidance to the staff of CGSC. Works for the Commandant, who is also the Commanding General, CAC (U.S. Department of the Army, 2010c).

Functional Area. A functional area is a grouping of officers by technical specialty or skill, which usually requires significant education, training and experience. An officer receives his or her functional area, of which there are 13, between the 5th and 6th years of service. Individual preference, academic background, manner of performance, training and experience, and needs of the Army are all considered during the designation process (U.S. Department of the Army, 2010a).

General Unrestricted Line Officers. Those officers who command the U.S. Navy's operating forces, e.g., ships, aircraft, submarines, operational fleets, and staffs (Mack, W., Seymour, H., & McComas, L., 1998).

Intermediate Level Education (ILE). Consists of two components: the Common Core and the Advanced Operations Course. The Common Core provides the baseline

instruction in a wide range of subjects, from strategy and operational art to theater logistics. The Advanced Operations Course focuses on operations and tactics at the Joint Operations level through brigade (Dean of Academics and Command and General Staff School (CGSS), 2008).

Joint Professional Military Education (JPME). The program for the professional education and development of all officers to develop their familiarity with the other Armed Services' doctrine and methods of operating. Upon reaching the grade of O-4 (Army Major), all officers are required to successfully complete JPME Level 1 instruction (U.S. Department of Defense, 2012).

Master of Military Art and Science (MMAS). Military art and science constitute the scholastic discipline of the military profession. The major components of the MMAS program are the conduct of significant original research and the preparation of a master's thesis (Dean of Academics and Command and General Staff School [CGSS], 2008).

Mid-level Formal Education Institution. The level of professional military education for the mid-level officers, usually Army, Marine, and Air Force majors, and Navy lieutenant commanders; each of the services has a command and staff college that serves as their respective officers' mid-level formal education (U.S. Department of Defense, 2012).

Military Service. A branch of the Armed Forces of the United States, established by act of Congress, in which persons are appointed, enlisted, or inducted for military service, and which operates and is administered within a military or executive department. The Military Services are: the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, the Marine Corps, and the Coast Guard when mobilized under Title 10 to augment the Navy (U.S. Department of Defense, 2011a).

Naval Postgraduate School. A research university at the graduate school level operated by the United States Navy located in Monterey, California; it grants both master's degrees and doctoral degrees to its students (Mack, W., Seymour, H., & McComas, L., 1998).

Optempo (Operating Tempo). Operating tempo, operational tempo, or optempo as it is usually abbreviated, is used as a measure of the pace of an operation or operations in terms of equipment usage, such as aircraft "flying hours," ship "steaming days" or "tank [driving] miles." Optempo increases with the intensity of and number of operations. It has come to be used as military jargon when U.S. Army personnel refer to their personal pace of operations, or "PERSTEMPO," in particular with respect to length of duty day, number of workdays each week, number and length of deployments, and so forth (U.S. Department of Defense, 2011a).

Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). A group of U.S. government personnel, usually consisting of military officers, diplomats, and reconstruction subject matter experts, working to support reconstruction efforts in unstable states. Their purpose is to empower local governments to govern their constituents more effectively.

Professional Military Education. Professional military education is a program of progressive levels of military education that prepare military officers for leadership (U.S. Department of Defense, 2012).

Quality Assurance Office. CGSC organization charged with assessing and evaluating the curriculum taught and the faculty teaching it. Members of the Quality Assurance Office visit resident classrooms at Fort Leavenworth to observe faculty teaching, as well as satellite campus and Reserve Component classrooms throughout the U.S. and

overseas. They also administer on-line surveys to students at the conclusion of each major block of instruction to solicit feedback from them on the course they just finished (Dean of Academics and Command and General Staff School [CGSS], 2008).

Rank Structure. U.S. Army officers are commissioned and usually begin their active duty career at the rank of lieutenant, although some of the medical branches commission directly into the rank of captain. From lieutenant, most Army officers then progress through the ranks of captain, major, lieutenant colonel, and colonel, to the general officer ranks.

Scholars Program. A program that began in 2009 that formed seminar groups of CGSC students to conduct in-depth study of selected topics. An entire staff group comprises one seminar, and is taught by a senior faculty member due to the number of instructor contact hours (80–150) and intensive academic requirements (primary research and intense writing requirements) (Dean of Academics and Command and General Staff School [CGSS], 2008).

School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS). One of the three schools that make up the United States Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The purpose of SAMS is to provide graduates with the skills necessary to deal with the disparate challenges encountered in contemporary military and government operations. Members of each of the U.S. armed forces, various U.S. Government agencies, and allied military forces attend the school, which issues a masters degree in Military Art and Science (Dean of Academics and Command and General Staff School [CGSS], 2008).

Staff Group Advisor. Faculty member from teaching team with primary responsibility for counseling, coaching, and advising individual students, along with a myriad of administrative functions. The staff group “home room teacher.”

U.S. Army Human Resources Command (HRC). HRC, located at Fort Knox, Kentucky, provides the full spectrum of human resources services to soldiers, veterans, retirees, and Army families. HRC manages schooling, promotions, awards, records, transfers, appointments, benefits, and retirement for all U.S. Army personnel, both Active and Reserve (<http://www.hrc.army.mil/>).

U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC). A graduate school for U.S. military and foreign military leaders. The intermediate level of Army officer Professional Military Education (Dean of Academics and Command and General Staff School [CGSS], 2008).

Summary

The purpose of the research was to explore how U.S. Army CGSC students decide whether or not to attend graduate school. The benefits to the individuals of a graduate degree are recognized in Army policy and doctrine. The benefits to the overall force in terms of improving the ability of future leaders to make better decisions in ambiguous, unfamiliar circumstances, is likewise recognized. Approximately half of a typical CGSC class arrives with an advanced degree, such as a master’s, a doctorate, or a professional degree. Many of those individuals earn an additional master’s degree during their year at CGSC; others enroll in and successfully complete one or several master’s degree programs available to them. However, many CGSC students do not attend graduate school, and the focus of this study was on how both CGSC students who are enrolled in graduate school and those who chose

not to attend graduate school made their respective decisions. The primary source for data was interviews with U.S. Army CGSC students, both those who decided to attend graduate school and with those who decided not to. Additional interviews with graduate school program managers and CGSC faculty helped inform the direction and nature of those interviews.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter examines the literature about graduate school decision making, enrollment, attendance, and considerations by prospective students. The literature review has been described as an opportunity “to support identification of a problem to research and illustrate a gap in previous research that needs to be filled” (Ridley, 2009, p. 2). In order to identify the research problem and fill in a gap in extant research, this chapter is organized into several sections that address key areas, with a summary and conclusion at the end. It begins with an examination of who attends graduate school and why they attend in order to provide a foundation for the research and situate CGSC students in context with the rest of the population. An overview of the literature on career development and decision making follows that sets the context for CGSC students. This will help define what CGSC students go through when deciding about graduate school. Literature that describes the pros and cons of graduate school examines some of the motivations from the students’ perspective. Characteristics of adult learners and a review of adult development theory provide the underpinnings for understanding of where CGSC students are in their social, academic, and cognitive development, and what influences their decision about graduate school. The view of graduate school from the perspective of adult development is examined to provide a perspective on where CGSC students are in terms of their own individual development. The final section is an examination of the barriers many adults face and struggle to overcome when considering enrollment in graduate school either directly from their undergraduate studies or when returning to school after a period of time in the work force at large. The

literature from these areas provides a framework in which to place the narratives from student interviews and derive the factors that influenced the students' decisions.

Who Attends Graduate School

The specific question of who enrolls in graduate school has changed over the past several decades. The picture of a typical white, male graduate student has gradually been replaced by a more diverse population of graduate students (Nevill & Chen, 2007). Graduate school enrollment continues to increase, but not commensurate with the overall increase in the population (Wendler, et al. 2010). More women than men enroll in graduate school, but the numbers vary according to the specific type of degree program (Nevill & Chen, 2007). For example, women are three times more likely than men to enroll in a Master's of Education program, but "men were more likely than women to enroll in MBA (9% vs. 6%), first-professional (6% vs. 4%), and doctoral degree programs (6% vs. 4%)" (Nevill & Chen, 2007, p. 9). In addition, the proportion of graduate school enrollees is greater for Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Black students than for White students (Nevill & Chen, 2007).

Overall demographic changes in graduate school enrollment reflect a shift in sociological and economic trends. While diversity in the population of graduate students has increased, the basic math and reading skills has trended lower, resulting in a graduate school population with lower academic skills (Wendler et al., 2010). The number of graduate students who return to school after having spent some time in the workforce has increased due to adverse economic conditions. They are seeking an advanced degree to improve their "employability" and, in many cases, to qualify for employment after having lost their job. These graduate students are characterized by a wide range of age groups, but the "nontraditional" students are usually older, working, and involved in a wide variety of other

activities in their lives (Wendler et al., 2010). Graduate school is not viewed as a path to their first career, but rather as a path to move up in their current career path or to pursue another one.

Marital and parental status impacts graduate school enrollment, attendance, and completion. Unmarried graduate students at the time of their enrollment in graduate school are more likely to complete the program of instruction and earn their graduate degree than graduate students who marry while enrolled (Nevill & Chen, 2007). The same holds true for graduate students who have no children before they enroll. Married graduate students are less likely than single graduate students, regardless of gender, to earn their graduate degree, with some variation between men and women; women are still more likely to enroll and complete graduate school, whether a master's degree or doctorate (Nevill & Chen, 2007). The timing of the decision to pursue a graduate degree impacts on the likelihood of enrollment and completion: the greater the period of time between graduating college and enrolling in graduate school, the greater the likelihood of staying enrolled and earning a graduate degree. In terms of enrollment, persistence, and eventual attainment, younger students are more likely to enroll in a full-time graduate school program, less likely to take time off due to conflicts or other interests, and more likely to earn a graduate degree (Nevill & Chen, 2007)--all of which may be due to economic factors rather than age.

Research on the social and academic correlates of graduate school revealed a complicated linkage between several factors. The linkage is complicated because the research suggests sometimes contradictory relationships. For example, Mullen, Goyette, and Soares found "no parental effects on educational enrollments beyond college," college defined as earning a bachelor's degree (2003, p. 143). By examining graduate degrees by

type, however, data in the Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study conducted by the Department of Education arrive at a different conclusion. They found that parents' education levels had no effect on enrollment in MBA programs, and only a small influence on enrollment in master's programs, but a strong effect on first professional degree and doctoral programs (Mullen et al., 2003). The undergraduate major pursued may impact the decision to pursue a graduate degree according to NCES research in 2000 (Mullen et al., 2003). Arts and science majors, for example, are more likely to enroll in graduate school than college graduates in professional fields, such as medicine, engineering, law, nursing, and so forth.

Predictive factors with respect to graduate school attendance are not single-dimensional, but have higher order considerations that must also be examined. For example, when data is examined across multiple factors, such as parent's education level, type of degree the parents have (either individually or both), ethnicity, age, and social level, different results emerge. In fact, Mullen found that parents' education level *does* play a role in predicting whether an individual will attend graduate school, and does so differently for different graduate programs (Mullen et al., 2003). Other factors that may predict graduate school enrollment are:

- Gender. More women than men are likely to begin a master's program, but more men than women are likely to pursue all other types of programs.
- Age. No effect on enrollment in master's programs, but has a negative impact on enrolling in doctoral programs.
- Undergraduate institution. Two-year community college students are less likely to enroll in graduate school. This is attributed to a lack of standardized test proficiency and generally low college admissions exam test scores.

- The type of four-year institution. Graduates of private research institutions are almost twice as likely to enroll in a master's program than graduates of state universities or public research institutions.
- Undergraduate performance. High performers at the undergraduate level, those with a high GPA, are most like to enroll in graduate school.

Mullen, Goyette, and Soares's research shows that students with highly educated parents, such as when both have a master's degree or doctorate, are also more likely to enroll in the more selective universities and thus also more likely to pursue a graduate degree (Mullen et al., 2003). One characteristic tends to lead to another. This tendency is more pronounced the higher the parent or parents' degree: those who have the greatest probability of attending graduate school have at least one parent with an advanced degree. The educational background of undergraduates' families impacts graduate school attendance in three interrelated ways:

- Structural. Individuals with highly educated parents are more likely to enroll in selective colleges, which make them more likely to gain entry into postgraduate programs.
- Social-psychological. Students of well-educated parents have high educational expectations, which translate into a greater propensity to enroll in graduate school.
- Standardized test scores, parents' education, college GPA. All are linked and influence each other.

The results of this research show that parental background influences "postgraduate educational continuation and that it does so differentially across graduate programs" (Mullen et al., 2003, p. 150). The prospective first-professional or doctoral student is strongly

influenced by parental education level, whereas master's degree students are only weakly influenced, and MBA students not at all.

None of this research, however, is directive; it merely describes the characteristics of individuals who are more likely to pursue a graduate degree based on various factors. It provides a rubric to identify those who are more likely to enroll in a graduate program. This research has bearing on CGSC students from a number of perspectives. Each student is counseled or coached by his or her Staff Group Advisor during the initial couple of days or weeks of CGSC. One of the topics of discussion is invariably graduate school and the MMAS program. With an understanding of the demographic and educational factors that impact the probability of pursuing a graduate degree in hand, the staff group advisor can be better informed and able to provide more focused advice.

Military Need for Graduate Degrees

Particularly in light of the decade-long overseas conflicts in Southwest Asia, the Arabian Gulf, and the Horn of Africa, the defense department has a need for officers who possess the “critical thinking and decision-making skills deemed vital in preparing military officers to work in the Service, joint, interagency, and international environments” (DoD, 2008, p. 3). The policy of the DoD is that each uniformed service shall establish graduation education programs to meet present and future needs. The purpose of these programs is to improve the “professional and technical competency, and develop the future capabilities of military officers to more effectively perform their required duties and carry out their assigned responsibilities” (DoD, 2008, p. 2). Such graduate education programs may be fully funded, partially funded, or unfunded, but regardless of the funding source the Secretaries of the Military Departments should “Encourage a lifelong continuum of learning by urging

personnel not selected for funded education to pursue unfunded education for its considerable professional and personal value,” (DoD, 2008, p. 4). Implementation of this guidance is further described in DoD Instruction No. 1322.25, *Voluntary Education Programs*, that further elaborates on the detailed responsibilities of all DoD components (Military Departments, Joint Staff, Combatant Commands, and so forth) to provide opportunity, funding, and counseling for active and reserve component military personnel (DoD, 2011b).

The fundamental perspective on graduate school according to U.S. Army policy is straightforward and unambiguous: the Army supports civilian education at the highest level feasible. The three domains of Army training and leader development are operational, institutional, and self-development (DA, 2009).

U.S. Army policy supports graduate degrees for officers. Army Regulation 621-1, *Training of Military Personnel at Civilian Institutions*, describes one of the goals of the Army’s officer education programs: “to obtain an advanced degree in a field related to one of their specialties by taking part in off-duty educational programs” (DA, 2007b, p. 1). Army Regulation 621-5, Army Continuing Education System, establishes the policy that “Commissioned officers should . . . pursue graduate and/or post-graduate study in an academic discipline supporting their professional and/or personal education goals” (U.S. Department of the Army [DA], 2009b, p. 18). Army Regulation 621-7, *Army Fellowships and Scholarships*, “establishes guidance and policies for Army non-military education fellowships . . . and scholarships” (U.S. Department of the Army [DA], 1997, p. i).

An example is the Olmsted Scholarship, sponsored by the George and Carol Olmsted Foundation, a three-year scholarship in which an officer studies for two years at a foreign university. The purpose of the scholarship “is to educate future military leaders in a foreign

culture” (DA, 1997, p. 4). Another example is the White House Fellowship, which provides “gifted and highly motivated U.S. citizens first-hand experience in the process of governing the Nation and a sense of involvement in the leadership of the society” (DA, 1997, p. 4).

Army Regulation 621-108, *Military Personnel Requirements for Civilian Education*, establishes a program to meet Army requirements for graduate education by developing “an inventory of officers with the requisite education credentials” (U.S. Department of the Army [DA], 2007a, p. 1) to meet Army-wide requirements. Justification for the program is:

Graduate education at the grade of captain, major, and lieutenant colonel provides the officer the necessary skills to meet specific position requirements, which are generally narrow in scope and deep in technical application. This scope tends to broaden as one advances to the grade of colonel where executive leadership duties primarily prevail. At the colonel level, the officer’s professional development has been complemented by graduate education, functional and professional military schooling, and a vast degree of military experience. (DA, 2007, p. 2)

Such a statement explains why the U.S. Army values graduate education for its officers, and backs that position with programs and policies to support its implementation. The Army Advanced Civilian Schooling program is designed to meet Army requirements for officers with advance degrees while providing the opportunity for individuals to achieve their academic goals, and encourages all Army officers to “take advantage of opportunities for advanced education” (DA, 2010a, p. 31).

The U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) executes a major portion of Army policy with respect to graduate education. The former commanding general of TRADOC, General Martin Dempsey, is now Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS),

and is expected to continue his efforts to broaden the educational breadth of the officer corps. TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, *The United States Army Operating Concept 2016-2028*, describes the need to emphasize “training, education, and leader development to produce a new generation of leaders able to succeed in the face of uncertainty” (DoD, 2010b, p. 34). This increased emphasis is a result of what is described as an “accelerating pace of change and proliferation of military technologies to emerging powers and nonstate actors around the globe (that) have combined to create a security environment in which a nation and its military that learn and adapt most quickly will prevail” (DoD, 2010a, p. 34).

General Dempsey describes the education and training challenge we face in these terms: “We live in a much more competitive security environment. This means that we have to learn faster and better than our future adversaries. Stated a bit differently, we must prevail in the competitive learning environment” (U.S. Department of the Army [DA], 2011, p. i). In *The U.S. Army Learning Concept for 2015*, Appendix F describes required capabilities of our future leaders: “lifelong learners who are creative and critical thinkers with highly refined problem solving skills, with the ability to process and transform data and information rapidly and accurately into usable knowledge” (DA, 2011, p. 59).

TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-7, *The U.S. Army Concept for the Human Dimension in Full Spectrum Operations 2015-2024*, describes the need to expand and accelerate leader development and education by embracing the principles of lifelong learning. The document provides seven key enablers; the sixth one supports the Army’s policy on graduate school: “civilian graduate education will continue to play a critical role in preparing leaders to meet the challenges of the future operational environment . . . and will provide the intellectual

grounding that contributes to effective decisionmaking in ambiguous operational situations” (DA, 2008, p. 31).

The Army Leader Development Strategy (ALDS) “requires balanced commitment to the three pillars of leader development: training, education, and experience” (DA, 2009a, p. 8). The strategy guides the Army’s development of its officers over their entire career and, in some cases, even after leaving military service. The attributes Army leaders model “in order to reach their full professional potential” (U.S. Department of the Army [DA], 2009c, p. 8) include having “the ability to reason, to think critically and creatively, to anticipate consequences and to solve problems) (DA, 2009c, p. 8). The ALDS describes eight leader development imperatives, one of which encourages lifelong commitment to learning and development.

The National Academy of Science nine-volume series entitled *Technology for the United States Navy and Marine Corps, 2000-2035: Becoming a 21st-Century Force*, a study requested by the Chief of Naval Operations, included a volume on Human Resources that addressed education in general and graduate education in particular. The chapter on Education and Training concluded that:

Graduate education provides career-long enhancement of the abilities of an officer, not just a technical specialty skill. Development of problem-solving skills is applicable to all kinds of problems that face the individual in unexpected situations. It is self-evident that there is little time for such education in wartime. The time to devote resources to obtaining graduate education is when the nation is at peace. It should then be a high priority whose payoff is enhanced performance in times of war

as well as in time of peace. Graduate education is a generator of future readiness with a high rate of return. (Murray and Fletcher, 1997, p. 39).

Benefits of a Graduate Degree

As new students arrive at CGSC each year, part of their initial orientation includes a description of the graduate degree programs available to them during the academic year. These programs range from a degree in military studies (MMAS), to several different master's degrees from either Kansas State University, Central Michigan University, the University of Kansas, or Webster University (Dean of Academics and CGSS, 2008).

This section will examine the impact of a graduate degree from the direct benefit to a military officer in his or her current duty assignment, to the longer-term benefits that may accrue to an individual after separation from the service or retirement, to intrinsic benefits in terms of self-efficacy and personal reward. Master's theses from officers attending the Naval Postgraduate School address some variation of this topic, as well as an equal number of articles written by civilian academics in business journals or graduate school publications. Additional research is prevalent on the advantages of adults returning to college to pursue a graduate degree after having a career for some period of time and the concomitant potential benefits that result from the additional degree. Not surprisingly, there is also a considerable body of research that suggests a graduate degree does not contribute materially to a military officer's financial status, professional competence, or probability of selection for promotion or command.

In *The Journal of the New England Board of Higher Education*, Ross Gittell, the James R. Carter Professor of Management at the University of New Hampshire's Whittemore School of Business and Economics, writes that "The correlation between educational

attainment and economic performance is very strong” (Gittell, 2002, p. 32). In his article, Gittell states that New England, as a region, “has outperformed the other eight U.S. census regions by virtually every measure of per-capita income and productivity growth. The productivity and income strengths are interrelated and both strongly correlated to New England’s advantages in higher education” (Gittell, 2002, p. 32) He goes on to make the argument that attributes this economic strength to the fact that New England is the top region in terms of people over the age of 25 who have post-secondary school or professional degrees and correlates that with the region also having the highest per capita income, in the top 25% of states in terms of gross state product per worker, and in the top 25% in terms of median family income.

In her doctoral thesis, Julie D. Filizetti developed a survey that “asks people who have observed and supervised people with and without master’s degrees to distinguish differences in productivity between these two groups” (Filizetti, 2003, p. iv). Her survey used ten different scenarios in which supervisors were asked to evaluate the ability of subordinate officers to make decisions or perform specific tasks associated with the situation. Her research suggested that decision-making skills and levels of productivity were higher for people with a graduate degree than those without one.

A Naval Postgraduate School Master’s thesis in 2002 concluded that “employees with a Master’s or Doctorate earned more in average salary but experienced lower salary growth than employees with a Bachelor’s degree” (Celik, 2002, p. v). The lower salary growth was attributed to advanced degree holders entering their period of employment at a higher grade to begin with.

Benefits of a Graduate Degree Specific to Military Personnel

Major Gregory A. Branigan, USMC, wrote a thesis while attending the Naval Postgraduate School on *The Effect of Graduate Education on the Retention and Promotion of Marine Corps Officers*. His stated purpose was to examine “the economic returns to graduate education and specifically Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) education” (Branigan, 2001, p. v). By analyzing the retention and promotion rates of Marine Corps officers with and without graduate degrees, he obtained results that suggest that graduate degrees “have a positive effect on the retention and promotion of Marine officers” (Branigan, 2001, p. v). Lieutenant William B. Phillips, USN, conducted similar research while attending NPS as a classmate of Major Branigan. His thesis was on *The Impacts of a Fully Funded Postgraduate Education on Promotion and Command Screen for Fixed-Wing, Carrier-Based Pilots and Naval Flight Officers*. He determined that there was a significant positive effect on rates of promotion and selection for command, with the greatest impact associated with officers who successfully completed a fully-funded technical degree (24.3% more likely to be promoted or selected for command) versus officers who earned a graduate degree on their own time (5.7% more likely to be promoted or selected for command) (Phillips, 2001).

In his master’s thesis while attending NPS in 2004, Lieutenant Commander David A. Schwind wrote that there has been some debate in official circles regarding the benefit of a graduate degree for Naval officers, mostly due to the perception that the one to two years spent away from the fleet in scholastic pursuits will cause them to be less competitive for the right jobs and possibly selection for promotion (Schwind, 2004). His research examined multiple studies suggesting that a graduate degree positively impacts promotion up through

the rank of Captain (O-6), but is less influential in selection to the flag, or general officer, ranks.

Benefits accrued to military officers notwithstanding, there are numerous obstacles to attending graduate school, some of which have been previously addressed. A component of adult learning theory has long explored the concept of participation in learning activities. Participation up to this point has focused on what participants hope to gain from graduate school, but equally important is understanding some of the challenges CGSC students have to overcome to do so.

Participation Issues

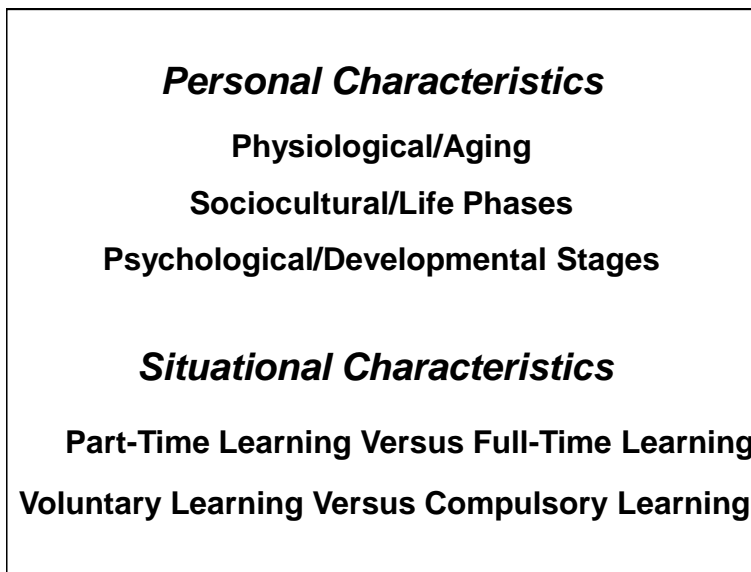
Barriers to graduate school.

Barriers to adult education, higher education, or graduate school can take many shapes, forms, and sizes, and their characteristics can vary widely. They may be internal, external, or environmental. Barriers to graduate school fall into two categories: impediments to enrollment and impediments to successful completion (Payne, 2006). Research on first-generation graduate student motivators and barriers, as well as “critical incidents” that shape perceptions of graduate school, indicate that race, gender, and previous academic performance (GPA) are all major factors (Payne, 2006). Goals, self-motivation, and family support are strong motivators, although the research did not conclusively identify what was the strongest. Barriers to enrollment and completion were found to be lack of financial resources, low grades, and poor scores on admissions exams, such as the Graduate Record Examination (GRE).

For many groups of people, the barriers to higher education, in particular graduate school, are insurmountable. In some cases, the challenges are discrete and measurable: not

enough money, not enough time, or too many other demands. This section will focus on impediments or barriers to participating in adult education activities in general. Patricia Cross writes extensively about barriers in her book *Adults as Learners. Increasing Participation and Facilitating Learning* (1981). In it, Cross examines preferences and practices of adult learners with respect to subject matter, teaching methods, and scheduling options. Her Characteristics of Adults as Learners (CAL) model, which she describes as a conceptual framework (Figure 2-1), “consists of two classes of variables. Those describing the learner are called *personal characteristics*, whereas those describing the conditions under which learning takes place are called *situational characteristics*” (Cross, 1981, p. 235). The personal characteristics are usually viewed as continuous, along a line of growth and aging as children become adults. The situational characteristics are usually expressed as dichotomies.

Figure 2-1. Characteristics of Adults as Learners (CAL) Model



(Cross, 1981, p. 235)

Patricia Cross classifies barriers to adult learning as either *situational*, *institutional*, or *dispositional* (Cross, 1981). *Situational barriers* are circumstantial conditions that hamper the ability of adult learners to gain access to and pursue educational opportunities. Examples

are: multiple and conflicting roles and responsibilities; available resources, in particular time and money; level of support received from significant others; and distance to travel to class (Cross, 1981). Time and money are the most common barriers cited, although “people who have the time for learning frequently lack the money, and the people who have the money often lack the time” (Cross, 1981, p. 100). In fact, the “impact of cost on participation in adult education is that . . . to say something costs too much is a socially acceptable reason for not doing it” (Cross, 1981, p. 102). This observation gets at the heart of the participation issue associated with graduate school.

Institutional barriers result from limitations regarding the methods institutions use to design, deliver, and administer learning activities that fail to consider the needs of adult learners. Examples of institutional factors are: availability and quality of information; the level and type of credentials required for admission; the quality and complexity of admission and registration procedures; timing, scheduling, and sequencing of learning opportunities; attitudes and behaviors of staff and faculty toward students; the quality and availability of support services, such as library and computer resources, advising and counseling services, or parking and transportation services; and finally, the availability of administrative services at times suitable for the adult learners (Cross, 1981).

Darkenwald and Merriam break down the institutional category even further, identifying an additional barrier they describe as informational. The informational barrier addresses the “institutional failure in communicating information on learning opportunities” and includes “the failure of many adults . . . to seek out or use the information that is available” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991, p. 36). Some CGSC students may arrive not really ready to make a commitment on short notice, not having considered what graduate education

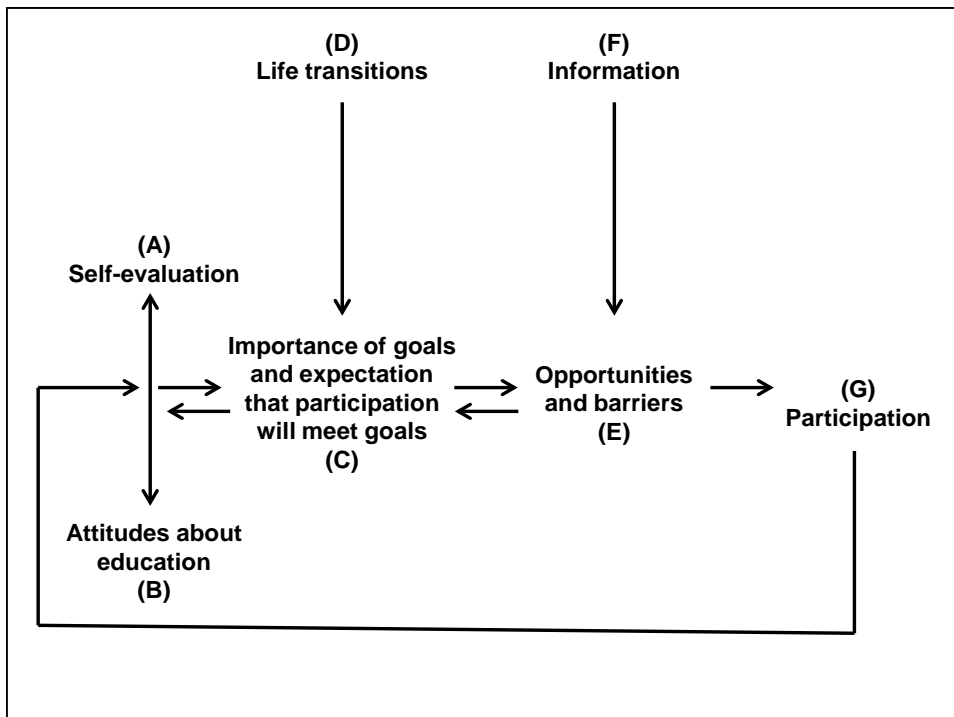
opportunities may be available. Others may have explored and examined the graduate school opportunities and are aware of most of the options available to them. Long also divides the institutional barrier “into two major types, administrative and instructional” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991, p. 36). His definition of the administrative barrier does not differ significantly from Cross, but his description of an institutional factor “includes such areas as teacher experience, ratings, and performance” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991, p. 36).

Dispositional factors relate to the adult learners’ perceptions of their ability to seek out, register for, attend, and successfully complete an adult learning activity. These factors are linked to issues of self-efficacy and margins of power addressed earlier. Examples of dispositional factors are: self-confidence; attitudes about the benefits of learning; attitudes about self that may adversely affect learning; prior negative experiences in learning activities; perceptions learners hold about the attitudes of administrators and instructors; feelings of being isolated within a learning community; and any health or fitness conditions that adversely affect an individual’s ability to learn (Cross, 1981).

A fourth set of factors identified by Dorothy MacKeracher, Theresa Suart, and Judith Potter in a University of New Brunswick *State of the Field Report* are *academic factors* (MacKeracher, Suart, & Potter, 2006). Academic factors address those skills essential to successful learning. They may comprise a barrier if they were never learned or learned a long time ago. Examples are: literacy in reading, writing, listening, and speaking; numeracy skills, such as addition, subtraction, and so forth; computer skills; skills in accessing information (conducting research); attention and memory skills; critical and reflective thinking skills; and skills in writing essays, examinations, and tests (MacKeracher et al., 2006).

Cross's Chain-of-Response (COR) Model (Figure 2-2) was instrumental in providing a foundation for development of the interview protocol. Each of the key points in her model—self-evaluation, attitudes about education, the importance of goals and the expectation that goals will be met, life transitions, opportunities and barriers, information, and participation—were used as a framework to develop the actual interview questions. Her description “that participation in a learning activity . . . is not a single act but the result of a chain of responses, each based on an evaluation of the position of the individual in his or her environment” (Cross, 1981, p. 125) contributed to developing questions that would help answer the research problem. Applying the COR model to the interview protocol provided a logical line of inquiry and helped establish a logical framework for the students' responses to open-ended questions during the interviews. Specifically, each of Cross's descriptions of each step in her COR model were translated into open-ended interview questions. When Cross wrote “persons who lack confidence in their own abilities avoid putting themselves to the test and are unlikely to volunteer for learning which might present a threat to their sense of self-esteem” (p. 125), it was translated into an interview question that solicited the participant's self assessment. An example from the interview protocol is “Do you think you would be successful in a graduate school program if you *did* enroll?” When Cross wrote “Attitudes about education also arise indirectly through the attitudes of reference groups and membership groups” (p. 126), it was translated into “What are the experiences of your friends and ‘significant others’ in your everyday life with respect to previous academic activities?”

Figure 2-2. Chain-of-Response (COR) Model



(Cross, 1981, p. 124)

In a qualitative study consisting primarily of interviews with CGSC students who had recent combat experience, CGSC faculty, medical personnel assigned to Fort Leavenworth, and the CGSC Army chaplain, post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) related issues were found to impact this last set of factors. This study “described the incidence of stress in the lives of Army officers, and its effect on their learning experiences” (Shea, 2010, p. 20), research showed that “common outcomes . . . emerged from the responses of the participants in this study . . . fear, transformations and transitions, stigma, (and) stress” (Shea, 2010, p. 146). Along with the increased stresses respondents communicated in their interviews, such as academic stress, marital stress, and dual enrollment in both CGSC and graduate school (7 of the 11 respondents), the academic factors may play the biggest role in a CGSC student’s decision regarding graduate school.

Obstacles facing adults considering graduate school are qualitatively different than the challenges facing younger students attending college for the first time, as in after high school, or returning to college. Adult learners considering graduate school are less concerned, for example, with being able to successfully do the academic work required and more concerned about being able to balance work, family, social, and graduate school requirements (Mbiliny, 2006). The two most significant barriers to enrolling in graduate school relating to time and money: finding the time to attend graduate school with all the other commitments adults have and finding the financial resources required to pay for it (Mbiliny, 2006). Likewise, the same challenges face adult graduate students who have already enrolled and are pursuing their graduate degree: overcoming the initial obstacles does not make them go away, but rather persistence, support, and encouragement from key “others” provides the incentive. In fact, for higher education in general, family members, in particular a mother or father, are most often the most influential individual in a person’s decision to pursue college and go on to graduate school (Mbiliny, 2006).

Participation in adult learning activities can have its own rewards if individuals are able to overcome the many and varied barriers that present themselves. Adults who participate in learning activities are characterized by some unique traits. Recognizing the differences between adult learners and others who participate in learning activities contributes to understanding how CGSC students decide whether or not to attend graduate school.

Characteristics of adult learners.

Adult learners have characteristics that set them apart from children and younger-aged learners. Those characteristics merit consideration and examination as part of an

exploration of how CGSC students decide whether or not to attend graduate school. These attributes are described below.

- Multiple roles: adult learners have more going on in their lives than just college, even graduate school; they usually have full-time jobs, many have families; their non-academic interests and commitments are considerable and cannot be disregarded.
- More life experiences: adult learners have lived longer than traditional college students. Being older means adult learners bring a wealth of experience to the learning environment, which can be either a great foundation or a major barrier to learning.
- Varied developmental tasks: both traditional younger-aged students and adult students share the characteristic of being at a transition points in their respective lives. Younger students are transitioning from the home environment to college and all the challenges and changes that presents; adult students may be “moving in, moving through, or moving out of many different” (p. 1) stages in their lives.
- Adult students may be less concerned with campus activities because their social network is in the surrounding community rather than on-campus.
- Adult students may have little or no experience with higher education, or that experience may not be very recent, which causes some difficulties adjusting to a college or university setting.
- Adult students are probably paying for their education, rather than having parents who foot the bill for housing, tuition, books, and other expenses.

- Adult students usually have “clearer education goals” (p. 2) than traditional, younger college students who may be trying to determine what their interests are and where their abilities lie. (Polson, 1993)

Research on the persistence of adult undergraduate students bears examination with respect to graduate students because of the similarities in the characteristics of the two groups. Demographically speaking, “the vast majority of adult undergraduates were reentry adults” and closer to the age of graduate students (Kasworm et al., 2002, p. 8). Every category of comparative statistics on characteristics between older and younger undergraduates increases the degree to which they resemble graduate students. Marital status, dependent children, part-time student, or full-time student with a part-time course load are all characteristics of adult undergraduate students that have corollaries to graduate students (Kasworm et al., 2002).

Adult learners prefer practical learning experiences that make use of their accumulated knowledge and skills (Knowles, 1980). They are often realistic about what will work and what probably will not, and are not reluctant to share their past experiences for the benefit of the learning group. They often have strong, well-established opinions, values, and beliefs that have built up over time and reinforced by stressful life experiences. The stressful life experiences of CGSC students may impact their readiness to engage in adult learning activities such as graduate school (Shea, 2010). Adult learners are usually mature, and prefer to be treated as adults; likewise, they usually prefer not be lectured to, and learn best in a democratic, participatory, collaborative learning environment. Adult learners see the role of the teacher “to engage in a process of mutual inquiry with them rather than to transmit his or her knowledge to them” (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 39).

Adult learners need to know why they are learning something, how it fits in with the greater scheme of things, and how it is relevant to their current life situation (Knowles et al., 2005). They are more self-directed than younger learners, and more autonomous; when given general guidance and direction they are usually able to determine a course of action. “Adults are ready to learn when they have a need to know or do something in order to perform more effectively in some aspect of their lives” (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 11). In conjunction with a sense of autonomy, adult learners prefer not to be rushed, but rather prefer to learn at their own pace. However, they are also somewhat impatient in the pursuit of learning objectives, and likewise intolerant of work that does not have immediate and direct application to their own particular learning objectives (Knowles et al., 2005).

From another perspective, adult learners differ from traditional, younger learners with respect to their logistical considerations: adult learners have other, sometimes more pressing, things to think about than just school. They often have family and family care responsibilities, whether children, siblings, relatives, or elderly family members (Kasworm et al., 2002). They usually have some job-related or career issues; somebody has to work to pay for school, after all (Kasworm et al., 2002). Social commitments may range from fraternal organizations, to church or religious organizational commitments, to some other social obligation. Time is always a resource that is in high demand, and well as money. Finally, conflicts with schedules, whether work versus school, home versus work, or the adult learner versus spouse or family, all present challenges.

Adult development.

Adult development theory contributes to the exploration of how U.S. Army CGSC students decide whether or not to attend graduate school. Erik Erikson focused on

development of the part of the self that interacts in and with the real world (Lemme, 2006). Each of his eight stages of cognitive development focuses on a psychosocial crisis in a person's life cycle: successful resolution of the crisis leads to development of a strength or virtue, whereas failure can lead to unresolved crises. Success or failure is dependent not only on a person's current life situation but also on what has occurred previously. Stages 4 and 5 have relevance in terms of Erikson's theory of developmental stages. In Stage 4, Industry versus Inferiority (ages 6 to 11), children who are encouraged to make, build, and do things are rewarded for their efforts and become achievement oriented; lack of support and criticism leads to feelings of inferiority. While ages 6 to 11 is well before the ages of CGSC students, if crises that occurred at this stage of development have not been successfully resolved, issues may re-surface when faced with the choice between making, building, and doing (attending graduate school) and lack of support and criticism for trying something new. As Erikson states, "Even though an issue has its moment of ascendancy in a particular stage of life, the issue is never resolved for good. It will reemerge in a different configuration at later stages" (Lemme, 2006, p. 48).

In Stage 5, Identity versus Role Confusion, which occurs from adolescence through the teenage years, an individual uses newly-developed cognitive abilities to develop a sense of self that integrates past experiences with the direction of future adult roles. In fact, "to remain psychologically alive [the individual] must resolve these conflicts unceasingly" (Lemme, 2006, p. 48). Realization that CGSC students may be struggling with the resolution of developmental stage psychosocial crises in their graduate school decision making process may inform the analysis of what factors impact or what criteria they apply.

James Marcia takes Erickson's stage theory further by operationalizing it in order to develop a means by which it can be measured (Lemme, 2006). In doing so he describes four identity statuses, or outcomes, that result from successful resolution of each identity issue:

1. Identity diffusion: individual is not in a state of crisis, has no real concern over status of need to resolve identity issue; "going nowhere" but unconcerned about it.
2. Identity foreclosure: committed to vocational and ideological choices without having experienced a crisis; choices externally imposed, personality development has been taken over by external forces.
3. Identity moratorium: individual is in a crisis but is unable to choose; rather, elects to take a temporary "time-out" or moratorium on resolving the crisis.
4. Identity achievement: individual has successfully worked through a crisis and is equipped with a clear sense of self, important beliefs, and life direction.

According to Marcia, these are developmental progressions, with the first being the least mature and the last being the most mature and desired outcome. However, he also states that the demarcation between type models is not strong and that "Each person has elements of at least two, and often all four, statuses" (Lemme, 2006, p. 94). With this in mind, the question that must be considered is what "type model" a particular CGSC student is, or what combination of statuses may be present. An individual who has an Identity Achievement status is well-equipped to decide whether or not graduate school is the right course of action, whereas someone with an Identity Moratorium status may be taking a "time-out" from the hectic operational environment from which he or she has come.

Neugarten's research on the timing of life events suggests that there are "age-appropriate behaviors" (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 313) in every society

that are based on chronological age. Individuals pass “through a succession of socially delineated age-statuses, each with its recognized rights, duties, and obligations” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 313). The timing of such events has changed since Neugarten conducted her research in the 1970s, but the concept of being either “‘on-time’ or ‘off-time’ regarding certain major life events still holds merit” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 313). Attending CGSC is an event that Army officers expect to occur somewhere during the middle of their professional career; attending graduate school may or may not be such an event, depending on their “socially constructed beliefs” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 314).

The adult learners in a CGSC class may view graduate school, at this particular point in their professional development or career progression, as a normal stage or phase through which they expect to successfully pass. Sharan Merriam and Carolyn Clark examine both sides of this issue (Hoare, 2006). For some adults change is a normal stage of life that presents itself when appropriate, whereas for other adults it is not normal at all, but rather a response to various new conditions. They feel that change for adults can have either a positive or negative connotation, that it is viewed as either “moving forward” or “slipping backward,” depending on an individual’s perspective (Hoare, 2006, p. 29). Carol Hoare writes that “adult learning is a change in behavior, a gain in knowledge or skills, and an alteration or restructuring of prior knowledge” (Hoare, 2006, p. 11). She goes on to say that adult development equates to “change over time . . . generally growth-oriented” but that some changes “represent perspectives that are more inhibited, restrictive, and less developed” (Hoare, 2006, p. 30). Jarvis adds that some learning experiences may “be detrimental to the development of the person” (Hoare, 2006, p. 30).

Concerns with self-efficacy manifest themselves in how newly-arrived CGSC students cope with the myriad of challenges they face, some of which may have little relation to the academic environment. Adjusting to the environmental changes may present the biggest challenge (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995): being in a classroom, spending off-duty hours with family, having free time, and simply being “back in the world.” For many married students, CGSC will be the most time an officer spends with his or her family ever. While this may initially seem like an unexpected benefit, for many couples or families it can also be a source of tension or friction at home. Classes begin late enough to allow students to drop off school-age or pre-school children, classes usually end early enough that students may arrive at home in time to help their kids with homework or sports of whatever after school activities usually occur in their absence. For students coming from a high-paced operational environment in which they left for work before dawn and returned well after sunset, if they came home that day at all, this can be a period of opportunity conjoined with increased stress. How CGSC students manage and work through these increased demands while adjusting to the new academic environment can be a developmental challenge.

As recent research conducted at CGSC concludes, the “adjustment back into either civilian life or life in non-combat situations involves a transition. Transitions have both a personal and a professional component. On the personal side, it is the reunion of families separated by a military deployment. On the professional level, it is the opportunity to attend military schooling” (Shea, 2010, p. 8). As a transitional period of time, CGSC students may find themselves undergoing a transformation of sorts as described by Jack Mezirow (1991). Having come from an environment, whether deployed or stationed in the U.S., where rules and regulations play a major role in determining daily activities to an environment where

openness, discussion, and dialogue are encouraged is inherently transformational, or at least has the potential for transformation. Under ideal circumstances, CGSC students would find themselves in “a safe, open, and trusting environment that allows . . . participation, collaboration, explorations, critical reflection, and feedback” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 154). For many this will be a shock to their cognitive and affective sensibilities; for others, it will be a breath of fresh air and an opportunity to expand their professional development. In either case, from an adult development perspective, arriving at CGSC and contemplating graduate school contributes to CGSC students’ transformation.

Mezirow’s cognitive and rational view of how adults develop that includes ten phases, some or all of which have application to the situation in which CGSC students find themselves (Mezirow, 1991). He describes a process of perspective transformation that begins with some event that triggers personal appraisal or self-examination. Such an event could very likely or easily be arrival at Fort Leavenworth and beginning the CGSC school year, an event that may very likely trigger an array of cognitive responses, the most familiar of which is the “distorting dilemma” (Mezirow, 1991). CGSC students may find themselves struggling to cope with this new and unfamiliar situation and begin to explore options for new roles (as a student), new relationships (as a member of a CGSC staff group or class), and new actions (reading, discussing, argumentative writing, and taking examinations). The result of this exploration, according to Mezirow’s rational cognitive view of adults, is the development of alternative perspectives that help individuals cope with the new environment and integrate these new ways of thinking into the individuals’ lives.

Robert Kegan proposes what is often called stage theory of adult development in *The Evolving Self* (1992). Although Jean Piaget is generally credited as the father of the stage

theory of child development, its character changes somewhat when applied to adult development. The fundamental premise of Kegan's stage theory, based on Lawrence Kohlberg's moral reasoning development, is that adults move through three major positions or levels: preconventional, conventional, and postconventional (Kegan, 1992). Each of the levels has two stages, for a total of six stages in the moral development of individuals. In the preconventional level, personal survival is paramount, with the primary focus on the self. In Stage 1, people do what is right in order to avoid punishment; in Stage 2, to serve their "own needs or interests" (Kegan, 1992, p. 52). In the conventional level, an individual is primarily concerned with fitting into and being accepted by society. In Stage 3, what is right is "living up to what is expected by people close to you" (Kegan, 1992, p. 52); in Stage 4 it entails "contributing to society, the group, or institution" (Kegan, 1992, p. 52). If development continues, the final level is postconventional, at which individuals make decisions based on broader considerations than either personal survival or conforming to society. Stage 5 incorporates the concepts of "social contract and individual rights" (Kegan, 1992, p. 52) and Stage 6 is defined by universal principles of justice and ethics.

There are gender issues with respect to adult development and how men and women learn that impact their development. Most research for many years was conducted on men and extrapolated to women, if women were considered as part of the research at all (Hayes, 2001). The two most common views of women as learners are defined in terms of the significance of relationships in their learning and their presumed preference for "subjective and affective" (Hayes, 2001, p. 36) ways of learning. The idea that a woman defines herself and views her world primarily in relationship to others was proffered by Carol Gilligan in 1982. The concept of "connected knowing" (Hayes, 2001, p. 37) extended Gilligan's work

by the authors of *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). The authors proposed that connected knowing sought to understand other points of view, as different from separate knowing that took “a more adversarial stance toward new ideas and looking for flaws in logic and reasoning” (Hayes, 2001, p. 37). Connected knowing is not manifested in “exclusively a female voice . . . separate and connect knowing are not gender-specific” (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 102). Separate and connected know “may be gender-related” (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 103), and more women than men may tend toward connected knowing, but there is no research on this specific issue that either supports or refutes a gender link.

The demographics of the individual students may play a role in how they view change associated with graduate school. In Western culture, the values are not the same as those in Eastern culture, or Native American culture, or some other non-Western culture, and participation in graduate school may be viewed differently (Brookfield, 2006). In Western culture traits of individuality, independence, and self-improvement figure high on the scale of desirable characteristics (Wlodkowski, 2008). A U.S. student who manifests Western culture may view him or herself as a “self-starter” with high levels of initiative and motivation, and consider graduate school simply another challenge to be overcome, with some degree of personal and professional benefit the result (Wlodkowski, 2008). Other, non-Western cultures may view the pursuit of a graduate degree as something not for the good or benefit of the group, and therefore less desirable or to be avoided due to “the risk of cultural suicide” (Brookfield, 2006, p. 221). “Cultural inversion” is the tendency of non-Western students to view “certain forms of behavior, events, symbols, and meanings as inappropriate for them”

(Ogbu, 1992, p. 8) because they represent Western culture, not their own. Consideration of the demographics or cultures of the respondents may play a large role in analysis of the data.

As Merriam and Clark explain it in Carol Hoare's *Handbook of Adult Development and Learning*, "the sociocultural context determines what people need to know, educational opportunities offered, how adults learn, and how that learning affects development. How an individual develops is a function of historical and cultural norms in conjunction with chronological age" (Hoare, 2006). But it is not quite as straightforward as that statement may seem to make it, because chronological age refers simply to the number of years an individual has lived, whereas "social time," or the timetable applied to the ordering or sequence of life events, is different. For example, the age at which a person may learn to drive a car, get married, attend college, begin full-time employment, or retire from full-time employment, as some examples, are all events that occur along a culturally-based timeline in conjunction with an individual's actual chronological age. Attending CGSC may be occurring at the expected chronological and social time; graduate school, however, may still be an event an individual still views as far off in the distant, dim future; he or she may not be ready from either a chronological or a social time perspective.

The timing of life events, such as attending CGSC or graduate school, occurs within a "system of social expectations regarding age-appropriate behavior" (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 313). According to Bernice L. Neugarten, individuals pass through a socially regulated cycle of events similar to the biological cycle of life. As adults, individuals develop a sense of when they should be doing something and what that something should be. Certain events are expected to occur at a certain time, and if they occur at unexpected times or outside the expected social life cycle they can cause stress. The events themselves do not "necessarily

precipitate crisis or change” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 314), but the timing of when they occur and whether they are “on-time” or “off-time” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 314). A CGSC student’s decision whether or not to attend graduate school may revolve around his or her perception that graduate school is an event that is socially expected at this particular point in his or her life.

There are four major theoretical perspectives described by Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman in their book, *Counseling Adults in Transition*: contextual, developmental, life-span, and transitional (Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman, 1995). Any or all of these perspectives could apply to CGSC students. The contextual perspective addresses the characteristics of adulthood in relation to the context; the environment, not surprisingly, impacts various transition problems people may experience. For CGSC students, these problems may range from post-traumatic stress issues resulting from recent combat experience, to family or domestic stresses due to prolonged absence from the home due to deployments, to adjusting to a drastically reduced operational pace in the quiet setting of the rural Midwest at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. In addition, a CGSC student’s *culture* may impact how he or she deals with the new environment. If a CGSC student’s culture dictates when it is appropriate to attend graduate school, or even to attend graduate school at all, this could have a significant influence on his or her decision, harkening back to Neugarten’s theory of age-appropriate social expectations discussed earlier.

As they describe it, there are four variables that impact how well CGSC students adapt to their new circumstances: *situation*, or what is happening; *self*, to whom is it happening; *support*, what help is available; and *strategies*, or how the individual copes with the stresses of transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

The *situation* may seem clear-cut and obvious: the individual is assigned to and enrolled in a military institution of higher education. How the individual views the situation, however, may vary based on a number of considerations. Timing is one such factor, in particular with respect to how attending CGSC relates to an individual's social or personal clock, career progression expectations, or even personal development expectations. Control is another factor, and may impact an individual's view of either being in control of life or subject to external control. The fact that everyone attending CGSC has previously attended other military schools mitigates the stress somewhat, so previous experience in similar military academic environments may positively impact the situation. Role change, or an individual's perception of a change in daily professional or personal role, may impact the situation. An individual who has previously led small units, sections, or organizations may experience difficulty adapting to being responsible only to him- or herself and immediate family. Changes in family duties and responsibilities may impact the situation; spouses who have been absent from the home for an extended period may experience significant changes when thrust back into the parental role. How individuals view the situation overall, either positively or negatively, may impact how they transition into their new existence. Officers who do not want to be at CGSC, who view it as either a waste of time, or a less productive use of their time, who would rather be with soldiers in units, may have difficulty managing the transition.

The *self* variable has two components, personal and demographic characteristics and psychological resources (Schlossberg et al., 1995). The former relates to such factors as socioeconomic status, gender, age, and ethnicity. Any of these may impact how an individual copes with the stress of a transition. The latter relates to more internal

characteristics, such as development of his or her ego, an individual's general outlook on life in terms of optimism and levels of self-efficacy, and personal values. The values resource may relate to the factors addressed under *self* with respect to whether or not an individual wants to be at CGSC, values the future benefit of the education and experience, and is committed to trying to do well.

The *support* variable is broken down into four types based on the source of support (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Intimate relationships, such as with a spouse or very close friend or family member, involve trust, sharing confidences, and providing understanding, and are an important resource during stressful transitions. Family units can help an individual adapt to the new circumstances, or at least ease the process of adaptation, although they can also be a source of additional stress. Networks of friends can help cushion a personal or emotional shock, which in most cases will not result from attending CGSC but may be a side-effect if spouse or family members are separated from each other during CGSC. A working spouse may remain in his or her current location due to family considerations, ailing parents, work or employment, or a myriad of other reasons that may cause the transition to CGSC to seem more like a separation or divorce than a ten-month school assignment. Lastly, institutions or communities to which an individual belongs, such as a church, political group, fraternity, or other organization that provides some degree of familiarity and welcome in a new and different environment.

Strategies, or how the individual copes with the stresses of transition, have three types of responses: those that modify the situation, those that control the meaning of the problem, and those that help manage the stress. Responses that modify the situation may involve negotiating some aspect of the new situation, exercising agency and self-

determination rather than simply resigning oneself to an unpleasant or undesired circumstance, or seeking advice from others rather than trying to be self-reliant and dealing with the situation on one's own. An individual's response that impacts the meaning of the problem or transition can involve making positive comparisons to previous similar situations that turned out well or choosing to selectively ignore the negative aspects of the situation. Responses that help manage the stress after it has occurred range from asserting oneself in certain situations in order to regain a semblance of personal agency, assuming a passive attitude about what is going on in various situations, or simply expressing one's emotions in an honest and open manner, to let out pent up feelings.

In contrast, Ruthellen Josselson's research found that women do, in fact, develop differently than men and transition through different stages (Josselson, 1996). Her work was based on Erikson's eight-stage progression in which issues faced by an individual must be resolved before that person can move on to the next developmental stage. Josselson identified four categories: foreclosure, identify achiever, moratorium, and identity diffusion. Women in the *foreclosure* category have adopted parents' standards of behavior and view of life, adhere to the expectations of their family, and follow whatever career direction, if any, the parents have prescribed for them. In the *identify achiever* category, women have begun to develop their own identities and have become more concerned with their own self-perception than parents' views. Women in the *moratorium* category have not yet found their place, struggle to determine their identity, and may have difficulty with commitment. In the *identity diffusion* category, women avoid forming or adhering to any identity, have trouble forming stable relationships, and are overall the most troubled.

For CGSC students who are not struggling with resolution of identity issues, but rather are at peace with respect to who they are and their self-image, the issue of self-efficacy may influence the decision whether or not to attend graduate school. One of the determinants of whether or not a person will attempt a task and persist at it is self-efficacy (Lemme, 2006), or one's beliefs and expectations about whether one has the ability to successfully accomplish a particular task. This calls into question the levels of self-efficacy in CGSC students. If their levels are high they may be more likely to decide to begin graduate school fully expecting to successfully complete the requirements in the time available, approximately ten months. If their levels are low, a different outcome is likely (Lemme, 2006).

According to Bandura, another aspect of self-efficacy is perceived self-efficacy, or "what we think we can and can't do" (Hoare, 2006, p. 171). It relates to an individual's sense of competence, confidence in his or her ability to be successful at whatever task is undertaken, and is frequently a function of the context. Different situations or contexts may generate different levels of perceived self-efficacy, depending on previous experience, the emotional component, potential consequences, the actual demands of the situation or environment, and so forth.

According to Hoare, individuals can exert intentional influence over their experiences and actions, the circumstances they encounter, the skills they acquire, and thus ultimately the course of their development (Hoare, 2006). Self-efficacy beliefs are important for three reasons:

1. Self-efficacy perceptions directly contribute to decision, actions, and experiences. People with high self-efficacy are more willing to pursue challenges, more persistent at those challenges, and experience less anxiety.
2. Self-efficacy perceptions may moderate the impact of other psychological mechanisms on developmental outcomes. People who acquire skills but still doubt their capability in spite of successfully completing a course of instruction may not put their newly-acquired knowledge and skills into practice.
3. Self-efficacy beliefs influence other cognitive and emotional factors that contribute to performance. People with high self-efficacy will set more challenging goals and remain committed to them, which contributes to motivation and achievement.

This agentic capability is worth considering when examining CGSC students' graduate school decision making. People develop beliefs about what the future may bring. A subset of future-oriented beliefs that is central to personality functioning across adulthood is the belief in one's capacity to control significant life events. A CGSC student has a choice about graduate school and the impacts it may have on his or her time at the college.

Career Development and Decision Making

U.S. Army officers attending CGSC are usually at the mid-point of their respective careers. Some have prior enlisted service and may be facing a situation wherein they are eligible for retirement from active duty after a twenty-plus year career as a major. Others are relatively junior majors, and just beginning the professional development transition to field grade officer status, with considerable career development opportunities ahead of them. Exploring how either group decides whether or not to attend graduate school is informed by career development and decision making research. Research on counseling individuals about

their careers, work, professional development, job fit, and other related issues is as applicable to U.S. Army officers as it is to the work force at large.

Some of the key figures in this body of work include Donald Super (1980), John D. Krumboltz (1979), Linda S. Gottfredson (2002), Duane Brown (2002, 2007), Norman C. Gysbers (1997), Linda Brooks (1991), Steven D. Brown (2004, 2005), Robert W. Lent (2004, 2005), Spencer G. Niles (1997, 2002), JoAnn Harris Bowlsbey (2002), Kenneth F. Hughey, (2009), Dorothy Burton Nelson, Joanne K. Damminger, and Betsy McCalla-Wriggins (2009), L. Sunny Hansen (1996), and Nancy K. Schlossberg, Elinor B. Waters, and Jane Goodman (1984, 1995). Although extensive, the list only scratches the surface of individuals involved in or focused on research that addresses how career decisions are made, how careers develop, and what people consider going through this process. The common thread connecting these figures is the realization that there is a link between an individual's characteristics and what those individuals do for a living on a regular daily basis, and that this link can be examined and analyzed. Career development, career choices that impact that development, and degrees of personal satisfaction associated with choices made are all areas to examine in regard to how CGSC students decide whether or not to attend graduate school.

Attending graduate school may entail a decision making process that falls within the conceptual framework proposed by Donald Super. He believes that people are continuously changing, and developed a model to account for those changes over an individual's lifetime (Super, 1980). While there is an age-related component to his model, it does not necessarily follow an orderly progression through stages of development that correspond to different chronological ages, but rather reflect changes that occur when needed or required.

Individuals change when they need to, or when they *recognize* the need to, not when they reach a certain age.

Inherent in his model is the concept of life roles people play, such as homemaker, citizen, or student, to name a few. Corresponding to these life roles are a number of tenets Super developed that elaborate on life changes. The major life stages he discusses are Growth, Exploration, Establishment, Maintenance, and Disengagement (Super, 1980). These stages are not necessarily sequential and discrete; they may overlap onto one another. Growth and Exploration may occur during young adulthood as part of an individual's development of a career that is satisfying or productive, but may also reoccur later in life when the drive for success or financial stability is less urgent and different paths are being explored. Establishment and Maintenance generally fall somewhere in the middle of a person's life-span, but in some cases may occur quite early or late as a result of unexpected good or bad fortunes. Disengagement typically describes the later stages of life, as an adult begins to move into retirement, or "disengages" from the competitive workplace, but there are numerous examples of senior citizens who continue to compete socially, economically, physically, and academically until their last breath.

The stages Super describes can be applied to CGSC students who are in one of these stages in their own lives. They may view graduate school as a growth stage, in which they have the opportunity to expand their understanding of the world and their place in it. They may view graduate school as establishing or improving their professional credentials, thereby increasing their competitiveness for advancement, or as Maintenance if they feel a need to keep up with their peers who already have a graduate degree. Determining the stage of

development CGSC students may help shed light on the factors that impact their decision about graduate school.

Viewing CGSC students through the lens of Super's Life-Span/Life-Space theory helps focus on each individual's major life stage. If a CGSC student perceives the academic challenges as a transition to a new job or another stage in his or her career development, he or she may be cycling through some of the major life stages. Apprehension about academic challenges, concerns about scholastic ability, and adjusting to a classroom versus tactical or operational environment may generate levels of anxiety that could range from minimal to very high. Regardless, CGSC students are undergoing some level of psychological, sociological, and perhaps cultural transition as they arrive at Fort Leavenworth and begin the new academic year. How they adjust to their new environment, how they adapt to this change in their careers, and what they ultimately decide in terms of engagement with other students and faculty will all determine their degree of success or failure.

How well do CGSC students adjust to changes in their careers, particularly as they relate to graduate school? Are CGSC students at a stage in their career development that they are ready to make the decision about graduate school? The characteristic of adult development from Super's *Life-Span/Life-Space* theory relevant to this research is that "The process of change may be summed up as a series of life changes characterized as a sequence of growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline" (Brown, 2007, p. 48). The nature of some careers is constant growth, re-exploration, and reestablishment . . . which sounds very much like a typical military officer's career.

Super's model could be used to explain the stage at which CGSC students are, namely, in another growth and exploration stage: new environment, new set of expectations,

new duty requirements, with increased emphasis on academic versus operational performance, and so forth. Super explains that success at any of the life-career stages “depends on (the) readiness of individual to cope with those demands” (Brown, 2007, p. 50) and calls this readiness career maturity. Dealing with the demands of the CGSC environment will be a challenge for some of the students, while others seem to thrive in it.

John D. Krumboltz proposed that individuals make career decisions, such as attending graduate school, based on what they have learned previously in their lives and how they learned it. He identified four factors that influence an individual’s career decision making: genes, environment, learning experiences, and what he calls “task approach skills,” such as self-observation, goal setting, and information (Krumboltz, 1979). The learning experiences can exert a powerful influence on career behaviors, especially those involving important role models in an individual’s life, such as a parent or parents, teachers, civic leaders with whom a person had a long-term relationship, or even personal heroes. Based on these four factors, individuals develop a set of beliefs about work, careers, and life roles, and these beliefs in turn influence choices made with respect to careers and work behaviors. The beliefs CGSC students have spent a lifetime forming will influence their decision about graduate school. The words of teachers and parents about such topics as the value of education, the importance of self-improvement, the skill sets acquired through a series of challenging operational assignments that entailed steep learning curves: all these can have an impact on a person’s decision about graduate school.

Another way of looking at how CGSC students make their decisions about graduate school revolves around SCCT, which draws from both Krumboltz’s career development and counseling work and Albert Bandura’s social learning theory. The key considerations

according to SCCT are beliefs of self-efficacy, expected outcomes, and personal goals (Brown & Lent, 2005). CGSC students have some expectations of whether they are likely to be successful in graduate school that are influenced by their previous academic experiences and contribute to their beliefs of success in future academic environments. Do they expect a painful and unpleasant experience sitting in more classes on top of the daily CGSC classroom sessions? Do they expect to feel good about what they are learning, excited about the professional, personal, and academic progress they are making, and to have an overall successful outcome at the end of the graduate school year? Do CGSC students have clearly defined, or even moderately developed, personal goals, such as a master's degree by a certain year or age, some number of credit hours toward a graduate degree by a particular time in their lives, or simply to successfully meet the requirements of the CGSC academic curriculum? In a different vein, are CGSC students' goals focused less on academic achievement and perhaps more on social and personal development, in particular with immediate family members? All of these may impact their decision about graduate school in various degrees.

The key aspect of SCCT is that it helps explain how individuals “develop vocational choices, make and remake occupational choices, (and) achieve varying levels of career success and stability” (Brown & Lent, 2005). SCCT illuminates a CGSC student's decision making with respect to graduate school in terms of how the individual addresses several considerations. One is with respect to self-efficacy, or beliefs about one's ability to do the work: “Can I do this?” The second relates to expected outcomes or consequences: “If I do this, what will happen?” The third focuses on goals and determination to engage in an activity in order to produce a particular outcome: “How much do I *want* to do this?” The

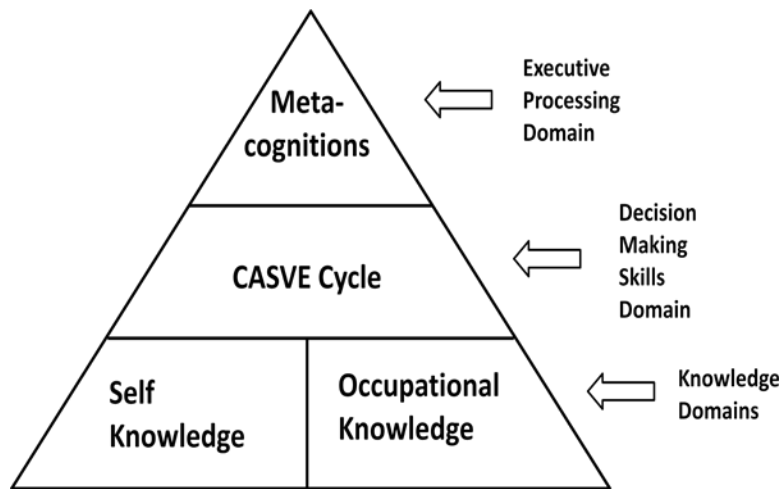
final consideration is about support for or barriers to success in this activity: “How will the environment treat me if I try this?” (Brown & Lent, 2005).

SCCT incorporates three central variables from general social cognitive theory: self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals (Brown & Lent, 2005). Self-efficacy may have the greatest impact on CGSC students’ beliefs that they can organize their lives, arrange their personal and academic schedules, and do the things they need to do in order to successfully complete graduate school. According to Bandura, individual self-efficacy beliefs result from four primary types of experiences: personal performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, social persuasion, and physiological and affective states, with personal performance accomplishments being the most compelling (Bandura, 2001). Personal attainment relates to what an individual has actually done; success builds personal efficacy. Vicarious learning is when an individual sees people similar to him- or herself succeed; the greater an individual’s perceived similarity to others, the more persuasive are the successes of these social models. Social persuasion strengthens self-efficacy beliefs through verbal encouragement. Individuals who are convinced by others that they are capable of success will try harder and sustain their effort longer than individuals who have not been so persuaded. Finally, physiological and affective states influence individual self-efficacy. Stress, tension, fatigue, or aches and pains can be viewed as either signs of poor performance or as motivation to continue on and try harder.

The Cognitive Information Processing (CIP) approach to career counseling consists of a pyramid (Figure 2-3) that describes the domains of cognition involved in a career choice, which attending graduate school clearly is. It was developed by Peterson, Sampson, Reardon, and Lenz to portray the three domains of career choice and decision making

(Brown & Associates, 2002). Self-knowledge and occupational knowledge form the base. In the middle is where the decision making process occurs and is called the decision making skills domain. This part of the pyramid consists of five information-processing skills: Communication, Analysis, Synthesis, Valuing, and Executing (CASVE). At the top of the pyramid is the Executive Processing Domain, in which an individual focuses on metacognition, or “thinking about thinking.” The focus at this level is on monitoring and evaluating the decision making process to determine if it’s working correctly, if any adjustments need to be made, or if anything can be done to make it better.

Figure 2-3. Pyramid of Information Processing Domains



(Brown & Associates, 2002)

The CGSC student’s self-knowledge and occupational knowledge in regard to graduate school varies between individuals. Furthermore, self-knowledge is based on the individual’s perceptions rather than reality, and may or may not be accurate. In order to make a rational decision about graduate school, the CGSC student must ask him- or herself some hard questions about interests, skills, values, knowledge, and ability. Knowledge about graduate school (“occupational knowledge”) is more concrete and can be verified. An increase in occupational knowledge can be obtained from university counselors and program

managers who are able to describe skill requirement, work load, GPA minimums, and so forth.

Brown's *Values-Based, Holistic Model of Career and Life-Role Choices and Satisfaction* addresses the role of values in career-decision making and, in a related manner, decision making with respect to graduate school (Brown & Associates, 2002). His values-based model is based on a number of propositions that influence how an adult makes career choice decisions. The propositions range from "Making choices that coincide with values is essential to satisfaction" to "High-functioning people have well-developed and prioritized values." As a result of his research in this area, Brown developed some assumptions when advising clients on career decisions.

1. "The decision maker is the person who will make the decision and may not be the person who will implement the choice" (Brown, 2007, p. 491). (Issue of dependent versus independent decision maker.)
2. "The (student) is (not) the only person who should be included in the decision making process" (Brown, 2007, p. 492). (Involvement of parents, family members, spouses, children, etc.)
3. "The choice of an occupation is part of a broader decision; the choice of a lifestyle and the process should be embedded in this context of lifestyle design" (Brown, 2007, p. 492). (Issue of individual's perception of what his or lifestyle should be. Deciding about graduate school should not occur in a vacuum.)
4. "With dependent decision makers . . . both the (student) and the decision maker (must be) aware of the implications . . . both in terms of the values of both parties and the ramifications of the choice for lifestyle. Decision makers have varying

ideas about the urgency of the need to make a . . . decision and the influences that should come to bear on the decision” (Brown, 2007, p. 492). Savikas (1991) says

“Everyone has a career, but not everyone knows that he or she has a career.”

Paraphrased for students, he says “Every student can have a career in the future, but not every student is aware of the possibility that they can shape their careers in the future.” (Issue of agency, self-efficacy, locus of control.)

5. “Conflicting values must be identified and reconciled. The values system of (students) often include conflicting values that may immobilize them in the . . . decision making process” (Brown, 2007, p. 495). (Issue of conflict between collective and individual social values, dependent and independent decision makers.)

Linda Gottfredson developed a theory to address the career development decisions people make and the compromises inherent in those decisions. Her Theory of Circumscription and Compromise described the process individuals go through in life, discarding career options based on attitudes and beliefs of expected success or capability that often have no basis in fact (Gottfredson, 2002). She proposed that as children develop they tend to recreate the inequalities of the adults around them, in particular with respect to academic achievement and social beliefs, regardless of the actual impact or influence on their lives. These structures of inequality are perceived to reduce choices or options available to children as they become adults; they have unknowingly circumscribed their career choices. As an example, young girls may circumscribe their view of potential career choices when they believe certain jobs are for girls and others for boys because that is what they have seen

in the adults around them and what they were taught, not because there is any proof or support for that perspective.

The compromise aspect of Gottfredson's theory occurs when individuals decide not to pursue career choices based on their beliefs of what is acceptable and unacceptable based on gender or social class. A poor young girl from a disadvantaged rural community, for example, may not consider applying to college an acceptable course of action, and so she eliminates that from her list of possibilities; she compromises her hopes and aspirations based on her self-identify and self-concept developed over time, regardless of its lack of validity. A young man may give up his vision of becoming an opera singer or ballroom dancer because such occupations are not consistent with his gender-typed career beliefs, or he may not even try to succeed in school because he believes a career in engineering, biology, or architecture is simply unattainable.

CGSC students may be unconsciously circumscribing their options and making these same kinds of compromises. If they are the first in their family to get a college degree, they may view a graduate degree as "a bridge too far." They may be circumscribing their alternatives based on gender, social class, ethnicity, or cultural influences, and not even be aware they are doing so. Without a strong belief in the probability of success or a favorable outcome, getting outside individual comfort zones may be too difficult for many CGSC students. If their experience growing up included social inequalities between social classes, races, or genders, it may be simply too difficult for a female African-American, for example, to step outside that unspoken boundary. Instead, she may compromise, modify her career choices, and settle for something less than she may be fully capable of becoming.

Gottfredson's theory of Circumscription and Compromise, in which she looked at how career aspirations developed, is based on four assumptions:

1. Career development process begins in childhood.
2. Career aspirations are attempts to implement a person's self-concept.
3. Career satisfaction depends on the degree to which a career is congruent with self-perceptions.
4. People develop occupational stereotypes that guide them in the selection process.

(Gottfredson, 2002)

She describes four developmental stages, but one relevant to this research is the last stage, which she calls "Choices explored," that occurs at age 14 and older. In this stage of development an individual considers jobs within tolerable boundaries based on criteria: sex-role association, social status association, and perceptions of abilities. A person may reject some options based on perceptions, difficulty, or acceptability; thus, he or she makes compromises with respect to career choice. This phenomenon can be extrapolated to pertain to decision making about graduate school if a person has "unduly restricted occupational choices due to lack of self-knowledge, knowledge about occupations (graduate school), or unexamined sex-role or racial-ethnic stereotypes" (Gottfredson, 2002, p. 58). It might also occur if a person is not aware of the pathways to occupations, such as graduate school, and lacks confidence that he or she can negotiate those pathways. An area of additional research might explore what a CGSC student knows about graduate school opportunities, how they learn it, and who tells them or is responsible for guiding them to learn it for themselves.

Another career development theory that has application to graduate school decision making is the Contextualist Theory, proposed by Deborah Bloch, a leadership studies

professor at University of San Francisco. In this theory, individuals can only be understood “in the context of their environments as they experience them and make sense or meaning of the experiences” (Brown, 2007, p. 73). Bloch states that “everything in the world is connected and non-predictable. People continuously regenerate their careers. . . . Careers are fractals and are part of people’s lives, and they, in turn are part of interlinked networks that shape and reshape themselves” (Brown, 2007, p. 75). Graduate school could be viewed through this lens as a student’s effort to “regenerate their careers” or “reshape themselves.”

Bloch defines a career as an “adaptive entity” (Brown, 2007, p. 74) and describes eleven characteristics of adaptive entities. The common characteristic among the eleven is that adaptive entities can both maintain themselves and be in a constant state of change, moving through transitions, creating new versions of themselves, and always moving between order and chaos. She draws the analogy between peoples’ careers and their lives, both of which range from orderly to chaotic, always striving to maintain some sense of balance. The philosophical foundation of Bloch’s theory is the idea that “career counseling is spiritual counseling” (Brown, 2007, p. 75) and the importance of establishing and maintaining a link between work and spirituality.

Irving L. Janis and L. Mann state that conflict is caused whenever a person is faced with making a decision, thus producing stress and uncertainty (Brown, 2007). Conflict begins when a person feels compelled to consider a threat and continues through several steps that can be illustrated by a series of questions that require action leading to the next question when answered positively, but lead to an interruption of decision making process when answered negatively—

1. Are risks involved if I do not change?

2. Are the risks serious if I do not change?
3. Can I hope to find a viable solution to the problem?
4. Is there sufficient time to search for viable alternatives?

Graduate School Decision Making

The decision to enroll in graduate school is not easily made. Whether continuing in college after receiving a bachelor's degree or returning to academia after a decade or more experience in the work force, either case is fraught with multiple considerations, higher order effects, and unknown consequences.

Howard McClusky postulated a theory of margin to describe the framework of adult lives as "grounded in the notion that adulthood is a time of growth, change, and integration in which one constantly seeks balance between the amount of energy needed and the amount available" (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 93). He identified two key factors: load and power (McClusky, 1970). McClusky describes "load" as the demands made upon an individual by him- or herself and by society. "Power" refers to the resources available to an individual to cope with the "load," such as ability, position, possessions, and so forth. "Load" uses up energy available to an individual, the "power" of life. The margin referred to is the relationship of the load to the power available, or load divided by power if expressed as a simple equation. The optimal margin for an individual to cope with the various challenges life presents is above 0.5 or somewhere between 0.5 and 0.8 (Hiemstra, 1981). "Surplus power" would provide a cushion with which to deal with unexpected emergencies, challenges, misfortunes, or other unanticipated demands upon an individual. The margin available to CGSC students may be sufficient, but may also entail curtailment of other, competing interests or demands, and may play a major role in their decision about graduate

school. Consideration of CGSC students' available margin will inform an analysis of the factors that impact their decision.

McClusky further divided both load and power into internal and external components (McClusky, 1970). He describes *internal* load as the sum of the desires, aspirations, and goals of an individual that define his or her life expectancies; these are more or less self-developed and self-imposed. He describes the *external* load as commitments to family, career, colleagues at work, and the community at large--normal life requirements, but still a demand on the individual. The internal and external loads for CGSC students may be considerable: recently returned from long-term deployment, to include extended training at both ends; high expectations on the part of family, children, spouse, parents, and so forth; "the best year of your life;" personal desire to do as well as possible, not to embarrass oneself in front of a new group of peers; anxiety over operational experience, particularly recent combat experience versus no combat experience or combat deployments. All these can contribute to both internal and external load.

In order to gain some control over one's life, either the load has to decrease or the power level has to increase. Similar to his description of load, McClusky also separates *power* into an internal and an external component. *Internal power* consists of knowledge, skills, and attributes accumulated over a lifetime of experience. It may include physical abilities, mental or cognitive skills, psychological fortitude, resiliency, strength of personality, or general coping skills. It is the sum of all those internal abilities that give a person the strength to persevere, to overcome adversity, and to succeed in the face of difficulties. *External power* comes from outside the individual; it may come from the immediate or extended family, social network of friends and colleagues, or economic ability

or strength. For example, an individual with a six digit income has greater economic power (external) than an individual in a homeless shelter.

The ratio between an individual's load and his or her power is the key to whether that person is likely to enroll in graduate school. Each person is aware of his or her margin of power, the ratio between what he or she perceives as the load and how much power is available to cope with it. If the margin is sufficient, and the perceived benefit is great enough, that person will participate in a graduate program. Changes in the margin may adversely impact the margin, however; continuing education literature is full of stories of promising master's and doctoral students who began a program of instruction with all the stars aligned, but their margin was insufficient to allow for unforeseen, perhaps life-altering, events.

The significance of McClusky's theory of margin includes a gender-related characteristic. When comparing the margins of men and women in graduate school, the multiple roles women find themselves taking on often make them more vulnerable to strains and imbalance between those roles, and thus more likely to find themselves unable or unwilling to complete graduate school (Grenier & Burke, 2008). In addition, the number of children a woman has and their age(s) can likewise play a role in the perceived load and available power to deal with that load (Grenier & Burke, 2008).

Related to McClusky's theory of margin is the concept of self-efficacy. The ratio between individual load and power notwithstanding, whether a person thinks he or she can succeed at graduate school influences whether they will even consider enrolling. Daniel Cervone, Daniele Aristico, and Jane M. Berry propose that "people have the capacity for self-agency" (Hoare, 2006, p. 169) and that they are capable of taking charge of their lives in

order to effect change. However, this capacity is also subject to external and internal influences. E. A. Skinner describes how people “develop beliefs about what the future may bring” and that a large part of their functioning across adulthood is based on the relation of those beliefs to their “capacity to control significant life events” (Hoare, 2006, p. 171). The concept of agency implies control over life events, and there are different types of control beliefs. According to J. B. Rotter, one set of beliefs relates to how much control an individual has over events, and the other set relates to an individual’s capacity to take action in response to life events (Hoare, 2006).

Summary

Preliminary research began with an examination of who attends graduate school and why they attend, both civilian and military. The overall benefits of a graduate degree in terms of income, job security, and promotion potential specific to military personnel were examined to establish a baseline for further research. Participation issues served as an overarching theme that encompassed barriers or impediments to enrolling in graduate school, a discussion of the characteristics of adult learners, and an overview of some of the adult development perspectives. A review of career development and decision making, in particular with respect to the advantages and disadvantages of a graduate degree, provided context for what influenced the decisions of CGSC students.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will describe the qualitative research methodology used in this case study. The rationale for using a qualitative research model and characteristics of qualitative research were addressed. Specific topics discussed include case study methodology, data collection and analysis, the student population and the sample, the role of the researcher, standards of quality and verification, as well as the practices for the protection of the confidentiality of the participants. The chapter will conclude with a summary.

This examination of how U.S. Army CGSC students decided whether or not to attend graduate school will help provide insight into their decisions about graduate school. By its very nature, the participant group is unique and circumscribed: unique because only U.S. Army officers attending the resident ILE course at Fort Leavenworth were asked to participate; circumscribed because the class began in August 2011, graduated in June 2012, and will never exist in the same configuration again. The population being studied has a beginning and an end. The largest proportion of CGSC students are Army officers, and despite some commonalities in DoD guidance and regulations, an examination of officers from all the Services would unnecessarily complicate the research. As the largest demographic group attending CGSC, U.S. Army officers provided sufficient numbers to purposefully select participants. Including international officers, warrant officers, and DoD civilians would present differences in culture, background, and histories that are not the focus of this study.

The intent of this study was to explore how U.S. Army CGSC students decided whether or not to attend graduate school. The expectation was that such an examination

would provide some insight into what influences a CGSC student's decision about graduate school, and that knowing those factors will prove useful to the college administration and leadership, the civilian university graduate school program administrators, and to the faculty members who advise students. The researcher expected that each of these key actors would have an interest in the outcome of the study, and that this study could be viewed as applied research. Patton wrote that applied research contributes "knowledge that will help people understand the nature of a problem in order to intervene, thereby allowing human beings to more effectively control their environment (2002, p. 217), which was the intent of this study. As Sharan Merriam described in *Qualitative Research*, applied research may "be used by administrators and policymakers to improve the ways things are done" (Merriam, 2009, p. 4), such as the college administration, leadership, and faculty.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research question: How do U.S. Army CGSC students decide whether or not to attend graduate school? Subordinate questions that served to inform the primary research question are:

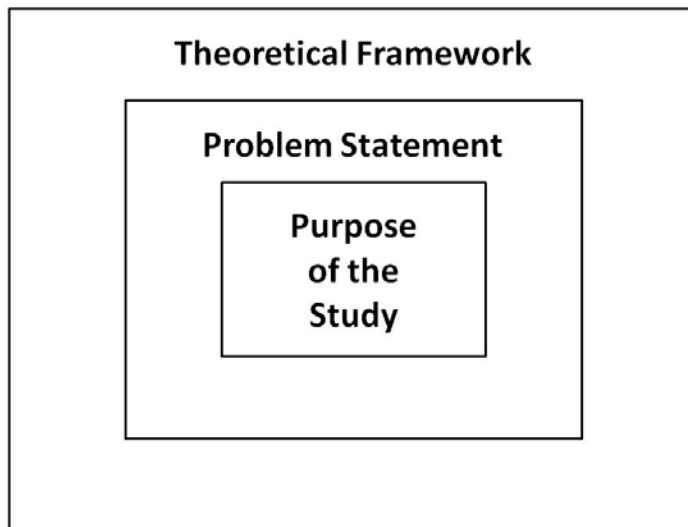
1. Do military career requirements influence a CGSC student's decision to attend graduate school? If so, how do they influence the decision? If not, why not?
2. Do post-military career aspirations and requirements play a role in a CGSC student's decision to attend graduate school? If so, how? If not, why not?
3. Do family considerations influence a CGSC student's decision to attend graduate school? If so, how? If not, why not?
4. Does previous academic experience influence a CGSC student's decision to attend graduate school? If so, how? If not, why not?

The Theoretical Framework

It is important to situate the research within a theoretical framework, to identify what is already known, what aspect the research will focus on, why it is important, what is not known or the “gap” in knowledge about the issue, and why it should be researched. What is already known is that nearly half of the of U.S. Army officers arriving at CGSC every year already have an advanced degree of some kind, usually a master’s degree. What is also already known is that a large percentage of U.S Army officers attending CGSC earn either their first or their second master’s degree, resulting in nearly 90% of the class that graduates having at least a master’s degree. This research will focus on the CGSC student’s decision, how each student made his or her decision, and what influenced the decision each student made. Understanding their decision making process, from the time they are notified up to a year before arriving in many cases, to sitting down in their first class, CGSC students apply some process, weigh different priorities, seek advice, and eventually make a decision. *How* that decision is made is largely unknown, and what influences that decision is understood even less. What is *not* known, or the gap, is how U.S. Army CGSC students decide whether or not to earn a master’s degree and what influences their decisions. This lack of understanding of the factors that influence their decisions about graduate school are why this topic should be researched.

Figure 3-1 graphically portrays Sharan Merriam’s description of how the theoretical framework “frames” both the problem statement and, more specifically, the purpose of the study (Merriam, 2009). It provides a simple, but elegant and parsimonious portrayal of the key considerations in developing a sound research plan and then executing it.

Figure 3-1. The Theoretical Framework



(Merriam, 2009, p. 68)

The theoretical framework for this research was career development theory, decision making, and adult development. Career development theory, decision making, and adult development formed the “underlying structure, the scaffolding or frame” (Merriam, 2009, p. 66) of the research. The steps individuals take to affect their career, the decisions they make to improve their competitiveness in the job market, whether military or civilian, and the stage they are at in their development frame the research.

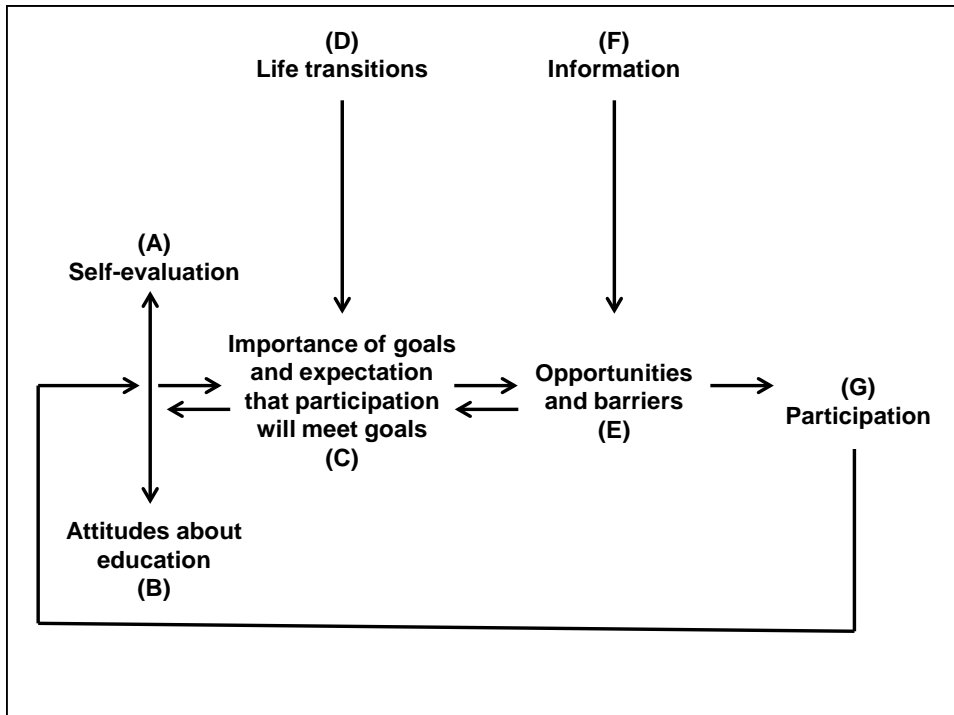
The theoretical framework generates “the ‘problem’ of the study, specific research questions, data collection and analysis techniques” (Merriam, 2009, p. 67), and how the findings will be interpreted. In turn, the problem statement, addressed later in the chapter, was constructed from “information . . . pulled from the . . . frame of the study” (Merriam, 2009, p. 68). In order to understand how individuals decided whether or not to attend graduate school, and what the influences were on them in making that decision, is framed by career development, decision making, and adult development theory, and informs the development of the problem statement. In this research, the problem statement asked “how”

CGSC students decided, and the subordinate research questions focused in on areas that were expected to be influential in that decision.

The innermost frame is “the exact purpose of the study” (Merriam, 2009, p. 69), in this case to explore an area of interest to the key actors described above and to contribute to the knowledge base in that regard. The exploratory nature of this study was paramount in its design and execution. Although the researcher had some expectations with respect to what may or may not prove influential, those expectations had no basis in prior research on the population being studied; such research did not exist. Other populations have been studied: U.S. Navy and Air Force officers, civilian graduate students, the health care industry, and corporate business are some examples. However, to date no research has been conducted on the specific population of U.S. Army officers attending CGSC.

Cross’s Chain of Response (COR) model provided a conceptual framework that helped “identify the relevant variables and hypothesize their interrelationships” (Cross, 1981, p. 124). The COR model incorporates adult development theories, career decision making theories, and career development theories to illustrate how adult learners decide whether or not to “participate in which learning activities” (Cross, 1981, p. 124). While Cross admits “it is still far from the kind of theory that can be used to predict” (p. 124) participation, it links many of the issues together in a logical manner that enabled this exploratory research.

Figure 3-2. Chain-of-Response (COR) Model



(Cross, 1981, p. 124)

Answers to the research questions were obtained by modifying Cross's COR model to provide a framework for the interview protocol. Her COR model has seven major components that together help determine whether or not an adult will participate in learning activities, as shown in figure 4. Each component provided a baseline for data that contributed to answering the research question. The COR model provided a framework about which the researcher was able to develop the interview protocol to solicit the individual respondents' perspectives on how they decided whether or not to attend graduate school.

While not directly answering the research questions, the model provided a path through each interview that walked the respondent through the different components, the result of which were fairly direct answers to the research questions. For example, the first component of the model, Self-evaluation, addresses the respondent's confidence in his or her ability to succeed in graduate school. Responses ranged from very confident to not confident

at all, which contributed in many instances to answering the 4th subordinate question regarding the influence of previous academic experience. Positive previous academic experiences increased respondents' confidence, negative previous academic experiences decreased respondents' confidence, but in some cases the individual continued to strive to attend and successfully complete a graduate school course of study anyway.

Cross's COR model provided a framework for the interview protocol. Interview questions were annotated according to the component from which they were derived, as described below.

[A] Self-evaluation. How confident was the student that he or she would succeed in graduate school? Cross writes that lack of confidence results in people not putting themselves in situations that may threaten their self-esteem (Cross, 1981).

[B] Attitudes about education. Attitudes "arise directly from the learner's own past experience and indirectly from the attitudes and experiences of friends and 'significant others'" (Cross, 1981, p. 125).

[A] and [B] Linkage. Attitude toward learning that impacts eagerness to seek out new experiences, potential for growth vs. avoidance of challenges. An individual's attitude toward learning influences his or her likelihood of trying something new and different, such as graduate school.

[C] Importance of goals. The value assigned to a graduate degree as a means to achieve a goal and the importance of achieving it. A highly-valued goal for which a particular action or activity is likely to result, then motivation to pursue that goal is strong.

[D] Life transitions. An individual's self-determined point in his or her own life cycle. Although transitions are usually gradual, they may be brought about by "sudden dramatic changes" (Cross, 1981, p. 127) and generate increased interest in graduate school.

[E] Opportunities and barriers. These become more important after an individual has arrived at the point where he or she "is motivated to participate" (Cross, 1981, p. 127), and either provide new avenues to explore (opportunities) or act as impediments (barriers).

[F] Information. Links motivated students to opportunities and can serve as an impediment if needed information is not readily available or not forthcoming as expected.

[G – AB] Participation. Previous experience in adult learning activities, such as undergraduate school or previous master's degree program, has a strong influence on future participation.

Basis for Choosing a Qualitative Research Methodology

Patton writes that qualitative studies can have four different purposes: research, program evaluation, dissertations, and personal inquiry (Patton, 2002). The purpose of *this* qualitative study was self-evidently for a dissertation, but it also had as its purpose research, to add to the body of knowledge about a how CGSC students decide whether or not to attend graduate school. It is not intended as a program evaluation of the course, nor as a personal inquiry. Despite the large proportion of CGSC students enrolled in graduate school each year, how those individuals make their respective decisions is largely unknown.

A characteristic of qualitative research is that the findings are not judged by their accuracy, correctness, adherence to a strict methodology, or strength of proof of a theory, but by their “substantive significance” (Patton, 2002, p. 467). As Patton describes the researcher’s argument, there are four questions that must be answered:

- How solid, coherent, and consistent is the evidence in support of the findings?
- To what extent and in what ways do the findings increase and deepen understanding of the phenomenon being studied?
- To what extent are the findings consistent with other knowledge?
- To what extent are the findings useful for some intended purpose? (Patton, 2002)

The evidence in support of the findings was solid, coherent, and consistent. Analysis of the transcripts of interviews with 26 CGSC students provided answers to the subordinate research questions, thereby supporting the findings. The findings provided an increased understanding of how CGSC students decide whether or not to attend graduate school, and what the influences are on their decision. The findings also revealed a number of unexpected trends or themes with respect to the research, which also deepened the understanding of the process and how it is influenced. The findings are consistent with research conducted on other groups of graduate students, and with the extant literature about how adults decide whether or not to participate in learning activities. Lastly, the findings are useful for some intended purpose, the purpose being to increase understanding of how CGSC students decide whether or not to attend graduate school and what the influences are on their decision.

As Patton describes it, “Qualitative data transforms data into findings” (Patton, 2002, p. 432). There are numerous metaphors and descriptions of how this process actually occurs, but most agree that the process is both art and science. Likewise, Miles and Huberman

(1994) identify the problem as one of having few agreed-upon rules for qualitative data analysis. Numerous guidelines and suggestions exist, but these are not rules to be followed, but merely suggestions on how a researcher might proceed. Their application entails judgment, perspective, critical thinking, and creativity—“the analytical intellect and style of the analyst” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 433).

Case Study Methodology

The case study methodology was chosen in order to provide an in-depth, detailed exploration of how U.S. Army CGSC students decide whether or not to enroll in graduate school. The case study methodology is appropriate when the purpose of research is to add to the already-existing knowledge about individual, group, or social phenomena and increase understanding of their complexity. The rationale for using a case study strategy is that the researcher “explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals” (Cresswell, 2009, p.13). Additionally, Yin describes three purposes for case study research, although he points out that they are not limited to only the case study methodology. He describes any research as “exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory” (Yin, 2009, p. 8). This research was exploratory in nature. What made the case study methodology appropriate for this research are three conditions: the type of research questions; the degree of control the researcher has over events being researched; and the focus on the present, here and now, rather than on past historical events. Some components of the study were descriptive in nature to set the context and explain the setting for CGSC students. Similarly, parts of the study were explanatory, and served to describe how a process or program unique to CGSC was implemented. Overall, however, the focus of the study was to explore how U.S. Army CGSC students decided whether or not to attend graduate school.

The case study methodology is aptly suited for this research because it is *particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic* (Merriam, 2009), key characteristics for case study research. *Particularistic* because case studies focus on a particular event, program, phenomenon, or group. Particularism was evidenced in this research because the group or individuals are U.S. Army CGSC students; the program is graduate school. This research was *descriptive* because the end result was a thorough, detailed description of the process individuals went through deciding about graduate school and how they made their respective decisions. *Heuristic* because each individual helped shed light on the phenomenon being studied, the factors that impacted their graduate school decision making, and how they decided whether or not to attend graduate school.

The research was a case study in accordance with Merriam's description in *Qualitative Research*. The research consisted of a detailed description and analysis of a bounded system, the graduate school program conducted in conjunction with CGSC. The reference population and context was bounded, in that a single institution, group, or community, in this case, a class of CGSC students, was the subject of the research. The particular situation that was the focus of the study: how U.S. Army CGSC students decided whether or not to attend graduate school. The research resulted in a thick, rich description of how individual U.S. Army CGSC students made their respective decisions: what took place from the time he or she first considered graduate school, what, if any, decision making process was involved, who was consulted for advice, the impact of family considerations, and so forth.

As Yin describes it, if it is virtually impossible to separate the variables of a phenomenon, case study methodology is ideally suited because it takes all the variables into

consideration during examination and analysis (Yin, 2009). He describes three situations in which it is appropriate to use case study methodology. The first one is when attempting to answer either “how” or “why” questions. “Who” is not at question; “what” is clearly straightforward; “when” equally so, as well as “where.” The focus in this research is on “how” CGSC students decided whether or not to attend graduate school and “how” select factors influenced that decision. The second situation is when the researcher has little control over the events surrounded the phenomenon being studied, which also applies to this study; the researcher had no control over events surrounding a CGSC student’s decision regarding graduate school. They arrived several months before the interviews took place, they had already made their decision about graduate school, and in some cases were already months or even years into their program of study. The third situation for which the case study methodology is appropriate and well-suited is when a particular phenomenon is so unique that its very nature may help establish the limits or boundaries of other experiences. In this case, the study was conducted at the U.S. Army CGSC. The student body is unique, in particular when only U.S. Army officers are the object of study. Although Army officers have been studied and researched, probed extensively over the past half-century, CGSC students attending graduate school is a particularly unique aspect of the class.

Student Population

The primary mission of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College is to educate mid-grade military officers, predominantly U.S. Army majors, but a small number of captains, lieutenant colonels, and colonels attend. It has two ten-month sessions, one that begins in August and ends in June, and another that begins in February and graduates in December. Nearly 1400 students graduated from CGSC last year. This total includes nearly

1100 Army officers, approximately 175 officers from the U.S. Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and sometimes the Coast Guard, as well as 18 civilians from various government agencies. In addition, 115 officers from other nations attended under various state department and international military training and exchange programs. The diverse student composition provides for a broad educational experience, but the educational experience resulting from the diversity of the student population is not the focus of this research. The focus of this research is on U.S. Army CGSC students.

All CGSC students have at least a bachelor’s degree as a requirement for their commission and many have graduate degrees. As shown in Table 3-1, nearly half of the student population in Class 12-01 that began in August 2011 already had an advanced degree, either a master’s, some professional degree (law, veterinary medicine, etc.), or a doctorate. If newly-arrived CGSC students who are enrolled in either a master’s or a doctoral program are included, that percentage increases to 59%.

Table 3-1. Advanced Degrees in CGSC Class 12-01

<i>Total Population (U.S. only): 984</i>		
Master’s Degrees	400	41%
Professional Degrees	45	5%
Doctorates	4	<1%
<i>Total Degrees</i>	449	46%
Master’s Degrees in-progress	124	13%
Doctorates in-progress	11	1%
Total (including in-progress degrees)	585	59%

(U. S. Army Command and General Staff School, 2011).

Sample

The research required nonrandom samples. There are specific, unique characteristics of respondents needed to answer the research question. Most of the desired characteristics were ascertained through a series of yes or no questions in an online survey emailed to CGSC students. A series of questions that gathered additional demographic data aided the researcher in obtaining coverage as broad as possible with respect to gender, marital status, branch, and so forth. Not until near the end of the online survey was the respondent asked whether or not he or she is enrolled in graduate school. At this point, it is not significant to the study whether the student was already enrolled when he or she arrived at CGSC, whether an individual enrolled after arriving, or even whether it is a “brick and mortar” or an online program. The significant data point is that they are, in fact, participating in a graduate degree-producing program at the time they are asked. Depending on how long it has been since such an individual made the decision to attend graduate school, he or she may not be capable of remembering *how* the decision was made, just that it was. Given the significance of such a decision, however, the possibility that such students are able to recall how they decided whether or not to attend graduate school warrants including them in the population. The online survey concluded by asking if the respondent would be willing to meet with the researcher to discuss how he or she made that decision and, if so, contact information.

The selection of students was a purposeful sample. As Krathwohl describes purposeful sampling, and as it applied to this research, it served to “select individuals that will better inform the researcher” (Krathwohl, 1998, p. 172). The individuals selected did, in fact, “have information, perspectives, contacts, or whatever the researchers need” (Krathwohl, 1998, p. 172). The research required students who have considered graduate

school *and* made a decision with respect to attendance. As it turned out, all of the students who agreed to meet for interviews with the researcher had considered whether or not to attend graduate school, made a decision one way or the other, and were willing to discuss that decision with the researcher.

Procedures

There were four parts to the data collection effort. The **first part** consisted of informal interviews with the directors of graduate programs available to CGSC students, in this case Kansas State University, Central Michigan University, and Webster University. Other universities also offer master's degrees or other advanced degrees, but these three schools have permanent offices in the installation education center, and their programs comprise the majority of master's degrees earned by CGSC students. The focus of the interviews was to get the program directors' perspectives on how CGSC students decide whether or not to attend graduate school. Each of them have many years of experience advising incoming CGSC students with respect to their graduate school programs. The graduate school programs vary from university to university in some ways, but all of them are designed to enable completion concurrent with graduation from CGSC: classes usually begin when the CGSC academic year begins, winter breaks occur around the holiday period at the same time, and their respective graduation ceremonies take place a week or so before the CGSC class graduates. Interviews with graduate school program administrators also helped inform the student interview protocol and contributed to understanding each student's decision making process. Their perspectives provided insights into how CGSC students decided about graduate school, what some of their concerns were, and what some of the influences might have been on their decision.

The **second part** consisted of informal interviews with select members of the faculty. Appendix D contains the interview protocols for both the directors of graduate programs available to CGSC students and for the faculty who were interviewed. The focus of the faculty interviews was similar to the focus of the university graduate program directors, to get their perspectives on how CGSC students decide whether or not to attend graduate school. A half-dozen faculty members were interviewed. The number of faculty members interviewed was determined by the researcher's perception that no new information was being gathered; by the fourth interview, much of what they were providing was either redundant to previous interviews or did not further contribute to the research. The faculty members interviewed were either staff group advisors or teaching team leaders (team leaders are nominally in charge of a 12-person teaching team), both of whom counsel individual students periodically throughout the academic year. Interviews with the university personnel and faculty members were not tape recorded, but notes taken during the interviews were transcribed into a narrative summary and provided to each individual for verification of accuracy, content, and tone (member checking).

The **third part** of the data collection effort consisted of an online survey that was emailed to a randomly selected portion of the class. An email was sent to 257 U.S. Army CGSC students asking them to participate in a research project. This number was determined by sorting all of Class 12-02 using a random number formula to select only U.S. Army officers. The initial request was sent to only a third of the population of U.S. Army officers in order to preclude early onset of "survey fatigue." The survey response window remained open for 11 days, from 21 October until 1 November, 2011. During this time, 70 students responded, half of whom were enrolled in graduate school and half of whom were not

enrolled in graduate school. The number of students enrolled in graduate school who indicated they were willing to meet with the researcher for individual interviews was 27; only 17 of the students not enrolled in graduate school were willing to meet for interviews, for a total of 44 potential interviews.

Subsequent to closing the survey window and sorting the responses into enrolled and not enrolled in graduate school categories, emails acknowledging receipt of the students' responses were sent to the 44 respondents. The purpose of this email was to acknowledge their response, establish communication directly with the individual, and begin the process of scheduling an interview.

The **fourth part** consisted of interviews with individual students. Input and perspectives from the program directors and faculty informed the interview protocol, specific questions, and possible subject areas that were addressed during student interviews. CGSC students who said they were willing to meet with the researcher were contacted via email and a mutually convenient date, time, and location was coordinated. In most cases, the interviews were conducted in the afternoon after classes had ended for the day. In addition, most interviews occurred in a conference room that provided privacy and freedom from unwanted interruption.

Four pilot interviews were conducted in order to more fully develop the interview protocol. The first two interviews were very informal and unstructured; the researcher used a list of questions to solicit feedback from the respondents, but did not take notes on the responses, or provide an informed consent release form, since nothing was being recorded. These initial interviews were truly “dry runs” in preparation for actual interviews. The purpose of the first two pilot interviews was to get a sense of how the interviews would take

place, how long they would take, what kinds of responses to expect, and so forth. In both of the initial pilot interviews, the students volunteered, were thanked for their time and effort, but their input was not included in the research data. The second set of pilot interviews was also informal, but more structured: they were conducted with an interview protocol, informed consent forms were provided and signed, and the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The data collected from the second two pilot interviews was included in the findings and analysis.

The interview protocol evolved as a result of the second two pilot interviews. While the information in the pilot interviews was deemed useful, the researcher did not have a framework upon which to “hang” the data, and determined that something was needed to make sense of the raw data, to “identify the relevant variables and hypothesize their interrelationships” (Cross, 1981, p. 124). As mentioned previously in this chapter, the researcher selected Cross’s COR model as a framework. The COR model served as a template for making sense of the data collected from the interviews. It also informed subsequent changes to the interview protocol, which evolved into a series of questions based on attitudes about education, life transitions, self-evaluation, and the other components of the model. This model proved effective in making sense of the data, framing it in a way that could be clearly seen to answer the research questions, and to provide organization and structure to subsequently transform data into findings.

The initial intent was to interview a half-dozen CGSC students from each group, those enrolled in graduate school and those not enrolled, or until reaching saturation and no new information was expected to be gained. An attempt was made to maximize variation in the demographic characteristics, or at least achieve an equivalent representation of the CGSC

student body by gender, ethnicity, branch, and so forth, but this was not possible. The demographic characteristics of respondents willing to meet for interviews was not representative of their proportions in the overall student body. For example, there were no Asians, only one African-American, and no Native Americans willing to meet for interviews, even though those demographic groups were in the class. In order to maximize variation, the researcher made contact first with the more atypical respondents, e.g., Hispanic, female, and African-American, in order to ensure those groups were represented in the final analysis. An attempt was made to interview equal numbers of student who were and were not enrolled in graduate school, but that was not a requirement as much as a goal. As the interviews transpired, saturation was not achieved until nearly twice as many of each group were interviewed, resulting in a total number of interviews larger than planned, 26, including the two pilot interviews. As a result, the researcher is confident that saturation was achieved and that no new insights would result from additional interviews.

Student Survey

In order to determine a purposeful sample, an online survey was sent to 257 U.S. Army CGSC students (Appendix B). The CGSC Quality Assurance Office randomly generated a sample of 257, which is about a third of the Army officers in Class 12-01. The request to participate in the survey was sent to this group, 70 students responded, 44 of whom indicated they were willing to meet with the researcher for interviews. The purpose of the survey was to identify those students who can contribute to answering the research question. The survey was not intended to collect information for quantitative analysis, but to sort the students into a purposeful sample for subsequent interviews. The survey asked demographic questions to narrow down the available student body to those members who are the focus of

the study, help achieve as wide a coverage as feasible demographically for maximum variation, and solicit contact information from those who indicated a willingness to be interviewed.

Interviews and Data Collection

One-on-one interviews were the primary means of collecting data. The interview protocols for students, faculty, and graduate program directors is in Appendix D. The intent of the interviews was to capture the essence of each respondent's words in his or her own voice. According to Patton, "The purpose of interviewing . . . is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective" (Patton, 2002, p. 341). Because the purpose of the study was to explore how CGSC students decide whether or not to attend graduate school, interviews allowed the researcher to begin to understand how that decision is made *from the CGSC student's perspective*. The intent was "to construct a situation that resembles those in which people naturally talk to each other about important things . . . relaxed and conversational" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 99). Their stories, their narratives, their descriptions of arriving at Fort Leavenworth and moving into a new house, are all part of each student's perspective.

"The quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer" (Patton, 2002, p. 341). Patton describes the challenge all interviewers face in trying to get the individual being interviewed to fully share his or her perspective on the world. The more the interviewer is able to step into the respondent's world, the more effective and higher quality the interview will be and the more valuable the data that results from it. Selection of the methods of conducting interviews, and the method that was used in this research, is in the following sections.

During the interviews, the researcher asked “open-ended research questions, wanting to listen to the participants” (Cresswell, 2007, p. 43). The researcher used a semi-structured interview process to solicit the students’ perspectives on enrolling in a master’s degree program in their own words. The semi-structured interviews were guided by an interview protocol based on Cross’s COR model in order to provide a framework for their responses. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed the researcher to modify the actual questions asked while adhering to a framework that contributed to making sense of the students’ responses from a holistic perspective. The interview protocol also helped identify trends or themes that were not expected in the students’ responses, and provide a way to separate those themes that may warrant further study from aspects of the respondents’ narratives that were more focused on answering the research question and sub-questions.

Each of the two groups of students, those who decided to attend graduate school and those who decided not to, were asked the same open-ended questions. The intent was to allow them to express their own thoughts about graduate school and the process they went through in making their decision in order to get at the “how” aspect of the research question. The questions for both groups of students were the same, or along the same lines of inquiry: what did you decide, how did you decide, why did you decide the way you did, what (if any) process did you apply to making the decision, and what would you like to share with either the CGSC faculty leadership or the graduate school recruiters about your experience?

Only the researcher conducted the interviews. About an hour was allowed for each interview, which proved sufficient in most cases, although no specific time limit was set. The interviews were allowed to proceed at their own pace, and most were about 60 minutes long. The researcher used a constant comparative method to adjust the interview questions,

identify common themes and outcomes, and to inform subsequent interviews and the overall research. This method proved effective in identifying overarching themes that were both unexpected and insightful. From the participants' interviews, a clearer view of how CGSC students decide whether or not to attend graduate school developed.

The data collection approach was to “conduct an unstructured, open-ended interview, audiotape the interview, and transcribe the interview” (Cresswell, 2007, p. 130). The focus of the interviews was on asking questions that would cause the respondent to think about what he or she went through, listening carefully and observing any significant body language, and then inductively trying to make some sense of all the interviews collectively. The researcher took field notes during the interview to capture data that informed the analysis and helped recall nuances that were not part of the audio recording. The advantage of having the researcher as “the primary instrument for data collection” (Merriam, 2009, p. 15) was that the researcher could expand his or her “understanding through nonverbal as well as verbal communication, process information immediately, clarify and summarize material, check with respondents for accuracy of interpretation, and explore . . . unanticipated responses” (Merriam, 2009, p. 15).

The downside to the researcher being the primary instrument was the potential for “shortcomings and biases” to “have an impact on the study” (Merriam, 2009, p. 15). Merriam suggests that identification of shortcomings and biases and being aware of “how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 15) may be sufficient. The researcher sought to overcome this potential shortfall in two ways: first, through peer reviews of some interview transcripts by colleagues with adult teaching and learning experience (peer review) to validate or refute the researcher's analysis and

conclusions; and second, by having each respondent review their own interview transcripts for accuracy (member check). Interview transcripts were provided to three graduates of the adult education doctoral program at Kansas State University for their review and analysis using the same coding protocol as the researcher. Their analysis yielded results similar to the researcher's with respect to answering the research questions and the emergence of additional themes.

Data Analysis

Patton cautions that “developing some manageable classification or coding scheme is the first step of analysis” (Patton, 2002, p. 463). Without a scheme, there is “chaos and confusion,” and the purpose of the research is to make sense out of the chaos and confusion. For the purpose of this research, Cross's COR model was used to make sense of the “chaos and confusion” inherent in the pages of interview transcripts. Analyzing the content, the research and interviews, requires determining what is significant in the data by identifying, coding, categorizing, classifying, and labeling patterns in it. This process begins by reading through notes or interviews multiple times, making comments and beginning to identify topics.

The researcher developed letter codes to analyze the transcripts and determine who each respondent contributed to answering the subordinate research questions, which in turn were expected to answer the primary research question. “M” was the code for responses that addressed the first subordinate question, “Do military career requirements influence a CGSC student's decision?” “P” was the code for responses that addressed the second subordinate question, “Do post-military career aspirations and requirements play a role in a CGSC student's decision?” “F” was the code for responses that addressed the third subordinate

question, “Do family considerations influence a CGSC student’s decision?” “A” was the code for responses that addressed the fourth subordinate question, “Does previous academic experience influence a CGSC student’s decision?” The transcripts were reviewed several times, portions of the transcripts that addressed each of the subordinate questions were highlighted and marked with the appropriate code.

This was a time-consuming and laborious process, but yielded specific verbiage from the respondents that helped answer the research questions. The relevant portions of the transcripts were then organized into two categories, “enrolled” and “not enrolled,” in order to further analyze the data with respect to whether the student had decided to pursue a master’s degree or not. Patton points out that the first consideration when coding and classifying is determining how all the various pieces of data fit together, which is known as convergence (Patton, 2002, p. 465). The first step in this process was to identify “recurring regularities in the data” (Patton, 2002, p. 465) that may reveal patterns that can then be sorted into categories. In this research, the categories already existed, and the challenge was to determine how the various pieces of data fit into the pre-existed categories based on Cross’s framework.

Themes

Patterns discerned in the data collected must be turned into “meaningful categories and themes” (Patton, 2002, p. 463). After the interviews were conducted, the narratives transcribed and verified by the respondents, and the analysis with respect to the subordinate research questions was tentatively concluded, additional analysis began with respect to themes that emerged from the interview process. According to Patton, the classification or coding scheme constitutes the first step of this analysis. He describes five steps: identifying,

coding, categorizing, classifying, and labeling the data. These steps are essential to determine what is significant in the interview narratives that may contribute to making sense of these additional themes. Identifying has two components: the first component is an observation that something significant was said or has occurred; the second component is then classifying that observation as part of a pattern to determine if it is singular in nature, links to any other patterns, or is a new pattern altogether.

Identification of emergent themes resulted from the researcher's realization during multiple reviews of the transcripts that certain unexpected commonalities existed in the students' narratives. While these commonalities, or themes, did not contribute to answering the research question, they did provide additional insight into the students' perspectives with respect to their decision about graduate school. The themes that initially emerged were self-efficacy, confidence, goal setting and achievement, persistence, time management, operational tempo, life issues, and guidance and mentorship. Two additional themes also emerged as a result of continued analysis: the quality of the graduate degree and the MMAS program.

Further analysis of the themes resulted in combining some of them due to their related nature and how they presented themselves in the transcripts. Time management was combined with optempo; they were often addressed by CGSC students in the same sentence or paragraph in a related manner. For example, the challenges many CGSC students who participated in the research faced in their ability to exercise time management related to the fact that they were either often deployed away from home or their typical work day left little or no extra time for pursuing a graduate degree. Self-efficacy and confidence were also combined. Many CGSC students interviewed for this study expressed a high degree of

confidence in their ability to succeed in graduate school, and even in the face of multiple unsuccessful attempts did not attribute their lack of success to inability on their part.

Codes for each of these themes were similarly developed using numbers to represent each of the categories to prevent confusion with the previous set of codes. As with the analysis and coding with respect to the research questions, the coded portions of the transcripts were subsequently transcribed into two categories, “enrolled” and “not enrolled” for additional analysis.

The theme of self-efficacy and confidence was defined as the sense expressed by nearly all CGSC students participating in the study that they would be successful if they enrolled. Goal setting and achievement was described by CGSC students in the study in several ways, but the common denominator was that almost all participants in the research set goals for themselves and worked to achieve them. Persistence was defined as a personal sense of continuing to try, to not give up, and to work through whatever challenges may present themselves. Time management and operational tempo was defined as being able to allocate time in one’s life to pursue a master’s degree, or finding that “margin of power” as McClusky described it (1970). Operational tempo, both prior to arriving at CGSC and while in the ILE course, was defined from the perspective of time away from home on operational deployments, time away from home due to long workdays, and the workload associated with the academic challenge of ILE. Life issues were defined as the complications of adult life that sometimes intrude on an individual’s plan, and include the broader category of quality of life issues. Guidance and mentorship was a theme that emerged during the interviews in two different directions: how students either received clear guidance and mentorship, or very little or none at all. Quality of the master’s degree related to the “check the box” mentality of

some officers that they needed a master's degree on their personnel record, regardless of where it was from or the field of study, to the importance of the reputation of the master's degree, and to the amount of work they put into earning it. The MMAS program theme included students' perspectives on the MMAS degree and overall program, which unexpectedly were negative in nearly all the interviews.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher was the single source of data collection, asked all the questions of respondents, and conducted all analysis of the data. As Patton describes it, "the researcher is the instrument" (Patton, 2002, p. 14), analogous to a test item or measuring tool used in quantitative research. As the single source of data for the research, the credibility of the methodology will depend a great deal on the "skill, competence, and rigor" (Patton, 2002, p. 14) of the researcher, and is obviously subject to distractions in personal affairs.

The researcher is a former Army lieutenant colonel, having served nearly 28 years on active duty. He taught captains in a professional development course for nearly two years at the Combined Arms and Services Staff School, was in charge of curriculum development for that same school, and served in leadership positions there as committee chief and deputy director. Most recently he taught majors in CGSC, both at the Fort Leavenworth resident course and at a satellite campus at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. He served in the Department of Joint, Interagency, and Multinational Operations, and his primary focus was on strategy and operational art, although he also taught other subjects. The researcher served as a staff group advisor for five years while on the CGSC faculty, and had extensive experience coaching and advising students on the subject of this research, attending graduate school. His current position is teaching faculty development classes to both new and experienced CGSC

instructors, although his primary focus is on teaching and re-certifying experienced faculty members as part of the Advanced Faculty Development program.

Standards of Quality and Verification

Data was obtained from multiple sources with various quality control measures applied to ensure its integrity, protect the accuracy of respondents' input, and maintain quality control over the research process. Transcribed interview narratives were member checked by the respondents to verify the fidelity of the transcription and, in some cases, to add additional comments. Several colleagues were also asked to review a handful of the interviews to validate or refute the researcher's analysis and findings. The researcher personally transcribed all the interviews, stored the electronic data in a secure location, and protected the fidelity and confidentiality of respondents' information. The key to success was in identifying commonalities between the different sources.

Confirmation of data and identification of emerging themes resulted from multiple sources: students, faculty, and graduate school program managers. Interviews with CGSC students were the primary source of data. CGSC faculty shared their insights and perspectives about students' graduate school decisions based on their observations and discussions with their students. Graduate school program managers had extensive experience with CGSC students' graduate school decision making, and their perspectives contributed to a more well-rounded exploration of the individual cases.

Miles and Huberman describe the negative application of triangulation, in which "triangulation is supposed to support a finding by showing that independent measures of it agree with it or, at least, don't contradict it" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 206). Whether the data from the students agreed with input from the faculty members who advise them, or with

input from the graduate school program managers or not, having different sources that provided input on the same topic helped validate the data. On the other hand, if disconfirming information is the result, if there are contradictions between the interviews with the students, faculty, and graduate school program directors, determining the reason for the contradictions may influence the direction of further research. Simply because the student's perspective does not agree with the faculty member's perspective does not mean one or the other is more true, but rather that an investigation of why they differ may be required. This turned out not to be the case in this research. All three sources were generally in agreement with respect to the issues surrounding CGSC students' decisions about whether or not to enroll in graduate school.

Peer review of transcribed narratives helped assure quality of the results and verify how they were obtained. They also assisted in identifying and developing themes as part of the data analysis process. Copies of interview transcripts and the coding methodology used by the researcher were provided to two individuals who recently completed the adult education doctoral program and who were familiar to the researcher. The transcripts used the pseudonyms rather than participants' actual names to ensure confidentiality. They were asked to read the transcripts, code the relevant portions, and return the transcripts to the researcher. In both cases, the coding by peers tracked closely with the analysis by the researcher, which confirmed the quality of the results.

Confidentiality of Participants

The actual identities of the participants were kept confidential. When the data was written up into a narrative transcript of what the respondents said, fictitious names were used. The researcher provided the informed consent protocol required by the Kansas State

University IRB to all participants. According to Patton, consent forms usually address the following:

- “The purpose of collecting the information.
- Who the information is for and how it will be used.”
- What will be asked in the interviews.”
- How the responses will be handled, to include confidentiality.”
- What risks or benefits, if any, are involved for the person being interviewed”

(Patton, 1990, p. 407).

Patton recommends providing this information twice, well in advance of the interview in order to provide the respondent an opportunity to consider his or her participation and formulate an understanding of what will take place, and again at the beginning of the interview (Patton, 1990). In this study, the introduction page of the survey was the first time the information is provided, and included contact information if the respondent had any questions or concerns. It was provided a second time prior to beginning each interview session. The explanation of the purpose was brief, succinct, and clear.

The main concern of participants in interview settings is that potentially embarrassing information may become public. Clear enunciation of the requirement to maintain confidentiality is paramount, and was emphasized whenever the respondent expressed concern. Confidentiality of the data included an explanation of how the information will be used, which ties back to the purpose statement earlier. Key items addressed in the opening statement were:

- That the information is important.
- Why the information is important, specific reasons for its importance.

- The willingness of the researcher to explain the purpose of the interview out of respect for the respondent. (Patton, 1990, p. 407)

A general overview of the questions that would be asked was provided to each respondent in advance of the interview, and at the time of the interview those became evident soon enough. The final item in the opening statement with respect to potential risks or benefits was addressed, but in this research there were neither risks nor benefits to an individual's participation in the study.

The actual recordings of student interviews were safeguarded at the researcher's home. Backup copies of the audio files were copied to from the recorder to both a removable flash drive and to the researcher's home computer for additional security. No one else had access to any of the files. Transcripts of the interviews were also safeguarded at the researcher's home for purposes of security and maintaining confidentiality.

Summary

Qualitative research was most applicable to this research due to the emerging nature of the findings. The case study methodology was most appropriate to examine U.S. Army CGSC students' decision making with respect to graduate school. In order to gather useful data, selection of participants was purposeful: students interviewed had considered graduate school and made a decision one way or the other. Analysis of the data obtained from research and interviews was iterative as development of patterns, themes, and categories occurred over multiple examinations of the data.

Chapter 4 - Findings

Overview of the Study

Data collected as a result of this qualitative research is presented in this chapter. Brief profiles of the students who participated in this research are provided. This chapter presented experiences and perspectives from the individual participants' points of view and attempted to develop an understanding how each student decided whether or not to attend graduate school through an analysis of their interviews. Responses to the interview questions answered the research questions and contributed to understanding how Command and General Staff College (CGSC) students decided whether or not to attend graduate school. Quotations from each of the interviews were provided to illustrate the issues relevant to this case study and answer the research questions.

An online survey was sent to a randomly selected portion of the CGSC class. An email was sent to 257 randomly selected students asking for their participation in a research project. Of that number, 74 responded to the email, 37 who were enrolled in a master's degree program and 37 who were not. Of the 37 who were enrolled, 27 agreed to meet for an interview, 73%. Only 20 of those not enrolled agreed to meet for an interview, 54%. Since the purpose of the survey was to purposefully select respondents who could contribute to the research, there was no further analysis of the overall respondent demographics.

Qualitative Methodology

This study was guided by the following research question: *How do U.S. Army CGSC students decide whether or not to attend graduate school?* The focus is on CGSC students attending the resident 10-month course at Fort Leavenworth, as opposed to CGSC students

attending the resident course at a satellite campus on completing the distance education version. Subordinate questions that served to inform the primary research question were:

1. Do military career requirements influence a CGSC student's decision to attend graduate school? If so, how do they influence the decision? If not, why not?
2. Do post-military career aspirations and requirements play a role in a CGSC student's decision to attend graduate school? If so, how? If not, why not?
3. Do family considerations influence a CGSC student's decision to attend graduate school? If so, how? If not, why not?
4. Does previous academic experience influence a CGSC student's decision to attend graduate school? If so, how? If not, why not?

Demographics

Summaries of the demographic characteristics of each CGSC student who participated in the interviews describe the range of differences among what has often been considered a relatively homogeneous group. The CGSC students who participated in this study have some similarities, but those are offset by different social, economic, educational, and cultural background. Some are first generation college graduates, while others' families have advanced degrees. The most common degree of either parent was a master's degree. Some parents had a high school diploma, some doctorates, and one student had a grandparent who recently received her bachelor's degree. They hailed from different parts of the country, had various socio-economic backgrounds, and represented several different branches of the U.S. Army. Table 4-1 provides a graphical representation of all 26 respondents' demographics information that was relevant to the research. The information is presented in two parts, those students enrolled in a master's degree program and those not enrolled.

Table 4-1. Respondent Demographics

Enrolled							
Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Marital Status	Combat Tours	Branch/Career Field	Parents' Education	Education Level *
Andrew	Male	White	Married	2	Aviation	Master's	Bachelor's
Bob	Male	White	Married	3	Logistics	Master's	Bachelor's
Frank	Male	White	Unk	4	Field Artillery	Master's	Master's
Allen	Male	Hispanic	Married	2	Signal	Doctorate	Bachelor's
Edward	Male	White	Married	3	Aviation	Associate	Bachelor's
Brian	Male	Hispanic	Married	1	Information Operations	High School Diploma	Bachelor's
Carl	Male	White	Married	>4	Explosive Ordnance Disposal	Bachelor	Bachelor's
Barbara	Female	White	Single	1	Military Intelligence	Bachelor	Master's
Donald	Male	Hispanic	Single	2	Military Intelligence	Associate	Bachelor's
Larry	Male	White	Single	>4	Armor	Master's	Bachelor's
Neal	Male	White	Married	2	Aviation	Master's	Bachelor's
Oscar	Male	White	Single	2	Strategist	Master's	Master's

Not Enrolled							
Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Marital Status	Combat Tours	Branch/ Career Field	Parents' Education	Education Level*
George	Male	White	Married	3	Field Artillery	Bachelor's	Bachelor's
Amy	Female	White	Married	1	Adjutant General	Bachelor's	Bachelor's (x2)
Harold	Male	Black	Married	2	Judge Advocate General	Some college, no degree	Master's, J.D.
John	Male	White	Married	2	Adjutant General	Associate's	Master's
Irving	Male	White	Married	2	Field Artillery	Master's	Master's
Cheryl	Female	White	Married	3	Medical Service Corps	Master's	Master's
Kevin	Male	White	Married	2	Signal	Bachelor's	Bachelor's
Mitch	Male	White	Married	2	Engineer	Master's	Master's
Paul	Male	White	Married	1	Simulations	Master's	Master's
Robert	Male	White	Married	2	Field Artillery	Master's	Master's
Scott	Male	White	Married	2	Engineer	Master's	Master's
Ted	Male	White	Married	3	Infantry	Master's	Master's
Victor	Male	White	Married	>4	Military Intelligence	HS Diploma	Bachelor's
Walter	Male	White	Married	1	Public Affairs	Master's	Master's

**Highest education level achieved prior to arriving at CGSC*

Their demographic characteristics provide a brief summary of each individual, but only begin to touch on the variation in each person's perspective on adult learning activities, higher education, and graduate school. The wide range of responses helped communicate the breadth and individual variation of students interviewed for this exploratory case study.

Participant Profiles

Profiles of the student participants were provided because this case study focused on each individual's decision whether or not to enroll in graduate school while attending CGSC and their responses to a range of questions wove a tapestry that revealed insights into that fundamental question. The students' roles in this research are paramount; they each shared their valuable time between or after scheduled classes, made the effort to arrive at an agreed-upon location in a timely manner, and opened up and shared some of their very personal experiences and perspectives. The level of professionalism on the part of every CGSC student who participated in interview sessions cannot be over-emphasized. They may not have had what they considered solid, logical, or supportable justification or reasons for how they made their respective decisions, but they were all honest and forthright in trying to describe that process to the researcher. Virtually every student who was interviewed shared his or her personal struggle of one kind or another in deciding whether or not to attend graduate school, and their frank and honest responses were critical to the overall quality of this research.

As part of the interview protocol, all participants were assured of anonymity and each was assigned a pseudonym, as shown below. The student profiles are presented in the order in which the individuals were interviewed, to include the two pilot interviews, which are the first two below.

Andrew.

[Pilot interview] Andrew, a white, male Aviation officer, graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point with a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering aerospace systems. His father has a master's degree in education, but stopped teaching after becoming disenchanted with it. Andrew is married and has three children at home. His wife also graduated from West Point, but is no longer on active duty. He has wanted to pursue a graduate degree since graduating from West Point, and was enrolled in the Webster University MBA program, which he began before arriving at CGSC. He would have also enrolled in the Master of Military Art and Science (MMAS) program, but was not allowed to due to some conflict with transfer credits. Andrew has deployed to a combat theater of war twice.

Bob.

[Pilot interview] Bob, a white, male Transportation officer, graduated from Presbyterian College in South Carolina with a bachelor's degree in political science and biology. He is married with two children at home. Bob was enrolled in the University of Kansas supply chain management master's degree program, which for him and another dozen CGSC students is fully funded. He said he would have enrolled in the program whether it was fully funded or not, and used either tuition assistance or his GI Bill to pay for it, because he thought it was a good program. Bob felt that his Army logistics experience, combined with a graduate degree from the University of Kansas in his field of expertise, would pay big dividends in the future. Bob has deployed to a combat theater of war three times.

Allen.

Allen, a Hispanic, male Signal Corps officer, graduated from the University of Puerto Rico with a bachelor's degree in microbiology. His father is a medical doctor and his two sisters both have doctorates. His wife is a Certified Public Accountant. He was enrolled in the Webster University MBA program. Allen is married and has three children at home, one a teenager. Allen tried on two previous occasions to complete a master's degree program at previous duty stations, but was unable to find the time due to an overwhelming work schedule. His previous lack of success caused him to doubt his ability to succeed in a graduate program while here at CGSC, but with his wife's encouragement, he thinks he will succeed this time. He has experienced several challenges in his efforts to enroll in graduate school, to include prerequisite examinations, confusion about the location of the installation education center, and what he perceived as unclear guidance with respect to scheduling, course offerings, and the beginning of graduate school classes. It has been a very difficult journey, particularly in the beginning of the academic year when the CGSC workload is so heavy, but he is now beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel. His determination to succeed this time was central to his success to this point, in spite of his fear of failing again. Allen has deployed to a combat theater of war twice.

Brian.

Brian, a Hispanic male Information Operations officer, graduated from the University of Puerto Rico with a bachelor's degree in computer science. He is married and has young children at home. He attended the 12-week Functional Area (FA) 30 (Information Operations) Qualification Course in 2008. He enrolled in the Webster University international relations master's degree program when he first arrived at CGSC, but is not

currently enrolled in any classes. While he would like to take as many classes toward a master's degree as possible while at CGSC, it has been difficult for him to find the time for additional schoolwork on top of the ILE curriculum. He does not expect to complete graduate school by the time he graduates from CGSC, but expects to have a good start on it, and plans to complete it sometime next year. Brian has deployed to a combat theater of war three times.

Carl.

Carl, a white, male Logistics officer, specializes in explosive ordnance disposal. He is married, and his wife is pursuing a Doctor of Pharmacy degree at the Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine in Erie, Pennsylvania. His parents' highest education level is a bachelor's degree. He enlisted in the Army after graduating from high school, left active duty to go to college using the Montgomery GI Bill, participated in Army ROTC for two years, and received his commission in the Infantry upon graduation. His undergraduate degree is from Lockhaven University and he is currently enrolled in the Central Michigan University MBA program. He is paying for the graduate school using tuition assistance. He has deployed to a combat theater of war four times.

Donald.

Donald, a Hispanic, male Military Intelligence officer, is not married. His parents' highest education level is an associate's degree. He attended two different undergraduate institutions; initially he attended Texas Southern University, then transferred to the University of Houston where he received an ROTC scholarship. He graduated from the University of Houston and received his commission. Donald is one of the first members of

his family to attend college and receive a bachelor's degree. He is enrolled in the Webster University master's degree program. He has deployed to a combat theater of war twice.

Amy.

Amy, a white, female Adjutant General Corps officer, is a member of the US Army Reserve, on active duty under the Army Guard and Reserve (AGR) program. She is married, has no children, and her parents' highest education level is a bachelor's degree. She has two bachelor's degrees, one in computer management and data processing, and the second in accounting, both from the West Virginia University Institute of Technology at Montgomery, West Virginia. She is not enrolled in graduate school at this time, although she has taken graduate classes in the past and would like to earn a master's degree in the future. She has deployed to a combat theater of war once.

Edward.

Edward, a white, male, Aviation officer, graduated from the University of Wisconsin where he participated in the Army ROTC program and received a commission upon graduation. He is married, and his parents' highest education level is an associate's degree. He had prior enlisted service as an interrogator, and attended the Defense Language Institute where he said he learned how to study. He was enrolled in a graduate degree program from the University of Wisconsin, Platteville, and when interviewed had nearly completed his Master of Science in Engineering, with a focus on engineering management. His master's program was entirely distance learning. Edward was using his remaining Montgomery GI bill and tuition assistance to pay for graduate school. He has deployed to a combat theater of war three times.

Barbara.

Barbara, a white, female Military Intelligence officer, graduated from Aquinas College, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, with a bachelor's degree in business administration and a second major in international studies. After a few years, she enlisted in the U.S. Army and became a Spanish interrogator, followed by Officer Candidate School and commissioning. She began her master's degree in international relations from Webster University while stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and completed a master's in political science from Kansas State University with a certificate in international studies. Barbara taught at West Point, and while there began her doctoral studies toward a PhD, also from Kansas State University, but after her last deployment was unable to afford the expense. She was currently enrolled in the MMAS program. She is single, and her father's highest education level is a bachelor's degree, while her mother completed a year of college. She has deployed once to a combat theater of war.

Frank.

Frank, a white, male Field Artillery officer, graduated from the University of Tennessee and received his commission. He is single, and his parents' highest education level is a master's degree. He already has a master's degree in business management from Webster University that he earned after attending the Captains Career Course at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Frank enrolled in the MMAS program to improve his writing ability while earning a second master's degree. He has deployed to a combat theater of war four times.

George.

George, a white, male Field Artillery officer, graduated from Northwest Missouri State University with a degree in geography and history and received his commission. He is

married, has one child, and his parents' highest education level is bachelor's degree. He did not enroll in graduate school so he could focus on his family and reconnecting with his wife and daughter after numerous deployments and high operational tempo. He has deployed to a combat theater of war three times.

Cheryl.

Cheryl, a white, female Medical Service Corps officer, specializes in public health. She is married, and her husband is in the University of Kansas supply chain management master's program while she attends CGSC. She received her bachelor's degree from Iowa State University with a 3-year ROTC scholarship and her Master of Science in Public Health from The Uniformed Services University in Bethesda, Maryland. Cheryl applied for and was accepted into the Genocide and Mass Atrocities scholars program, which would have resulted in a second master's degree through the MMAS program, but was subsequently disenrolled. Her parents' highest education level is a master's degree. She has deployed three times to a combat theater of war.

Harold.

Harold is an African-American, male Judge Advocate General officer. He is married, has five children, and his parents have some college experience, but no degrees. He graduated from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette and subsequently attended and graduated from law school, earning a Juris Doctor degree. While an undergraduate, Harold joined the Army ROTC program and completed a "compression" program, in which he took both Military Science 1 and Military Science 2 courses at the same time. After earning his law degree, he joined the U.S. Army as a judge advocate general (lawyer), later earning an advanced law degree, the Legum Magister (LL.M). He was not enrolled in graduate school,

but would like to earn a PhD in public policy. He has deployed to a combat theater of war twice.

Irving.

Irving, a white, male Field Artillery officer, is married, has one child, and his parents' highest education level is master's degree. He earned his associate's degree from Central Texas College while he was stationed at Fort Hood as an enlisted soldier. He received his bachelor's degree from Cameron University at Lawton, Oklahoma, after completing Officer Candidate School and receiving his commission. He has a master's degree in information systems management from Colorado Technical University that was an on-line, distance education program, but someday wants to earn another master's or a doctorate in leadership. He was not enrolled in graduate school because he already has a master's degree and was advised to concentrate on ILE while at CGSC. He has deployed to a combat theater of war twice.

John.

John, 39-year old white, male Adjutant General Corps officer. He is married, has one child, and his parents' highest education level is associate's degree. Both he and his wife were the first in their families to earn bachelor's degrees, and he was also the first to earn a master's. He graduated from Western Kentucky University, received a General Studies degree with emphasis in education, got married, and enlisted in the Army. After a few years as an Adjutant General clerk and noncommissioned officer, he attended Officer Candidate School and was commissioned. He earned a master's degree from Webster University in human resource management while he was stationed at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. He was not enrolled in graduate school. He has deployed to a combat theater of war twice.

Kevin.

Kevin, a white, male Signal Corps officer, graduated from the University of Tennessee with a degree in business administration. He is married, has two children, and his parents' highest education level is a bachelor's degree. He did not initially want to attend college; he wanted to join the Army, but felt pressured by his parents' expectations. Despite a somewhat challenging start, he eventually did well and graduated from college on time, but felt his time spent there was drudgery. After graduation, he enlisted in the U.S. Army Reserves, worked at a bank and an insurance agency for a few years, then decided he wanted to go on active duty in 2002. He always wanted to be a soldier, and felt he was getting older and needed to act while he was still young enough to serve. He was not enrolled in graduate school. He has deployed to a combat theater of war twice.

Larry.

Larry, a white, male Armor officer, graduated from West Point and served for five years before leaving active duty, joining the U.S. Army Reserve, and becoming a Foreign Service Officer with the Department of State. He is single, and his parents' highest education level is the master's degree. He is currently on active duty to attend CGSC, and has been mobilized for just over two years, but will return to an inactive Reserve status when he graduates and resumes his state department duties. Larry has always envisioned himself earning a graduate degree at some point, but had difficulty finding time for it until now. He enrolled in the Webster University MBA program. He has deployed to a combat theater of war four times.

Mitch.

Mitch, a white, male Engineer officer, graduated from West Point. He is married, and his parents' highest education level is the master's degree. He received his Master of Science in geological engineering from the Missouri University of Science and Technology as part of a cooperative degree program in conjunction with the U.S. Army Engineer School at Fort Leonard Wood. His wife has a master's degree in corporate health promotion, and was pursuing a second graduate degree through an on-line master's degree program to improve her employability. Mitch was focused on obtaining his Professional Engineer certification, which he expected would require another technical graduate degree in a related engineer field to obtain. He has deployed to a combat theater of war twice.

Neal.

Neal, a white, male Aviation officer, graduated from West Point. He is married, has one child, a newborn, and his parents' highest education level is a master's degree. His wife is an attorney. He was enrolled in the MMAS program, with a focus on strategic level research as part of his effort to earn the Strategist Additional Skill Identifier (ASI) upon graduating from CGSC. He chose not to enroll in any of the civilian universities because he thought the degree from CGSC would be more respected. He has deployed to a combat theater of war twice.

Oscar.

Oscar, a white, male, Strategist officer, graduated from DePaul University at Chicago and was initially commissioned as an Engineer officer. He is married, has three children, and his parents' highest education level is a master's degree. He earned a master's degree in public administration from Webster University while attending the Engineer Captains Career

Course at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. He enrolled in the University of Kansas Master of Science and Business program in order to improve his credentials as a strategist. Oscar has been accepted to attend the School for Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) next year, which was one of his goals associated with attending CGSC. He has deployed to a combat theater of war twice.

Paul.

Paul, white, male Simulations officer, graduated from Purdue University with a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering, and was commissioned in the Armor branch. He is married, has one child, and his parents' highest education level is a master's degree. He earned a MBA from the Krannert School of Business at Purdue, after which he attended a six-week Simulations Operations Course to receive his simulations functional area designation. Paul was selected to attend SAMS next year, which will enable him to earn a second master's degree. He has deployed to a combat theater of war once.

Robert.

Robert, a white, male, Field Artillery officer, graduated from Presbyterian College and earned a degree in business administration with a management concentration. He is married, has two children, and his parents' highest education level is a master's degree. He earned a master's degree from Webster University in public administration while attending the Engineer Captains Career Course at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. He considered earning a second master's degree while at CGSC, but instead enrolled in an online Project Management Professional program through Johnson County Community College that the Engineer branch recommends for all engineer officers. He has deployed to a combat theater of war twice.

Scott.

Scott, a white, male, Engineer officer, graduated from Presbyterian College in Clinton, South Carolina, and earned a bachelor's degree in business administration with a management concentration. He is married, has two children, and his parents' highest education level is a master's degree; his father is a Naval Academy graduate. His wife did not attend college. He earned a master's degree from Webster University in conjunction with the Engineer Captains Career Course. His follow-on assignment was to West Point to teach literature and English. He has deployed to a combat theater of war twice.

Ted.

Ted, a white, male, Infantry officer, graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. He is married, has no children, and his parents' highest education level is a master's degree. Ted earned a master's degree in public policy from Georgetown University; his wife also has a master's degree from Georgetown and another master's from the Florida Institute of Technology in logistics. He attended class full-time while also working full-time at the Human Resources Command at Alexandria, Virginia. He considered working on an MMAS while attending CGSC, but found the required introductory classes too stifling, and felt rushed in having to select a research topic and faculty committee members. He has deployed to a combat theater of war three times.

Victor.

Victor, a white, male, Military Intelligence officer, with six years prior enlisted service, initially attended Western Kentucky University, then transferred to the University of Illinois and graduated from there with a degree in Russian-European studies. He is married, has two children, and his parents' highest education level is a high school diploma. As an

enlisted soldier, he spent 47 weeks at the Defense Language Institute at Monterrey, California, learning Russian, and spent a semester studying at St. Petersburg in Russia. He has deployed to a combat theater of war five times, three year-long tours and two 3-month tours with Special Operations units.

Walter.

Walter, a white, male, Public Affairs officer, graduated from the University of Portland, in Portland, Oregon, earning a bachelor's degree in communications. He is married, has two children, and his parents' highest education level is a master's degree. His wife also has a bachelor's degree, his sister earned her physician assistant degree at Stanford University, and both his grandparents also have college degrees. He earned a master's degree from Colorado State University in English, with a focus on rhetoric and composition, under the Advanced Civil Schooling program. His follow-on assignment was to West Point to teach literature and English. He has deployed to a combat theater of war once.

Findings

Introduction.

Interviews with CGSC students who participated in the research provided answers to the research questions. To a greater or lesser extent, each of the research questions was answered affirmatively in the participants' own words. That is, military career, requirements, post-military career requirements, family issues, and previous academic experience all influenced their decisions about whether or not to pursue a master's degree while attending CGSC. In addition, a number of themes revealed themselves in the interviews that were common to many of the participants. Although those themes did not contribute directly to the research, they were significant enough to warrant inclusion and examination in this

chapter. They suggest a number of potential areas of future research or lines of inquiry that may be worth pursuing.

Research Question One

Do military career requirements influence a CGSC student's decision to attend graduate school? If so, how do they influence the decision? If not, why not?

CGSC students interviewed for the study expressed their belief that a master's degree was important to their success in the U.S. Army. The reasons they cited fell into two categories: professional development, in terms of improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities as an Army officer; and military job security, with respect to improving their competitiveness in terms of being kept on active duty. With respect to professional development, some students in the study felt a master's degree provided them an edge over their contemporaries with respect to promotion and selection for command or other key positions. These two, promotion and selection, are separate considerations because for some Army officers, their measure of competitiveness is based on their next promotion. For them, when the promotions stop, they no longer see themselves as being competitive. Selection, on the other hand, relates to special assignments, duty positions, or schools. All Army officers do not attend the same schools, and many are not selected for higher level command; only a select few command a battalion, and even fewer Army officers command brigades, so the pressure felt by many officers to not only continue to be promoted, but also to command units and attend senior service colleges are intertwined.

Others expressed a sense that if everyone else in their year group had a master's degree, and they did not, they would be at a disadvantage for promotion and selection. The second category is of particular interest to the students interviewed in light of the overall

force reductions facing the Army and the anticipated draw-downs. Faculty advisors and graduate program directors expressed similar observations of CGSC students with whom they discussed attending graduate school. After over a decade of operational deployments, faster promotions than in previous decades, and little concern about retention, suddenly many officers in the study found themselves facing the distinct possibility of being told their service is no longer needed.

Military career requirements clearly influenced the decision of each CGSC student who participated in the study whether or not to attend graduate school. Every student interviewed expressed a realization that an advanced degree of some kind was necessary to his or her continued advancement and success in the Army. Even though the official position stated by personnel managers to CGSC students is that a graduate degree is not a requirement, everyone in this group still felt it would benefit their career. This perspective, that a master's degree will benefit Army officers in terms of their career, whether correct or not, was echoed by the faculty and by the graduate school program managers. The faculty advisors tried to help their students make a balanced decision, weighing all the factors, and not rushing into anything, but often found their students had already made their decision and were fully engaged in a master's program because they thought it was something they were going to need and this year was the only opportunity they thought they would get. Similar concerns were voiced by the graduate school program directors: students would arrive in their office and ask what they needed to do to get a master's degree—any at all—in the time they are attending CGSC.

Even for CGSC students not enrolled in graduate school, military career requirements still influenced their decision, although attending graduate school while attending CGSC was

not the result. In most cases, CGSC students who were not pursuing a master's degree had already earned one prior to arriving at CGSC. Of the 14 students interviewed who were not enrolled in a master's degree program, all but 4 had already earned a master's degree. Many expressed interest in a second master's degree, but when they realized the amount of work that CGSC entailed, most elected not to invest that additional time and effort and were glad they did not feel they *had* to.

Professional development-enrolled in graduate school.

As Andrew said, "I think in my profession I had to look at does having a degree give me an advantage over others that don't. And I think it is an easily-defined discriminating criterion whether you have one or not. So having one, I think, may, at least in that regard, have the tick mark in the right column for me." He went on to say that he was prepared to also commit to completing an MMAS while he was at CGSC because he viewed it as "a discriminating criteria for job advancement . . . that would be relevant for the rest of his Army career." Even while a cadet at West Point, he knew he wanted to pursue a master's degree because he believed, "it would be used as a discriminator for promotion."

Allen described how he "had a command and didn't have time to do it," meaning pursue a master's degree, but that he always believed it was key to his future success in the Army.

For Bob, as a logistician, the supply chain management graduate degree was the most attractive from the perspective of both near-term utility and applicability while still on active duty, as well as having value after leaving the service. He wanted to enroll in the scholars program, which he thought would provide him the best professional development while attending CGSC in addition to a well-respected master's degree from a reputable university.

The influence of senior advisors or mentors was clear in some of the interviews. In some cases, their advice was clear and unequivocal: “it doesn’t matter, you have got to get a master’s while you’re there” was how one senior leader advised Bob. Such advice led him to state, “So I don’t think I had an option, almost, of coming out here and not getting one.” Bob saw it as an unstated requirement: “I don’t have a master’s, so it was kind of a—that block had to be checked.” Allen was told by one of his commanders that, “if you want to succeed in the Army, or you want to stay longer, you have to be competitive, do you have got to . . . start thinking about this [a master’s degree].”

Donald felt pressure as a young officer to get married and get a graduate degree: “When I first came in, it was almost a necessity that you were not only married, but you had a master’s degree.” Again, not stated in so many words, but his perception of what he needed to go on to succeed in the Army. His view of a graduate degree was that “There was more evidence along the way that said if you didn’t have it; it wasn’t going to *stop* you from getting promoted, moving on, or getting those jobs that you wanted. Now, it would *enhance* your ability to get those specific positions, promotion, and everything else. So it was kind of more or less a plus to have it, not a requirement like it was—that you felt.” This perception contributes to the belief that there is a disconnect between the reality of what the officer personnel management system publishes in its guidance and the personal beliefs of Army officers in that system, or perhaps a lack of understanding on the part of the officer.

Barbara earned a master’s degree from Kansas State University, and was pursuing a doctorate from there when she deployed and had to put her studies on hold. She planned to resume her doctoral program when she arrived at CGSC, but instead found herself enrolling in the MMAS program, saying it “definitely would not be my first choice, but militarily it

makes sense, it's certainly not going to hurt you any to have that . . . that would be a good military move for a career." She thought that "even in the time that I remain in the military it's still going to say something about me, about who I am and my work ethic. And so I think it has the potential to influence assignments and job security, but I wouldn't say that is a guarantee." Barbara initially thought a graduate degree would provide increased job security or greater likelihood of selection for promotion, but with recent personnel reductions being discussed by the DoD, is less confident in that regard.

Larry expressed his long-time interest in a master's degree, initially citing the need to remain "competitive for promotion," but also voicing a personal desire for "continued education and improvement." He had been thinking about when the best time was to pursue a graduate degree, saying that "I knew I needed to have one." Larry thought that having a graduate degree "improves the chances of selection for lieutenant colonel and beyond," and that "just having that experience and that knowledge inherently will assist me when I'm talking with guys in the foreign commercial service or as part of my interaction with other government officials." Neal's mentors likewise advised him that "You need to go get a master's degree to be competitive in your career." He also thought "the chances are higher of getting promoted with a master's degree than not," and thought "the more qualification you have, the more likely you are to advance." His mentors advised him just to "get a graduate degree. Doesn't matter what it is, you need to check the block." So he enrolled in the MMAS program to earn a strategist skill identifier as part of his strategic level thesis research.

Paul said he had spent some time thinking about graduate school and discussing it with his wife, and said that “a graduate degree, to me, was important personally, professionally, *and* post-Army.”

Oscar is also a strategist, and felt he needed more credibility in his work environment. He already had a master’s degree in public administration from Webster University, but thought a master’s from the University of Kansas would make him more competitive, or at least on equal footing, with his colleagues who have degrees from Johns Hopkins, Georgetown, and Harvard. He was enrolled in the Master of Science and Business, and has been selected to attend SAMS next year. He said that “If you’re going to operate as a strategist, in my opinion at least, you have to be able to sit across the table from a staffer and be taken seriously,” and having advanced degrees with the right pedigree is “part of it.” By the time he returns to his job as a strategist, he expects his two additional master’s degrees, one from the University of Kansas and the other from SAMS, will improve his standing and credentials and expects to be taken more seriously by his colleagues in that respect.

Professional development-not enrolled in graduate school.

Amy was not enrolled in a master’s degree program, but thought a graduate degree was something she would pursue in the future, saying, “I primarily just like to do the best that I can in my position, so that’s another reason I probably put it off.” She heard what people around her said, “that they want to get that degree behind them, so they feel like it’ll be a better guarantee for promotion,” but she also listened to her career manager who reminded her that “you don’t have to have it.” So she is not convinced of the benefit to her military career, at least at this point, of a graduate degree.

George was also not convinced of the benefit to his military career of a master's degree, and shared his discussions with his branch manager. He said his branch manager advised him to "focus on doing your job . . . do your job well." So, he "just kept kicking the can down the road" a little farther. George expressed a need for what he viewed as firm, definitive guidance from his branch manager as to the importance of a graduate degree, and never thought he got it. He was looking for his branch manager to say, "Hey, you need to look at this. Here's ILE, here's your date. If you're going to get a master's, this is the time to do it." But that never happened, and he was reluctant to start something without knowing for certain whether he was capable of completing it and whether it was worth the investment or not. It would have been easier for him, he said, to pursue graduate school as a captain, before getting married and starting a family, but "it was just one of those things that I just never found the right time in my career to do," as he put it. When repetitive deployments began to be the norm, George really lost "the desire to go out and do it because it was like . . . deployment, come back . . . and I just never saw the master's as . . . being that benefit to me in that cycle I was in." From his perspective, he never reached "that happy spot" where he was ready to "go ahead and invest the time and do a master's." Since he "never really saw a graduate degree for promotion potential" with respect to his military career, his decision was relatively straightforward, although he has expressed some regret.

Irving had a master's degree when he arrived at CGSC, and was thankful he did not have to pursue one while attending ILE. He was unequivocal concerning his view of the influence of a graduate degree on his military career. Without a master's degree, he said "you're probably not going to get promoted—at least the myth out there right now is you're not going to get promoted to light colonel without a master's degree." In fact, he "wouldn't

have gotten a master's degree if [he] didn't think it was a delineator to make the next grade." While he acknowledged that there are "guys out there who are going to get promoted" without a master's degree, he also felt that he "would rather be the guy who has a master's on his transcript than the guy who doesn't," and that "a lot of guys, when they come here, feel very pressured . . . I have to have my master's before I leave this school because I am not going to get a chance to do it again." Irving was glad he already had a master's degree, because if he did not, he would "be in a master's program right now . . . no matter how much it was killing me," he said he "would be in a master's program."

John earned his master's degree before arriving at CGSC, and was encouraged by a senior officer to pursue it while assigned as a training company executive officer. In the words of his mentor, "Now would be a great time to get your master's." His justification was that John's wife was working full-time, he had no children, and he was not facing an imminent deployment. John felt that his "lieutenant years were the best years to knock it out, to get that block checked." As his mentor put it, "There won't be a better time for you." Looking back, he had to agree; "the stars and moons aligned—the timing was perfect."

Paul earned his MBA from Purdue, and would have pursued a second master's degree while attending CGSC but found that "the degrees that were offered here weren't career-enhancing enough or personally desirable enough to go through the effort of trying to get a second master's while in school." Having been selected to attend SAMS after completing CGSC, however, means he is "going to get the Army degree next year, so there's really no reason to try and go through a meat-grinder this year when there's going to be one available to me next year." In his mind, earning a graduate degree at some point was inevitable, saying

that “to a certain point the Army wants you to have a master’s degree and they reflect that with promotion rates.”

Robert already has a master’s degree which he earned en route to teach at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. His perspective on military career requirements influencing his earning a graduate degree is straightforward and direct: his master’s degree led to the teaching job he wanted. In addition, he has been approved to complete a fully-funded doctoral program and then return to West Point to continue teaching. In terms of increased job security, selection, or promotion, however, Robert thinks a graduate degree is a greater discriminator outside of the Army. As he put it, “I’ve never heard it from someone saying, ‘Oh, the promotion board is looking to see if you have a master’s.’” He went on to explain that he “never heard it from people who’ve served on them [promotion boards]. They’re looking more at what does your report card say, how do they say it, who signed it... once you transition out of the Army and there’s not that promotion board, and you’re building up a resumé,” then it has an impact—but not while in the Army.

Walter also earned his master’s degree en route to a teaching position at the U.S. Military Academy. He said he began to think he would “like to go to grad school at some point, but I have no absolutely no idea what I want to do when I grow up,” until the opportunity to teach at West Point presented itself. Walter said, “That was the draw. That was the motivation that I needed to pull me, really pull me in.” Thus, his military career requirements directly influenced his decision to attend graduate school.

When Ted arrived at CGSC, he planned to enroll in the MMAS program and get a second master’s degree, after having already earned a graduate degree from Georgetown University. He said he “had some ideas [he] wanted to get out,” but was put off by having to

go through the entire program of instruction on research methods and structure, so he decided not to pursue that option. Before CGSC, Ted worked at HRC, the headquarters for all Army personnel actions. While there, he concluded that “two was the new one when it comes to master’s degrees—everybody can get a master’s.” From his perspective, “it’s pretty much [something] you have to have . . . and then if you want to stand out you need to have two or something from an Ivy League school.”

Victor does not have a master’s degree; his goal was to attend graduate school while here at CGSC, but found the topics offered were not ones he was particularly drawn to, so he decided to forego graduate school for the time being. He expressed some resentment that a lot of his peers have master’s degrees, and his year group—1997—was just making captain in 2001 when the Global War on Terrorism began and has been nearly constantly deployed since then. He definitely thinks that military career requirements influence his decision in that regard. Victor is eligible for promotion below the zone soon, and said that “When they rack ‘em and stack ‘em, and I’m equal with this guy on all fronts, but he’s got his master’s degree and I don’t,” he is not that sure how he is going to fare getting selected for lieutenant colonel. He hopes his five deployments will carry as much weight as continuing education, but does not “know if the mindset has changed enough.” Longer term, however, Victor said that “if [he is] going up for O-6 [colonel], yeah, I gotta have it.”

Scott earned a master’s degree in conjunction with his Engineer Career Course and considered a second while attending CGSC, but instead chose to focus on reconnecting with his wife and kids after what he described as a “rigorous schedule” at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California. Since he was a lieutenant, “it was the biggest thing that some of your mentors and people in the military would tell you about was you need to get a

master's." He also said he was told, "Hey, your college degree's great, but if you look at the work force, people who have master's are getting picked up [for promotion] more than those without." He said that was why he earned his master's degree at his career course. Scott said he looks at a master's degree as communicating something about you to the Army, that "You've shown the military that you're trying to progress the nature of what it is you're trying to do, you're broadening your experience, you're trying to become more educated, you're staying current in your professional development and education."

Many of the CGSC students interviewed for the study said they thought a master's degree was important to their professional development, expressed in terms of improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities as an Army officer, and would impact their long-term success in the U.S. Army. They said they felt that a master's degree provided them an edge over their contemporaries with respect to promotion and selection for command or other key positions. Promotion to the next higher rank or grade, for many officers, is the main indicator of how they measure up against their peers. Selection for command or higher level schools is an equally significant measure, but in a different way. The other aspect of the value of a master's degree expressed by CGSC students during the interviews was the contribution, at least in their minds, to their military job security, defined as being kept on active duty in operational and staff assignments in their respective fields.

Military job security-enrolled in graduate school.

Force reduction issues figure into the importance of a master's degree now that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are beginning to wind down. Allen characterized his view of graduate school as positive because if "you put a little weight on it because of the drawdown . . . if they cut 20 to 30% of the service," he will still be competitive. Despite the challenges

he faced in two different attempts to earn a master's degree, he felt it was worth making a third attempt because it would help him out eventually: "if the Army cuts personnel, and I'm part of that, [and] I have nothing, so I decided maybe I should do it."

Oscar is married with three small children at home, and said "the wife and I talked about it a lot" before he decided to pursue a graduate degree while attending CGSC. They agreed that with all the talk of draw down and reduction in the strength of the Army, "there was a question of whether or not I was going to be able to stay," in particular since his branch is over-strength. They wanted to "make sure that I was positioned" regardless of what happened.

Edward was already enrolled in a master's degree program; his major decision when he found out he was scheduled to attend CGSC was whether or not to continue working on it. It is online, and he only had a couple of courses to complete, and was not particularly confident about how he stacked up against his peers. He felt that he "really need[ed] to make sure that I don't get the cut," and "considering what my ORB [Officer Record Brief], my packet, my military profile looked like" with the intent of making it as competitive as possible.

Military job security-not enrolled in graduate school.

Kevin was not enrolled in graduate school and did not have a graduate degree. For him, after he graduated from college, he had had enough of school for a while, even though he acknowledged that "it's going to get more competitive . . . in the coming years," and that "Lots of people have it—I think I need to get one eventually, but . . . not at ILE." The catalyst that drove him to this conclusion was the projected drawdown in military strength; he realized that "it's going to be more competitive, and that's what really made me think

about it. And . . . some of my classmates are getting one, maybe I should too.” Although he did not think a graduate degree would provide any particular advantage with respect to his military career at present, he did think that having one would improve his standing in terms of selection and job security in the future when considered alongside a reduction in force of what he believed would be “a hundred thousand people from just the Army alone.”

Mitch already had a Master of Science in Geological Engineering when he arrived at CGSC, so his focus was not on earning a second master’s degree but on his credentialing as a professional engineer. He said he “knew it was the thing to do, and . . . at some point . . . would have to get a master’s degree.” Looking ahead, he thought that “as the Army starts to draw down and begins to become more competitive . . . they’re going to start using an advanced degree as a discriminator, not so much what the degree is, as it is this guy’s got drive to pursue more education or has the ability to take on more education.”

Allen said he had a commander who told him, “Hey, if you want to succeed in the Army, or you want to stay longer, you have to be competitive, so you have got to start thinking about this [a master’s degree].” He said he determined “that if the Army cuts personnel, and I’m part of that, I have nothing [without a graduate degree],” so he felt it was definitely worth making the effort.

Lifelong learning.

Frank already had a master’s degree and decided to pursue an MMAS while attending CGSC. He said, “the second one kind of builds into that long-term resumé--you know, all the guys have master’s degrees, but wait, this guy has two. It could be that one little deciding factor that tips the scales later on down the road.” This seems to support the idea that he was influenced in his decision by military career considerations. However, he also went on to say

that although having a graduate degree was important to him “as a military professional,” he also “looked at it as more for later in life.” In fact, he doubted whether the MMAS would provide any kind of tangible or intangible reward, such as increased job security, promotion, selection, and so forth. It was just something he had an interest in, at least until attending the introductory sessions became too onerous.

April never considered an additional graduate degree to have any positive impact on her military career, but still began work on the MMAS program because the subject matter was of interest to her in the scholars program. When she was denied enrollment in the scholars program, although she was encouraged to continue her research, she could not see how it would “further [her] professionally,” so she dropped the MMAS and focused on her quality of life rather than “meeting an achievement [she had] already met.”

Summary.

Most of the CGSC students interviewed said that military career requirements influenced their decision whether or not to attend graduate school, although in different ways. For many, improving their professional credentials was the key consideration; for others, whatever they could do to remain on active duty was the prime motivator. Disconnects between what students who were interviewed perceived as important to their future success in the Army, what their leaders and mentors told them was important, and what the official position of the personnel managers at HRC in many cases made their decision more difficult. In a few instances, even though respondents said military career requirements influenced their decision, they also expressed some doubt about whether or not it would play a significant role in their future success, but still thought it was worthwhile and provided additional insurance in the long run.

The students who were interviewed expressed different perspectives about how “military career requirements” influenced their decisions whether or not to attend graduate school. Some saw a graduate degree of any kind to be an unwritten and unstated requirement. Everyone shared their consideration of getting a master’s degree, or at least taking some courses, even though they were not currently enrolled in a master’s program while attending CGSC. Thus, military career requirements influenced their decision, even though in some cases the decision was to postpone getting a master’s degree until later in their careers. Military career requirements specifically influenced the decision of each CGSC student to either enroll in graduate school or to postpone working on a master’s degree until after graduating from CGSC, but in all cases it is recognized as a goal that each officer needs to attain at some point.

Research Question Two

Do post-military career aspirations and requirements play a role in a CGSC student’s decision to attend graduate school? If so, how? If not, why not?

Post-military career aspirations and requirements played a role in some CGSC students’ decisions, but not all. In some cases it was the most important consideration, but those instances were few. In other instances, a student did not really have a very clear idea of what he or she wanted to do after leaving the Army, but thought a master’s degree would help make them more competitive in the civilian job market.

Post-military-enrolled in graduate school.

Andrew was already enrolled in a master’s program when he arrived at CGSC. Despite already completing all but one of his classes for an MBA from Webster University, he wanted to enroll in the MMAS program, but was not allowed to due to transfer credit

issues. He thought the MBA would give him “more flexibility later . . . without exactly knowing what [he] was going to do ‘after Army.’” While Andrew had no clear picture of what he wanted to do after leaving military service, he “thought the MBA was diverse enough to give me more options when I get there.” The potential increased earnings were not foremost in his mind; he said, “I don’t think monetary compensation after Army was relevant to how I decided whether or not to go to graduate school.”

Bob looked at a graduate degree as something that would contribute to his “marketability later in life.” He initially considered, but quickly discarded, the option of pursuing an MMAS, because he did not see how he could “really market an MMAS when I take off this uniform.” He considered getting a master’s degree from Webster University in education, because “that’s the easy way to walk away” after leaving military service. Eventually he decided on the supply chain management master’s degree program, “that would equate to more if I wanted to pursue a career whenever I take off this uniform.”

Allen said he began to think about “what I wanted to do after getting out of the Army, when I retire, whenever that is,” and that was when he started doing some research in earnest with respect to graduate school while attending CGSC. After discussing the subject with his wife, they both decided it was a good idea. Despite some serious concerns about being successful, he persisted and completed his first semester at the time of the interview. He feels good about what he has accomplished, with the help and support of his wife, and thinks a graduate degree “is going to help me out eventually.”

Brian enrolled in graduate school when he began CGSC, but has since taken a hiatus from classes for a while. He found it to be a lot more extra work than he expected, although he is certain he still wants to get a master’s degree in the future. From his perspective, he

says “it opens more windows for me . . . [and] it’s going to be good to have for me when I retire.” Brian can see the benefit of a graduate degree in terms of a “greater likelihood [of] selection for employment . . . post-Army.” He figures he has six more years of service left before retirement, and that “by the time I retire, I’ll have it.”

Carl talked to several colleagues about graduate school versus the MMAS, and decided that “if I get out of the military, what does the MMAS mean to a civilian corporation or anything like that in your follow-on job?” When he compared the name recognition of the MMAS to what he described as “a brick and mortar, by name program [that] somebody can look back and say, ‘This university,’” he decided against the MMAS. He does not view a graduate degree as an automatic ticket to post-military employment, though, saying that it is “not even going to get you a job [but that] it’s better to have, you know, something that’s going to be a base for a future job.”

Donald has had a good experience in graduate school, and thinks that “if something happens along the way, I’m set up personally, you know, through this master’s degree, to help myself out with either Homeland Security, some type of security manager position, or, you know, even working locally . . . as a security manager for a business, corporation, or [the] government.” Edward also was looking ahead, “making sure I had my portfolio straight for when I did depart the military.” He said he “wanted to build on my bachelor’s experience,” which was in the engineering field, but with emphasis “on an engineering management [graduate degree] so that I could do defense or consulting, or maybe teaching or something like that.”

Edward spent some time thinking about different options for his graduate degree, from the MMAS program to the various degrees offered by civilian institutions, and said “I

was making sure I had my portfolio straight for when I did depart the military,” and that he “wanted to build on my bachelor’s experience.” As an Engineer Officer, he wanted to take his “skills as an officer, leadership, organizational-type leadership, merge that with some engineering background, but focus on engineering management” so he could do some defense consulting, “maybe teach or something like that.”

Barbara initially thought a graduate degree would provide increased job security or greater likelihood of selection for promotion, but with recent personnel reductions being discussed by the DoD, is less confident in that regard. However, she still thinks that “when I do return to the civilian sector, it’s still going to say something about me, about who I am and my work ethic.”

Frank already had a master’s degree, but decided to pursue another graduate degree through the MMAS program. He saw a second master’s “as hopefully applicable post-Army,” that “builds into the long-term resumé—you know, all the guys have master’s degrees, but wait, this guy has two. It could be that one little deciding factor that tips the scales later on down the road.” He did not see a graduate degree as important in terms of being “a military professional,” but more important “later on in life . . . for the long term, I think it’s really important.”

Larry considered both the MMAS program and a graduate degree from one of the civilian universities, and was advised by various mentors not to waste his time on the MMAS, “because you can’t use it on the outside.” He was advised to “use that time to get a real degree that is applicable to real life,” so he enrolled in an MBA program.

Post-military-not enrolled in graduate school.

Amy thought that having a graduate degree “opens up another door for me,” and that she was “hoping to maybe get, acquire a government civilian job.” At the same time, however, she did not think it was the only characteristic potential future employers would consider, but rather that “it could be a plus.” From a future employer’s perspective, although “at the time if I have it, great, I can mention it,” but her emphasis would be on persuading the interviewer she is not a person who will just do well in an interview, but “then won’t do well on the job.”

In a broad sense, George did not perceive any increased potential for promotion resulting from a graduate degree. What benefit he did see, however, was that a graduate degree served “as a kind of combat multiplier, not for my Army career, but just for me as a person going forward with the rest of my life.” So his view of the benefit of a master’s degree was based on neither the benefit to him in his current career nor in his post-military career, but strictly from a personal development perspective.

April’s focus with respect to the graduate degree she already earned from the Uniformed Services University in Bethesda, Maryland, was twofold: it was not only “necessary to remain competitive in my field to have one,” she said, but also that with it, she was “very certain I could work for any state public health department, whatever I really wanted to do.” So for her, the benefits were realized both in her current military career as an environmental health specialist and in a post-military career application. Despite already having earned a graduate degree in her field of study, April was still interested in pursuing a second one in a related field, Genocide and Mass Atrocities, a special scholars program offered to a select group of CGSC students. Unfortunately, the college would not permit her

to enroll in the scholars program in that area, so she elected to forego graduate school while attending CGSC and instead spend her free time with family and friends, who coincidentally are only a few hours away, while her husband pursues his master's degree.

Harold had a long-term view of the potential impact of his advanced degrees on both his military career and future civilian employment. As an Army Judge Advocate, or lawyer, he has already earned both a law degree and a master's degree from the Judge Advocate General school, but is fully aware that "there will come a time when the soldier part will end." Despite already having multiple advanced degrees, Harold has not lost interest in continuing his education and pursuing another master's degree in the future. He expressed a sincere desire to contribute to the greater good of society at large, and said "there's a bigger piece on why I practice law and what I enjoy about doing it, that I want to try and help build ... that's the process on why I would want to go to graduate school."

Irving also earned a master's degree prior to arriving at CGSC through an online program he completed at his previous assignment. His long-term view was that he would "need to have a marketable skill, so I'm going to get my degree in what Forbes says is the thing to do." Clearly, Irving has an appreciation for the benefit of a master's degree in a post-military career application. In his case, he earned a master's degree in information systems security, only to discover halfway through the program that it really was not something he wanted to do for the rest of his working years after leaving military service. He completed the program despite the realization that the degree was not in a field he truly had much interest in, but plans to "someday, get another master's degree or a doctorate." In particular, he said, "I want to get the next graduate degree for me. I want to do it for me." So it would seem that Irving recognized the benefit in terms of post-military career

aspirations, but chose a field in which he did not think he would be happy in the long term, and will try to correct that in the future. He would have enrolled in graduate school while attending CGSC, but quickly realized after arriving at Fort Leavenworth that “the school load for CGSC was already, at the front side, heavy enough.”

John earned his master’s degree before arriving at CGSC, and although he said his focus was on doing well in his military career, but he did not lose sight of the importance of advanced schooling in a challenging job market after leaving military service. He said that “a bachelor’s degree is like my father’s degree, [his] high school diploma. And the job market demands people with more expertise, more training in their areas.”

Mitch is an Engineer officer, and earned his master’s degree while attending his Captains Career Course. Despite not having spent a lot of time thinking about advanced degrees, such as master’s, he “knew at some point [he] would have to get a master’s degree.” When asked why he said he always knew he would need one, he explained that “in order to be competitive at some point whenever I hang this up [meaning leave military service]—if I want to be competitive in the engineering field, then I have to continue pursuing [further education] in that field.”

Paul earned an MBA through a fully-funded advanced degree program at Purdue, did not enroll in graduate school while attending CGSC, but said he would have pursued a second degree if the programs offered while attending CGSC were either “more career-enhancing . . . or personally desirable . . . to go through the effort.” For him, earning a graduate degree “was important personally, professionally, and post-Army.” In terms of post-military, he said, “In the civilian world, I think there are absolutely tangible benefits,

particularly having an MBA; I've heard between 5 and 10 thousand dollars a year, easy, on initial pay type of a situation.”

Robert also already has a master's degree, and expects to be approved for a doctoral program that will begin after he graduates from CGSC. His plan is to earn his doctorate and return to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point to become a permanent professor and probably finish his military career there. He said he thought the advantages of a master's degree became more pronounced after leaving the military. In his opinion, “outside the Army . . . it's one of those, for lack of a better term . . . a discriminator.” He felt that “once you transition out of the Army . . . and you're building up a resumé, yeah, I think that speaks something.”

Scott was also thinking about pursuing a second master's degree, but elected to instead focus on reconnecting with his family after what he described as three very busy years stationed at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California. The other consideration was money; he would not receive funding for a second master's degree from the Army, and actually considered working toward an MMAS, which is free. That alternative did not hold much appeal when viewed “from the vantage point of what is an MMAS really going to do for me in the civilian world.” His master's degree is in public administration, and he thought that if he could get an MBA while at CGSC, it would open “up the pool for possible jobs” after leaving the Army. He had a pessimistic view of the advantages of advanced schooling, though. He thought it was different now than when he graduated from college; at that time, people “were saying you need to have a master's to get a job. And now you see people that have master's and PhDs that can't even get jobs and they're working as a Wal-Mart door greeter.” In spite of that thinking, however, he still said

he thought a graduate degree “may give you an advantage over a peer or competitor for a certain job. The more money thin—I’m not sure that’s necessarily true anymore today, but the fact that it might give you a leg up, if you have experience and a master’s.”

Victor did not have a master’s degree when he arrived at CGSC, although he said it was always his plan to earn one while he was here. He said he thinks there “would be a tangible reward in the aspect of once [he] got out, on job placement . . . and the pay scale would be a little bit higher for someone with a graduate degree.”

Walter earned a master’s degree in English through a fully-funded graduate school program, with a follow-on assignment to teach at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. He had a similar view of the benefits of a graduate degree after leaving military service, saying, “Now I can go teach at a junior college.” He also expressed a long-term view of the impact of his education after military service, and is “looking at beyond the Army.”

Summary.

Post-military career aspirations and, in some cases, perceived civilian job market requirements played at least a small role in most CGSC students’ decisions to enroll in graduate school. All but one continued to pursue a master’s degree, and the individual not currently enrolled expects to resume his graduate studies when it is more convenient, sometime after graduating from CGSC. Not everyone thinks a graduate degree is an automatic ticket to financial success or employment, but those who addressed their plans after leaving the Army agreed that it is a necessary component for their future employment security.

For CGSC students not enrolled in graduate school, the answer to this question took several forms, the most common being that a graduate degree is more important in terms of

individuals' current military career rather than after leaving the service. The impact of a master's degree on most CGSC students' post military career aspirations was evident, but not a major influence. Post military career aspirations and requirements played a role in some, but not all, CGSC students' decision to attend graduate school. In several instances, CGSC students described how they thought a master's degree would be useful or helpful in the job-seeking efforts after leaving military service. In other instances, in particular instances in which the student already has a master's degree, they have already made the decision to improve their employability or attractiveness in a future civilian job market, especially in the case of the engineer officers interviewed.

Research Question Three

Do family considerations influence a CGSC student's decision to attend graduate school? If so, how? If not, why not?

Family considerations influenced most CGSC students' decision-making with respect to attending graduate school. The influence of family emanated from two sources, immediate family and extended family, or parents, siblings, and other relatives, sometimes in combination with each other and sometimes only one or the other. In some cases, the impact of added stress on the family coupled with a strong desire to reconnect after long periods of separation due to deployments and high operational tempo made family considerations the overriding criteria. In other cases, the impact of pursuing a master's degree on the family was considered, but the inevitable sacrifice was deemed worth the payoff in terms of perceived improvement in competitiveness and keeping pace with contemporaries. In either case, however, it was still an influence, although in different ways and with different results. Spouses were usually supportive, and in many cases picked up the additional role of

providing entertainment for children through after school youth activities such as dance, martial arts, or other sports. In some cases, students described a lower stress level in the family, even though one parent was often absent while attending classes, because everyone knew that parent was not in harm's way on a deployment somewhere.

In a different sense, the CGSC students' siblings and parents, and in some cases even in-laws, influenced their decision to attend graduate school. Their academic achievements served as a spur to their own continued efforts. CGSC students who were interviewed said the academic achievements of family members served as both an inspiration in many cases, and also as a source of encouragement. Familial academic achievements motivated them to strive for their own achievements. From a different, but related perspective, a few CGSC students felt they set an example for some of their family members, such as siblings and cousins, not only in completing college but by going on to earn a master's degree.

Notably, one CGSC student said she was not influenced in her decision whether or not to attend graduate school by family considerations. Barbara said she never "gave thought to how much the schooling would really impact" her life; she "was more focused on the benefits after graduation." She said her focus was on how much she wanted to attend graduate school and earn her master's degree, not on "the impact on your personal life." Her ex-husband got his master's degree when they were stationed at Fort Riley, Kansas, and her brother recently finished up his second master's degree, so there is some family influence, both immediate and extended, that may affect the importance she assigned to graduate school. Barbara already had a master's degree, and was enrolled in the MMAS program, with a follow-on assignment to attend SAMS, so the significance she attributes to educational achievement is clearly evidenced by her actions.

Family influence-enrolled in graduate school.

Andrew was already enrolled in an MBA program when he began CGSC, and said his wife was “totally supportive. She has said that she is supportive of decisions I make relative to my career,” and that “she was willing to back me up with that [graduate school].” His father has a master’s degree in education, and his mother a bachelor’s degree in sociology, so education is an important component in his family.

In other cases, the spouse expressed an understanding of the necessity of a master’s degree. Bob’s wife, for example, “was fully supportive, knew I had to do one to stay competitive and all that.” He was still very aware of the additional “stress or pain” he was putting on himself, but did not blame anybody but himself. He is also very aware of the time being taken away from his family by his involvement in graduate school, but did not want to be separated from them while attending CGSC, and said he did not want “to make this another deployment.” On nights when he is at class, he says “they’re not just sitting around without me there . . . so she’s fine.” She looks at it as a lot less stressful than when he was an XO and the phone would ring at any hour and he would have to go take care of something at the battalion. She thinks graduate school “would be a good idea,” that he is “not in charge of anything, so it would be a good time.” When Bob thinks about the future and his family, he asks himself, “If something happened, what do I have to offer? That’s what keeps me going, what drives my motivation to do this.” After his first month in graduate school, he thought he was not going to succeed, and that “if it weren’t for the wife, I would have withdrawn out of school.” He said she helped keep him motivated and kept him from getting too discouraged.

In another sense, extended family, defined as siblings, parents, and other relatives, drove some students' motivation to pursue graduate school. Edward said he thought "the siblings kind of drive it for me." His brother has a master's degree, as well as his sister and step-mom, and his mother recently earned her associate's degree. He thought that "seeing my brother and my sister move forward in what they were doing kind of inspired me."

Larry shared a similar perspective on family academic achievement. He said his mother just finished two years preparing for a CPA exam, his father had two master's degrees, his uncle recently earned a bachelor's degree, and his brother just finished EMT training and is enrolled in classes to become an anesthetist. He is not married and has no children, but said that the academic achievements of all the other members of his family were motivation for him to earn a master's degree.

Donald said his undergraduate experience blazed a trail for the rest of his family to follow. He said that "I was kind of the first one that not only graduated early, but I went straight into college," something none of his other family members had done. He said, "there was a whole lot of influence from family, you know, that had did it before," because none of his family had gone to college. As a result of his success, Donald said his sisters and a lot of his cousins have also gone on to college.

Oscar is married with three small children at home, and said "the wife and I talked about it a lot" before he decided to pursue a graduate degree while attending CGSC. They agreed that with all the talk of draw down and reduction in the strength of the Army, "there was a question of whether or not I was going to be able to stay," in particular since his branch is over-strength. So they tried to "make sure that I was positioned" regardless of what happened. His extended family is well-educated; Bob's three brothers all have bachelor's

degrees and his mother has a doctorate in psychology, so the family influence may also be a factor.

Family influence-not enrolled in graduate school.

Scott chose not to pursue a master's degree while attending CGSC. He said he felt that due to the pace of operations at the National Training Center, "I haven't really had an opportunity to know my two young ones and trying to reconnect with my wife has been" difficult. For him, "it just wasn't worth my valuable time to have to retake some of the exact same courses I had already taken . . . it was about family time."

Despite Amy's positive view of graduate school, she felt sufficiently challenged by the CGSC curriculum and "didn't want to burn the candle at both ends—it's the quality of life . . . that was a little bit important. And being able to spend time with my family." Thus, she elected not to pursue graduate school while attending CGSC.

George described a similar logic in his decision not to attend graduate school. He did not have a master's degree, and described the challenge of achieving a balance between CGSC academic requirements, family commitments, and pursuing a master's degree in the evenings. He said he asked himself, "Do I really want to go ahead and take those nights out of the weeks, those weekends and stuff and do that?" After telling his wife that the two years he spent as a battalion S-3 would "be the worst of my major years," he did not think that trying to convince her that the additional study and research associated with earning a master's degree was fair. George had already promised his wife that "once I get to CGSC, then we're going to have some time," after two years of 16-hour days. He said, "She would have supported me, but it was just one of those things, you know; it just didn't make the cut line in my personal story." He felt he needed the "chance to kind of take that year, reconnect

with the wife, be with the daughter, do stuff with her. In the end, that ended up bumping that above pursuing a master's while here at CGSC." He summed it up this way: "You know, the 3 things I can do while I'm here: do well in ILE, reconnect with the family, knock out a master's. Of the 3, what are the 2 I *have* to do well? And to me, it was ILE and the family."

April might have found it easier to balance CGSC academic requirements, family requirements, and graduate school requirements, but also felt that since her husband was already working on his master's degree, she "thought two of us doing master's degrees in the same household when I didn't need it" might prove to be more of a domestic challenge than they needed. She said she "wasn't willing to put aside all my personal goals for the year and put them into another academic goal" that she felt she had already met by earning her graduate degree earlier. Despite encouragement from her faculty advisors to continue in the MMAS program, April said she "would rather spend the time with my family, friends, my dog, and my husband than meeting an achievement" she had already met.

Irving already had a master's degree, and considered pursuing another, but changed his mind after realizing the amount of academic work required for CGSC and the amount of additional work required for a master's program. He said one of his classmates is only "getting two hours of sleep a night. He's not seeing his family." Irving said it was easier in the beginning of the academic year when his classmate had experience with many of the CGSC subjects, but as the year progressed the demands of ILE on top of his graduate school really began to be felt, and "he's looking at trying to change his program now. And he has a baby due in April." Irving's decision not to enroll in graduate school while at CGSC was made in conjunction with his wife. He said they discussed it, and both agreed it would be good to walk away from CGSC with another master's degree, and she was "totally

supportive.” But the further into the year he progressed, and the greater the workload increased, he quickly realized that was not going to happen. He earned his master’s degree through an on-line program that he “made it fit my life at that time,” and his positive attitude toward graduate school makes him think he “also would like to be the first guy in my family to have a doctorate degree.” For Victor, he found himself “balancing that time between do I want to put all my time that I’m here into class or do I want to enjoy the fact that I get home at 2 o’clock in the afternoon and can hang out with my wife and we can do stuff on weekends?”

John earned a master’s degree as a lieutenant, but considered getting a second one while attending CGSC. The three main criteria he applied in making his decision were the amount of time it was going to take, his desire to attend his son’s sports events, and wanting to spend time with his wife. In the end, “the negatives outweighed the positives, and my already having a master’s degree in my field—that was the cincher right there for me not to pursue one while I was here.” He weighed the various requirements in his life, saying “you have competing issues with your time and your effort and your focus,” and concluded that he wanted to focus on the CGSC academic requirements and his family for the year.

Kevin “also wanted to spend time with [his] wife and two kids,” and realized he could not handle a graduate school program on top of the CGSC academic load. He has a generally positive view of graduate school, but also looks at it with some trepidation in the sense that he does not want “to go through the work and do it all.” In his way of thinking, “between the Army alone, and a wife and two kids and those responsibilities, that’s going to be negative.” He simply does not see how he “would find the time to do it.”

Paul's family background, more than his current family considerations, may have played a role in his decision to attend graduate school. He earned a master's degree from Purdue, and both of his parents and sister have master's degrees, so for him it was almost a foregone conclusion that eventually he would earn one. Because none of the course offerings while attending CGSC interested him, he decided to forego pursuing a second master's degree, although it was initially a goal. His wife also expressed some interest in earning her master's degree, but he said that "it wasn't good timing for us fiscally to put her through a master's program" at this time.

Robert's decision not to enroll in graduate school while attending CGSC was based on the fact that he already had a master's degree and that "he did not want to take more time away from my family to pursue a second one." He wanted the opportunity to spend more time on his personal life after a two-year period of deployment and high optempo as a brigade fire support officer. Robert said he "hadn't really seen my family and been able to do stuff with them. I'd like to take this year to be able to help coach my daughter's soccer ... be able to coach, and be out there with the kids, so that was a thing that I also looked at." He looked at his year at CGSC as "the one time I have for my family for a while before I go in the rat race again." To him, "it's more important to spend that time with the family because I would look at, okay, what point is it, I got this master's degree and I've done all this, and my kids won't even know me. At least in my values, that would be like--to me would be a failure."

Scott earned his master's degree while attending the Engineer Captains Career Course and "was thinking about pursuing a second one while I was here [at CGSC] through the down time." He decided against that course of action based on how busy he had been the

previous three years training units at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California; he said “I haven’t really had an opportunity to know my two young ones.” In his mind, it came down to a desire to “reconnect with the wife . . . and spending time with family.” His parents, one of whom had a master’s degree and the other a bachelor’s degree, were “influential” in his decision about attending graduate school. His brother, who has an engineering degree from Virginia Tech, also exerted some influence on Scott’s decision about pursuing a master’s degree.

Ted also comes from a background that encourages lifelong learning and continuing education. He earned his master’s at Georgetown, and his wife has two master’s degrees, but he still wanted to “go ahead and get another master’s while I was here,” in this case through the MMAS program. He wanted to use it as a forcing function, to get him to stay academically engaged and do more, but felt like it “was almost taking a step back academically” after the work he did at Georgetown. He said he gets plenty of encouragement from both sides of his family: “I’ve got my father and my father-in-law that both beat you with the education club—get more degrees, get going back to school and doing those types of things.” He thinks he is on track with respect to his continuing education, but still gets “beat with the education club quite a bit: ‘When are you getting your doctorate?’” He is not sure when he will get it, but has that as a future goal to pursue.

Victor’s goal before arriving at CGSC was to attend graduate school while he was here and he found a program that had enough appeal to make him think it was what he wanted to do. His concern was over the amount of time and effort it was going to take, how much that additional work would detract from his performance in CGSC classes, and how much it would take away from time to spend with his family. His wife’s work schedule

adversely impacted his decision, though; he was going to class in the mornings and early afternoons, she would work afternoons and evenings, and they found they “weren’t really spending any time together.” After only recently returning from a deployment to Iraq, he found they “were still trying that reconnect process,” which influenced his decision not to enroll in graduate school while attending CGSC. The question he asked himself was, “Do I want to spend this time here reconnecting with her and my family, or do I want to put that extra time in getting a master’s degree?” Advice from senior officers and other mentors also influenced his decision. Their advice was to focus on getting combat experience, getting job experience in the intelligence field, and “try to find some way down the road” where it is a more opportune time. For Victor, “that was the deciding factor, balancing that time between do I want to put all my time that I’m here into class or do I want to enjoy the fact that I get home at 2 o’clock in the afternoon and I can hang out with my wife and we can do stuff on the weekends. That was the deciding factor for me.” Another factor was the 18-year old stepson at home who “got a little bit out of hand” during his last deployment. Victor weighed the impact of “sitting at a desk or going to the library trying to get my research done” against the need to help his stepson “get his feet back underneath him during this year,” and opted to focus more on helping his stepson.

Walter’s decision about enrolling in graduate school while attending CGSC was simple and easy, as he put it: “I already have a master’s degree coming here.” He wanted “to focus, obviously on family time,” having just returned a few months ago from deployment. His focus was on “wanting to reconnect.” His wife and family all have college degrees or professional degrees; even his grandmother went to Washington State University to get her bachelor’s degree recently. If he had been seriously considering graduate school while

attending CGSC, the thing that would have killed it for him would be “not feeling like I could achieve the necessary balance while being here.” As he put it, “If I didn’t feel like I was going to get the requisite amount of family time with my two-year old and see my wife and all that, I think that would have killed it for me, if I was seriously looking.”

Summary.

CGSC students who were interviewed described how family considerations influenced their decision whether or not to attend graduate school. In nearly all cases, family considerations were an influence; the notable exception was previously described. The two broad categories of how family considerations influenced CGSC students were immediate family, defined as spouse and children, and extended family, defined as siblings, parents, and other relatives. The influence of immediate family was described in terms of continued sacrifice for the greater long-term good of the family with respect to financial security, or in terms of not pursuing a master’s degree in order to devote more time to reconnecting with a spouse and children. The influence of the extended family was also described in terms of siblings’ and parents’ academic achievements serving as motivation to do likewise. In other cases, the CGSC student was the first in the family to attend college or graduate school, and served as an example for other family members, which in turn motivated them to succeed.

Research Question Four

Does previous academic experience influence a CGSC student’s decision to attend graduate school? If so, how? If not, why not?

Adults’ previous experience in learning activities has been shown to influence their decision to participate in future learning activities, and interviews with CGSC students support this (Cross, 1981). CGSC students who had a positive undergraduate experience

expressed a more positive view of graduate school and a greater sense of efficacy with respect to their expected success pursuing a master's degree. Likewise, CGSC students' prior graduate school experience, whether it resulted in a degree or was just an occasional graduate course, influenced their decision about graduate school while attending CGSC.

Previous academic experience-enrolled.

Andrew said he “was very interested in the undergrad work I had done and wanted to continue learning and developing that expertise,” despite his description of his academic experience at West Point as having “started out rough.” His challenge was in the fact that he was already enlisted in the Army, was a Private First Class, and had not attended any of the preparatory courses most of the other cadets attended, so he felt he had a steeper learning curve with respect to academics, academy rules and procedures, and just adjusting to life in the military academy overall. However, he concluded that “overall the experience was a positive one,” and that “he ended up learning about stuff that [he] enjoyed.”

Allen described his undergraduate experience at the University of Puerto Rico as being “like any other college kids, don't know what to do.” After taking a couple of classes he said he “realized I wanted to be a microbiologist,” and found he had a genuine passion for it, so for him, “it was not that hard—it was something I wanted to do.” Later he experienced a series of unsuccessful starts with respect to graduate school. In his words, he never felt confident in his ability to succeed in graduate school, and said “I thought I was going to fail.” The first time he tried was in 2004 after returning from a deployment to Afghanistan. He took two signal-related courses, and completed them both successfully, but said “it was the toughest thing at the time.” Allen tried again in 2007 when he was commanding a recruiting detachment, but said “I didn't have time to do it; I wanted to do it, but I said hey, if I do it,

I'm going to fail." When referring back to his past graduate school experiences, Allen did not characterize them as having a negative impact on his latest efforts. Rather, he felt that since he actually passed all the courses he enrolled in, in spite of all the challenges and competing requirements of his commands, he said "I knew I could do it." His third effort has proved successful, and he is currently enrolled in the MBA program through Webster University, but said that "after the first month, hey, I'm going to fail this thing." But he continued, and with support and encouragement from his wife, persevered.

Carl had a positive undergraduate experience at Lockhaven University, and said he "enjoyed it." He had just gotten out of the Army and had seen other soldiers with college degrees get promoted ahead of him, so he decided to "get out and go to college." After the first two years at Lockhaven, he met with an ROTC cadre who showed in the pay charts for officers compared to enlisted, and decided to enroll in ROTC and earn a commission while attending college. He had not participated in any graduate school programs before arriving at CGSC because he "wanted a program that I could have my military education count," which is what he found when he visited the Army Education Center. That was a very positive experience for him; he said, "when I walked in, they had the answers—this is how many credit hours."

Donald had what he described as a "very complicated" undergraduate experience. He took college classes while still in high school, and actually graduated early by taking some additional summer courses. He wanted to enlist in the Army, but his parents refused to sign the required paperwork since he was only 17 years old, and convinced him to enroll at Texas Southern University when he was still 17 and he ended up continuing on there for another 2 and a half years. He transferred to the University of Houston and received an ROTC

scholarship, having discovered a way to both get a college degree and join the Army as an officer. He said “it was a challenge” keeping his grade point average above 2.5 to maintain his scholarship eligibility, but he said “I made it work for me.”

Edward was already enrolled in a master’s degree in engineering when he arrived at CGSC, and “wanted to build on my bachelor’s experience.” When he described his undergraduate experience, he said “undergraduate wasn’t bad.” He was in a nationally recognized engineer program at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, and felt he “was way overworked” carrying 20 credit hours, the birth of their first child, and National Guard and ROTC commitments, but said he still “finished with a decent GPA.” His other academic experiences were in military schools, such as flight school and at the Defense Language Institute where he learned Spanish to serve as an interrogator. Edward said the Defense Language Institute “really taught me how to study and then I think because of that I was really encouraged to work hard at it.”

Barbara had a positive undergraduate experience, and would have continued on to graduate school after finishing her bachelor’s degree if she could have afforded it. She ended up with a double major, but took five years to graduate, but “was really excited about that.” She eventually enrolled in a political science master’s degree program through Kansas State University that was conducted in a distance learning format. Every week she would participate via video teleconference from her office at West Point. She completed her master’s degree and was accepted into a doctoral program also at Kansas State, but has not been able to find the money to pursue that degree yet. Instead, Barbara enrolled in the MMAS program while attending CGSC in order to continue her research, which she said

“will continue to build for when I can reapply for my PhD program and it will feed my dissertation.”

Frank had a good undergraduate experience at the University of Tennessee, saying he “did a victory lap” because he changed his major his second year and needed to work on improving his GPA. He said “it was great—no regrets at all,” and that “in retrospect, you really did learn a lot,” and that “looking back, that was great—good experiences.” He completed a master’s degree through Webster University while attending his Captains Career Course, and did not think it was that difficult. From his perspective, “the biggest challenge was managing time,” and balancing between his academic requirements and his job after completing his career course. He said, “It was almost another give-away,” and that “it really wasn’t that taxing.” He only had to take six classes, got credit for four classes, wrote a thesis, but got the presentation waived “because of deployments.” In the end, he said he has a “neutral” view of graduate school, which he attributes to the fact that he had not “gone to a more traditional institution.”

Larry said he was “really burned out on school after West Point,” although he “was going to get a master’s degree from somewhere at some point.” The learning activities he participated in since West Point were a mixed experience for him, but “more positive than not.” Larry said he enjoys “learning for its own sake.” He is enrolled in the Webster University MBA program, says it is going “pretty well,” and thinks it will be beneficial when he returns to his job as a Foreign Service Officer with the U.S. State Department.

Neal is enrolled in the MMAS program, and described his undergraduate years as “a great experience—probably the best opportunity I’ve ever been given in my life.” He said

“I’ve had a very positive experience with higher education” and that “I feel that I’ve gotten something out of the time I’ve put into it.”

Oscar graduated from DePaul University, which he described as a “very classic liberal arts education.” He had a good experience at DePaul. He earned his master’s degree in public administration from Webster University while at his engineer career course and is enrolled in a master’s program at the University of Kansas. Oscar is a strategist career field, working at the Pentagon with other strategists who have degrees from Johns Hopkins, Georgetown, and Harvard, and feels a little out-classed in terms of his educational background. His previous experience in other learning activities was a 3-month course at the U.S. Army War College where he earned his strategist certification, which he described as “pretty intense,” graduating only 11 of the original 16 participants; the others “were kicked out for academics—it was strictly academic.” He has also been selected to attend the follow-on course to CGSC, SAMS, so by the time he leaves Fort Leavenworth he will have three master’s degrees.

Previous academic experience-not enrolled.

Amy described her undergraduate experiences as “better than my high school,” and had a generally positive attitude toward graduate school. She has taken graduate school classes in a master’s degree producing program and did very well in all of them, earning A’s in all three classes she took. She said her plans are to resume a graduate school program after graduating from CGSC, and would like to “do one class at a time.” She thought she could fit in one class and “still do my job well,” which is her overriding focus. She would have enrolled in a master’s program while attending CGSC except for “feeling insecure that I

would have done well at taking graduate-level courses on my own or in addition to the CGSC.”

April’s undergraduate experience was very positive, despite working two jobs, being enrolled in ROTC, and attending school full-time. She earned her master’s degree from the Uniformed Services University in Bethesda, Maryland, and said that gave her a positive view of graduate school and that she liked the education, in spite of the interdepartmental fighting that took place while she was there. She felt it “was a well-rounded program and they used everything that they had at their disposal,” such as interdepartmental agency guest speakers, visits to the FBI body farm at Quantico, and so forth. Her positive academic experience at the Uniformed Services University influenced her decision to pursue a second master’s degree through the MMAS program, although she eventually dropped from that program due to other reasons.

Harold has a law degree and an advanced law degree similar to a master’s degree from the Judge Advocate Generals school. He described his undergraduate experience as “wonderful,” and likewise thought his previous graduate school experience was “absolutely a positive influence.” His positive experience as an undergraduate, graduate, and law student likewise influenced his interest in pursuing an additional master’s degree, but he decided instead to set his sights on a doctoral degree at some time in the future.

Irving enjoyed his undergraduate experience, saying “[I] felt like I learned a lot of stuff.” He earned his associate’s degree while still enlisted, then his bachelor’s degree after completing Officer Candidate School (OCS) in 1997 and being told “you have 18 months to get your bachelor’s degree or you’re not going to make captain.” His objective at that time was on “the fastest way I can get a bachelor’s degree,” so he enrolled in 18 to 24 credit hours

a semester. Despite the heavy academic load, Irving said “there were some classes I really enjoyed,” but would have scaled back a little to enjoy the classes more to have more time to read and really study. As he put it, “I need to get a degree. Don’t care what I’m getting it in. Inter-disciplinary studies. Touchdown. It’s a piece of paper; call it good.” He earned his master’s degree through an on-line program, and thought “it was a great learning experience.”

John was working on an education bachelor’s degree when he decided to marry his college sweetheart and enlist in the Army. He needed to finish in a semester instead of a year to ship off to basic training, so he changed his degree to a General Studies bachelor’s since he had already had enough credits. But he really likes “teaching, instructing, whatever you call it,” so he is “looking at getting [his] teaching certificate before” he leaves military service. John has a master’s degree in human resource development from Webster University he earned as a lieutenant, and has a positive view of graduate school. He thinks a master’s degree “focuses you in on that field,” as opposed to undergraduate school in which the intent is “to broaden peoples’ experiences so much in their undergraduate degree that you kind of water down their focus in their primary major.” He thinks “a master’s degree or graduate degree program re-focuses you attention back into your area.” John admits that “Not all programs are created equal,” but thought he got the best out of his graduate school experience that he could at the time.

Kevin did not want to go to college after graduating from high school; he wanted to enlist in the Army. He said he “went to college, basically, because my mom and dad expected me to.” As a result, he said his grades initially suffered, but that he eventually “turned into a pretty good student.” Looking back, Kevin did not enjoy the first three years

of college, although he “enjoyed it the last year.” For him, “it was hard, because it was drudgery,” and since graduating he has not had “any desire to go to any other school other than an Army school.” He does not have a graduate degree, has never given much serious consideration to graduate school, and did not express any interest in pursuing a master’s degree. From his perspective, “going to graduate school doesn’t appear new and different—I’ve already done it. I mean, I’ve already gone to school. To me, it’s just like more drudgery.”

Mitch attended the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and found it a very positive experience. He said, “I liked it; it was great. I enjoyed it. Always in hindsight. I appreciated it more in hindsight.” He did well at West Point, more so after completing what he described as “the core stuff,” the mandatory lower division classes, and began the more interesting civil engineering classes. He characterized his West Point years as “a great experience.” He earned his master’s degree in geological engineering while attending the Engineer Captains Career Course, he said having a graduate degree was important to him when he was a graduate student. At the same time, he also thinks “a lot of folks put too much emphasis on a graduate degree vice experience to the point where—I don’t think an undergraduate should go right into a graduate degree.”

Robert also graduated from West Point and earned his master’s degree from North Carolina State University in computer science. He said he has a positive view of graduate school, and thinks “it’s good to have, just the experience of learning more, and I think you start to learn how to really research. As an undergrad, you’re just taking classes. But when you have to actually start thinking more than just passing tests, that’s when you really learn something.”

Scott already had a master's degree and was considering another while attending CGSC, but decided not to so he could spend more time reconnecting with his family. He graduated from a small college in South Carolina, earned a bachelor's degree in business administration, and said "it was a very positive experience." His graduate school experience was also "very positive," and he found that "it was very professionally rewarding and left a positive outcome for me as far as graduate school went." He said that because of the time that elapsed between graduating from college and going back to school for a graduate degree, "it left a positive light, that I can still do this." He said he thought "it left a positive attitude, one that helped . . . when I came in here [CGSC] that I could get back into and be successful [academically]," even though that was not the course of action he chose for himself.

Ted graduated from West Point and said his academic experience there "was a good experience," although if he had it to do over again he would have chosen a different major. He said West Point was a "positive experience," but also "kind of a survival experience" in how he "knew that a lot of the classes and a lot of the topics I was learning I would never use again." He earned his master's degree at Georgetown in public policy, something he realized he "was really interested in, good at," and found it "a terrific broadening experience," contributing to his "positive view of graduate school in general." He intended to enroll in the MMAS program, but found it to be "almost a step back academically," to have to "sit through 20, 30 hours of research methods" when he has already demonstrated competence in that regard. Despite his positive view of graduate school, he thinks CGSC is "actually one of the worst" environments for pursuing a graduate degree based on his graduate school experience at Georgetown when he worked at HRC. At that time, when he left work he did not have "work" homework he needed to do in addition to his graduate school homework,

which he feels is the situation at CGSC. In CGSC, he says “you’re getting homework from our classes . . . now you have all these other classes on top of it.” He thinks “it would be harder than when I was doing it at HRC going to school full-time and working full-time, where I didn’t have to take homework home from HRC.”

Summary.

Previous academic experience played a role in CGSC students’ decisions whether or not to enroll in graduate school. Individuals who had positive academic experiences were confident in their ability to also succeed in graduate school while attending CGSC, and many elected to pursue either their first or a second master’s degree. In other cases, despite the positive experience respondents had as either an undergraduate or graduate, other factors influenced their decision about whether or not to attend graduate school, such as family considerations, and they chose not to invest their time and effort in that direction at this time. Others indicated some challenges in previous academic endeavors, but were still determined to succeed in their new environment. In a few instances, individuals participating in the study said their undergraduate experience was positive, but that it really did not influence their decision. In one instance, the CGSC student said in his interview that he did not enjoy college, did not really want to go to college in the first place, and just wanted to enlist in the Army and be a soldier, but was pressured by his parents to do go to college first. That individual expressed no interest whatsoever in returning to academia and pursuing a master’s degree.

Themes

Interviews with CGSC students not only served to answer the research question, they also provided a broader view of the students’ perspectives on pursuing a master’s degree

while attending CGSC. The interviews revealed nine common themes shared by CGSC students who participated in the study. These themes were not anticipated by the researcher, but rather provided unexpected insights into how CGSC students decided whether or not to attend graduate school. In many cases the themes revealed a different aspect of how students who participated in the study think and feel about pursuing a master's degree. Some of these aspects overlap with the research question analysis, but others are unique in how they provide additional insight into how CGSC students decide whether or not to attend graduate school.

Although in some cases themes informed the analysis of the specific research questions, in many cases they did not, but rather suggested future lines of inquiry or research that may be worth pursuing. Those themes identified as common to all CGSC students who were interviewed are: self-efficacy and confidence, goal setting and achievement, persistence, time management and operational tempo, life issues, guidance and mentorship, quality of degree, and lastly, the MMAS program. Each theme is described below for the purposes of the research. The order in which they are described is from the most predominant, confidence and self-efficacy, to the least, the MMAS program.

The theme of self-efficacy and confidence is defined as the sense expressed by nearly all CGSC students participating in the study that they would be successful if they enrolled. Goal setting and achievement is described by CGSC students in the study in several ways, but the common denominator was that almost all participants in the research set goals for themselves and worked to achieve them. Persistence is defined as a personal sense of continuing to try, to not give up, and to work through whatever challenges may present themselves. Time management and operational tempo is defined as being able to allocate

time in one's life to pursue a master's degree, or finding that "margin of power" as McClusky described it (1963). Operational tempo, both prior to arriving at CGSC and while in the ILE course, is closely linked to time management. It is defined from several different perspectives: time away from home on operational deployments, time away from home due to long workdays, and the workload associated with the academic challenge of ILE. Life issues are defined as the complications of adult life that sometimes intrude on an individual's plan, and include the broader category of quality of life issues. Guidance and mentorship was a theme that emerged during the interviews in two different directions: CGSC students described how they either received clear guidance and mentorship, or very little or none at all. Quality of the master's degree was a theme expressed by both CGSC students who were enrolled in graduate school and those who were not. It related to the "check the box" mentality of some officers that they needed a master's degree on their personnel record, regardless of where it was from or the field of study, to the importance of the reputation or "cachet" of the master's degree, whether military or civilian, and to the amount of work they put into earning it. The MMAS program theme included students' perspectives on the MMAS degree and overall program, and were both unexpected and unequivocally negative in nearly all the interviews. There was one exception, in which a CGSC student participating in the research described the MMAS master's degree as one from an "institution that might be respected."

Self-efficacy/confidence.

Self-efficacy and confidence initially started out as a separate themes, but upon further analysis and reflection they were combined. They are defined as the sense expressed by nearly all CGSC students participating in the study that they would be successful if they

enrolled. If they chose *not* to enroll, it was not because of any fear of failure, but for other reasons. Most students in the study were confident they could successfully complete a master's degree program. In addition, if they began a master's program, they were not going to quit until they had succeeded; there was no question of not accomplishing the mission once begun. There was also a thread of "seeking out new experiences" (Cross, 1981) that ran through many of the respondents' narratives. Students in the study who said they sought out new experiences also communicated high levels of self-efficacy. Most of the students interviewed did not lack confidence or the belief that they would be successful in their efforts to pursue a master's degree. Some went so far as to state outright that they never had a doubt that they would be successful, or would succeed, but as previously described struggled more with external factors such as time, money, professional conflicts, and so forth.

Allen is an exception to this observation. He tried unsuccessfully on two previous occasions to complete a master's degree program, in 2004 and 2007, finally earning his master's degree while attending CGSC in 2012, but is quite forthcoming in his belief that he did not think he would be successful in graduate school, based on his previous two attempts, saying "I thought I was going to fail."

The concern he expressed about the possibility of failure was not due to his lack of confidence in his ability to do the work, but rather because, as he said, "I didn't have time to do it," and after the first month thought he was "going to fail this thing." Allen stayed the course, so to speak, attributing completion of his second semester to the support and encouragement of his wife, "who kept me there and all that." In fact, looking back on his two unsuccessful attempts and his latest successful completion of a master's degree program, Allen's perspective was that he always thought he would be successful, except for the

challenges of finding the time, saying “if I don’t have the time . . . I’ll fail.” Despite his previous unsuccessful attempts to complete a master’s degree program, he had no lack of confidence in his ability to do the work since he had passed all the courses he had taken. His confidence did not waver in spite of his repeated failure to complete a master’s degree, and he was not reluctant to keep trying, “because basically that’s how you grow,” he explained.

Carl expressed a positive view of graduate school in general, explaining that “I probably walked in thinking it would be a lot harder than it is.” Some of that he attributes to the fact that he is older and more responsible now than when he was an undergraduate; “you might be more focused on it than I was 12, 13 years ago” is how he explains his perspective. He said he “didn’t have any issues about being successful,” just with how well he would do academically, expecting to “be just middle of the road.” He said, “I figured everyone else had done it before me,” so earning a master’s degree was not an inconceivable accomplishment. His attitude was that no matter what he sets out to do, he will succeed at it. “I never go running in the door; I always know I’ll be successful.”

Edward said although thought he would be successful in a graduate school program, he also “thought that graduate school was going to be harder than it has been.” Pursuing a doctorate may be more of a challenge, though, because writing “a dissertation or something like that, or research, does seem daunting in a way because it’s not something that I’m used to doing.” Although he said he enjoys challenges to his accustomed way of thinking and behaving, he said “I don’t pursue them, but if I get introduced to it or there’s something new that’s going on, I usually look at it as an opportunity to learn some new stuff and do some things.”

Donald said he thought he would be successful from the time he began his first class, and was pretty confident he would be successful. He said he viewed each new assignment or duty station as a new experience that he tried to make as positive as possible by “pulling what I needed to” to make it that way with respect to *why* it may not be what he wanted, and what he “could do to make things a little bit better.”

Frank saw new experiences as “targets of opportunity” that he is “going to try,” and when he does, he is “usually successful,” which is what he expects. He described his academic challenges as an undergraduate to youth and immaturity, rather than ability, saying that he never had any doubt he would be successful in a master’s degree program while attending CGSC. He characterized academic success as not being about how smart a person is, but rather “it’s about resilience-can you gut through it” or not, which harkens back to the persistence theme discussed earlier.

Barbara was likewise confident in her ability to earn a master’s degree, saying that, “I anticipated classes that would challenge me, but I never thought I would fail anything.” When asked if she thought she would be successful, her response was “Absolutely. Never a doubt.” She said she never had any concerns about not being successful. She said she enjoys challenges, and that “I need to *have* this challenge periodically because we *do* become so predictable in patterns of thought if we are not challenged at some point in time. So, for *that* perspective, I like to be challenged. Do I enjoy it all the time? No, but I *do* like to be challenged.” She said she is “selective on what challenges I do pursue,” which is based on “how well do I think I can really do this, what am I going to get out of it, what can I put into it.” She believes that “anything you do, you should make sure you’ve left it better when

you're done with it than when you started," and that "you should do it to the best of your ability."

Larry said he was confident he would be successful in a graduate school program, characterizing his confidence level as "85-90%" confident. He explained that "I was a little concerned that I hadn't been doing any real schoolwork in a long time, but I figured I'd pick it up fairly quickly." The 15% that he was not confident about he attributed to "a little trepidation of the unknown. But once you get in there and see what the expectations are, understand what the assignments look like, and what the grading standards are," he said he was confident he would be successful. With respect to his expectation of success at new experiences, he said he "absolutely" seeks them out, and that although he does not necessarily think he will always be successful at them, he is "going to have a good time trying," which communicates a high degree of self-efficacy. He said that "if I know I'm guaranteed to be really good at it, then okay—I'm not interested. I want to try new things that I think are going to be a challenge that I'm going to have to work at to master."

Neal said he "never doubted" that he would be successful in graduate school before enrolling. His only concern was what he described as personal "self-doubt" with respect to whether he was going to be able to get it done. Despite the MMAS program being a whole new experience for him, because he is usually successful at new experiences, he expected success in this one, saying "I don't fail very often." Realistically, he admits he does not always succeed at new experiences, citing an application for a Congressional fellowship that he was not accepted for, but sees new experiences and challenges as having "value to be gained." Neal said "if you're always thinking the same way, then you're not progressing,

you're not making any changes. You're not getting better or worse." For him, he "absolutely" seeks out new experiences in order to achieve personal growth.

Oscar already had a master's degree, and was "pretty confident" that he would be successful in a second master's program, saying "I thought that I was going to do great and that it was going to be easy." That turned out not to be the case for him with the program in which he enrolled. He said it has been "extraordinarily challenging" from an academic perspective, especially the amount of preparation he found himself having to do before each class. He said he was initially confident he would be successful, and was still confident, although he now has a more realistic set of expectations, saying "I think I'm going to make it." He said he was surprised not only with how difficult the master's classes were, but also that he "did not know that CGSC was going to be hard. *That* was the difference."

For Amy, her focus while at CGSC was on ILE; she said, "I wanted to do as well as I could in this portion, and then decide" about graduate school, perhaps at some later date. She anticipated a lot of doctrinal, strategic, and operationally related" instruction, which she said was not her strong suit, and said "I wanted to put my focus on that because I wanted to do as well as I can in the ILE piece." Amy's perspective on her classmates is that "folks around me seem really intelligent, so I always feel like I'm a little, not quite at their level." She has a positive view of graduate school, having successfully completed a couple of classes over her Army career, so she has experience with graduate-level courses and knows she can do the work. In many of her Army assignments, however, did not feel she could do her job as well as she should while "taking a course at the same time." That same reluctance carried over to CGSC: "the only thing in my way is myself and feeling insecure that I would have done well at taking graduate-level courses on my own or in addition to CGSC." She said there are

many people in her staff group working on their master's degrees, but also said, "I didn't feel like I could do that. You know, I may just be cutting myself short, I don't know. I didn't want to take the chance."

George said he was also concerned about being able to meet both the CGSC academic requirements and the additional load entailed in a master's program. He had an opportunity to attend graduate school following his Captains Career Course, and said "I kind of regret" not doing so. "Man, if I would have just bit the bullet and done it at that point, I probably would have been better off. I wouldn't have been that far out of college." From his perspective, with 15 years having elapsed since earning his bachelor's degree, he is a little apprehensive. "Am I going to be able to swing that pendulum and get back there, all the while trying to do all the core of CGSC?" In retrospect, he thinks he could have managed the two sets of requirements, CGSC and graduate school, "without doing the sacrifices that I originally thought." His main reservation was not having enough time to consider all sides of the decision, all ramifications: "showing up in July, movers unloading, looking at the 20-page welcome letter"—it was all just too much at once for him. George said, "I'm real hesitant to jump into something if I don't think I'm going to do well. If I'm *not* going to do a good job, I'm not going to do it to start off with." He said, "Once I got back into the academic mindset in CGSC, by the time I hit my third month here, I was like, 'Dang, I probably could have done it.'" He just did not "want to take on a master's and then all of a sudden find out I'm struggling in ILE." He decided to focus on the ILE curriculum, and said, "If I get the chance in a follow-on assignment, if I get put in a staff job or something where I can go back, then I can go in and reconnect." He said he thinks he would be successful in a graduate school program in the future. The primary impediments to pursuing a master's

degree at CGSC were “being concerned about the time involved, the personal time, and then making sure that it didn’t detract from my level of performance in CGSC.”

April already has a Master of Science in Public Health, and said she thought she would be successful in a graduate school program while at CGSC. For her, “having done one thesis already” takes away a lot of the anxiety about the “unknown.” She said, “Now that I understand the process and . . . what was expected of me . . . it would be fairly straightforward.” Her only concern was a personal one: she admitted to sometimes procrastinating, saying that “I’ll wait to write the thesis until I have to.”

Harold was confident about being successful in graduate school, saying that “After 22 years . . . of academics, I’d be okay.” Irving was somewhat less sanguine about pursuing a master’s degree while attending CGSC; he thought he would be successful, but “at what cost?” For him, success would come at too high a price to pay in terms of additional work, time away from his family, and so forth, although he had no doubt that he “would have been successful . . . but it would have been at a high cost.”

John earned his master’s degree as a lieutenant over a decade ago, and although he considered a second one, decided instead to use his available time to spend with his family. He said he was “fairly confident” he would be successful if he had chosen to pursue a second master’s degree, though. He also views new experiences as having a potential for personal growth, and said he is “a firm believer that if you set your mind to it, yes, you can be successful in the vast majority of new endeavors.” John’s prior graduate school experience helped him to “appreciate that fact that you can do whatever you want to when you put your mind to it.”

Kevin had a lot of apprehension about graduate school while at CGSC, saying that he knew his “limitations, and ILE was enough” for him to have to deal with, and he did not think he could “handle both” the CGSC academics requirements and spending time with his family. He said, “I grabbed some brochures and looked at them and then found I couldn’t do both.” He said he thought he would be successful in a graduate school program, but that “it really depends on the degree,” and that he “can be successful” now that he has had an opportunity to re-tune his academic skills through CGSC.

Mitch has a Master of Science in Geological Engineering, earned in conjunction with the Engineer Captains Career Course, and considered a second master’s degree while attending CGSC but could not find a program that he felt contributed to maintaining competitiveness in the engineering field. He was confident he would be successful if he had enrolled in a master’s program, though, saying that “Once I get back to the mind-set of school, I can knock school out. It took me two weeks to get back into it here.” He is still enjoying the challenge of new experiences, though, by learning Arabic, which he not only saw as a challenge but said “it will help me in my next job.”

Paul earned his MBA from Purdue as part of a fully-funded graduate school program, and although he did not find any programs that he thought were sufficiently “career-enhancing,” he was very confident he would have been successful pursuing a master’s degree while attending CGSC. In his mind, he expected to be successful at Purdue, which he was, and really had no concerns about not being successful, saying that “School’s been good to me.”

Robert earned his master’s degree at North Carolina State University, and was “very confident” he would have been successful if he had decided to pursue a second master’s

while attending CGSC. He decided not to because he “did not want to take more time away from my family to pursue a second one.” His only concerns about being successful in his previous master’s program was with the 18 month timeline he had in which to complete his degree. That concern disappeared after he met with his academic advisor at North Carolina, and they worked out a plan that “he was confident he could get me through it.”

Scott said he always thought, in the end, he would be successful in his graduate school program, although he said he “could be labeled as a pessimist, so I do a lot of worrying.” He earned his master’s degree at the Engineer Captains Career Course, and found himself asking “Hey, is this really worth it?” It seemed to get easier as he progressed through the program, though, and he said that “Once I start to get into the process, my attitude changes and I become more optimistic as things go along.” His biggest concern was also with the time allowed to complete the program and having to complete it online, rather than in a classroom. Scott said when he tries new experiences, “those are things I really go into with an open mind because I want to succeed. I always want to succeed. And I get very frustrated if I don’t get it right the first time or two, and I’ll just continue to work at it until I get it right.”

Ted was very confident he would be successful in the MMAS program because, as he put it, “It’s TRADOC—sorry. It’s not bad, but TRADOC teaches at the 70-80% level to try to get people through.” He said he thought it would be harder working on a master’s degree while attending CGSC than working on one at Georgetown, as he did, while working full-time at HRC. Ted said that at the end of the day at HRC, he did not have reading and homework to do on top of his master’s work. He said, “As ideal as this place seems sometimes for grad school, it’s actually one of the worst. Being in CGSC, we’re getting

homework from our classes, from that standpoint; now you have all these other classes on top of it.”

Victor’s goal before arriving at CGSC was to attend graduate school, but said “I really didn’t find [a topic] in particular that I was drawn to” until he found an international security program, which related well to his military intelligence experience. In the end, however, he decided against graduate school in favor of focusing on spending more time with his family, although he was pretty confident he would have been successful if he had enrolled in a master’s degree program. He based his confidence on his interest in the subject matter, which was very high, and his undergraduate experience, which was very positive. Victor said he did not have any concerns about being successful pursuing a master’s degree for two reasons: “(1) I’m going to pick something I’m interested in, and (2) academics doesn’t really—I mean, I know I have weaknesses academically. I’m not the best writer, but I do okay, I can hold my own.”

Goal Setting and Achievement

Goal setting and achievement is described by CGSC students in the study in several ways, but the common denominator was that almost all participants in the research set goals for themselves and worked to achieve them. This theme links back to the confidence and self-efficacy theme in how the students have every expectation of succeeding, regardless of how challenging or difficult it might become. As a group, the CGSC students interviewed were consistently motivated, set realistic but high goals for themselves, and in nearly all instances achieved those goals, although in some cases not the first time.

Goal setting-enrolled in graduate school.

Andrew said he had been “interested in the undergrad work that I had done and wanted to continue learning and developing that expertise” since he was a cadet at West Point. He said, “I wanted to start a graduate degree program as soon as I could, and Webster did not require me to have a GRE (Graduate Record Examination).” The major considerations for him were “the fact that now I was around [not deployed] and the opportunity was available,” and “the fact that my workload was now less than it was previously . . . that carried a lot of weight.” So he started a master’s program, deployed in the middle of it, but resumed his studies upon his return.

Bob’s view was that he did not have a master’s degree, and said it was a “block that had to be checked.” He said, “I had decided before I got here that I would do a grad program.” The master’s degree program in supply chain management appealed to him as a logistician, and he said, “I thought that would equate to more if I wanted to pursue a career whenever I take off this uniform.” That particular program had both a scholars program that is fully-funded for a select group of CGSC students, and a non-scholars program that CGSC students can pay for either through tuition assistance or with their own money. Regardless, that became his goal: “I was going to do the program whether I was a scholar or not.”

For Allen, the key motivator for his decision to pursue a master’s degree was establishing a secure future for his family. As he put it, “If something happened, what do I have to offer? That’s what keeps me [going], what motivates me. When I think far ahead, I’m not just thinking about myself, I’m thinking about the family.”

Carl did not seriously consider graduate school until about 4 or 5 years ago, pretty much since the time when he knew he was headed to CGSC. He looked at the MMAS

program and the degrees offered by the other civilian universities, and decided on a program that would result in a master's degree with the least adverse impact on his CGSC classes. His rationale was, "How can I get around without interfering with my work, you know, here, to maintain [in ILE]?" He researched all the available programs, and chose the one that would have the least impact on his CGSC requirements, personal time in the evenings, and had the fewest number of classes he had to attend.

Donald said, "It was more of a personal goal, you know, that you needed to have. So it was kind of more or less a plus to have it, not a requirement." He earned his bachelor's degree in political science in order to get commissioned in the Army, but said his "first ambition was to try and get a degree in what I wanted," which apparently was not political science. Through a complicated process of graduating a year early from high school, earning a full scholarship to one university, then transferring to another in order to receive an ROTC scholarship, Donald kept his grade point average above 2.5 and graduated with a degree and a commission, for which his parents were very proud—he was the first in his family to graduate from college.

Barbara had always wanted to earn a master's degree, and first thought about getting one while attending CGSC when she was at CAS3, the staff officer's course for Army captains. She figured it was "several years down the road," and she had not decided whether she wanted a civilian degree or one through the MMAS program, but began to plan out how she was going to eventually get that graduate degree. When she arrived at CGSC 9 years later, she said "the final decision really came down to my finances and looking for ways to achieve professional and personal goals at the same time," and so her acceptance into the scholars program and selection for SAMS both helped in that regard. She sees the next two

years as an opportunity to really focus on the doctoral research topic, even though she has put that goal off for the time being.

Larry said he had been thinking about earning a master's degree while at CGSC "for quite some time," and thought that attending CGSC was an opportunity "to get a master's degree from somewhere." As soon as he was notified that he was going to attend the 10-month resident ILE course upon his return from deployment, he told himself, "Okay, I need to get everything lined up for school."

Goal setting-not enrolled in graduate school.

Of the CGSC students not enrolled in a master's degree program who already had a master's degree, at some point before arriving at Fort Leavenworth they set a goal for themselves and achieved it: a master's degree. For the CGSC students without a master's degree who are also not enrolled in a graduate school program, although they have not achieved that goal, they have not lost sight of it or written it off as something beyond their capability. Rather, it is still a goal all of them expressed during their interviews, but achieving it while attending CGSC simply did not seem like the right time.

Amy, for example, has taken classes toward a master's degree previously, and when asked if she wanted to resume her studies replied, "I would like to, yes. And I'm planning, actually my plans right now after leaving here . . . I want to do one class at a time." So although pursuing a master's degree while attending CGSC is not her preference, she still retains the goal in mind and plans to achieve it. She said, "I don't mind postponing it; I've already postponed it to some degree, so I figure at this point, again, I want . . . to do the best I can here [at CGSC], as well as if I was working in a regular assignment."

George does not have a master's degree, but expressed a similar sentiment with respect to having the goal of earning a master's degree, but not seeing it happen while attending CGSC. He said, "Let's do CGSC right, and then . . . if I get the chance in a follow-on assignment, if I get put on a staff job or something where I can go back, then I can go in and reconnect." As he put it, "I never hit that happy spot to say, 'Yeah, I want to go ahead and invest the time and do a master's.'" He said it just needs to be the right time and circumstances: "if everything lines up . . . if I get that follow-on assignment where it's like my family's in a good place, I'm in a decent job, I think this is the point where I can go ahead and knock out my master's and then focus on whatever direction I want to go. That's the kind of time I need to do it." George expressed some regret at not having made the time earlier in his career, saying "If I would have just keyed in on it a little bit more and put a little more thought into it, I think I probably would have decided in the end that I could have done it."

Cheryl earned her master's degree at the Uniformed Services University in Bethesda, Maryland, and said she always expected to get one because it is a professional expectation in her field. She explained that "I am an allied science specialty, and we are required to have . . . certain skills and knowledge, so it is required that we are master's degree eligible, obtain one, and then we also have to obtain a professional credential." Cheryl has completed all these requirements; she received her professional credential, a nationally-recognized registered environmental health specialist certificate. For her, the goal was clearly spelled out, she accepted it as part of her professional development, and achieved it.

Harold described his "educational goals" in clear terms, having thought about it at some length. He already has a law degree, a Juris Doctor, as well as an advanced law degree,

the LLM, earned at the Judge Advocate Generals school. His next goal is to earn a PhD in public policy. He explained his rationale for wanting a doctorate, saying “Practicing law is good, but there’s that bigger piece on why I practice law and what I enjoy about doing it, that I want to try to help build, and that includes the educational piece. So, that’s the process on why I would want to go to graduate school.” Harold has already achieved a great deal academically, with a bachelor’s degree, a master’s degree, and a law degree, but still has his eye on a doctorate and has a plan to achieve it. None of this is a surprise to him, though, because “I am part over-achiever,” as he explained.

Irving described how he has set goals and achieved them throughout the Army career. It began after receiving his commission through OCS and being told “you have 18 months to get your bachelor’s degree or you’re not going to make Captain.” At that point, his goal was to earn a bachelor’s degree in the shortest amount of time possible, and his attitude, as he described it, was, “I have to get from here to there to get promoted. I put a curriculum together and took the classes . . . from 18 to 24 credit hours a semester. It was, again, not optimal” but he achieved his goal. He regrets not having had more time to spend enjoying the classes he was taking, to “be able to read and study,” as he put it, but said his intent was, “I need to get a degree. Don’t care what I’m getting it in. Inter-disciplinary studies. Touchdown. It’s a piece of paper; call it good.” Earning a second master’s degree is still a goal for Irving. He said, “I want to get the next graduate degree for me. I want to do it for me.” For him, “It’s another one of those things, I like to challenge myself. I like to read and I like to learn so—and I guess I also would like to be the first guy in my family to have a doctorate degree.”

John already has a master's degree, but said he wants to earn a teaching certificate before getting out of the Army because he found he enjoyed teaching while deployed to Afghanistan and serving as advisors to the Afghan National Police Force. So that is his goal, and his plan is "getting my teaching certificate later on and trying to find the balance of being able to devote enough time to finish it in a timely manner and spend time with the family and at work." He said, "I think about it all the time."

Mitch earned his master's degree in geological engineering, and since "there were no engineering fields offered here for me to do further study in, I focused more on credentialing—what I would have to do to sit for my Professional Engineer exam or Project Management Program certification." Mitch considered options, selected one, set a goal for himself, and devised a plan to achieve it. For him, "the credentialing thing would be a better pursuit for what I want in the future." He thinks that if he wants to remain competitive in the engineering field, then he has to continue pursuing further education in that field [engineering], which is what he is interested in. Mitch said, "Pretty much, I think you have to have a master's degree to be somewhat competitive in our field." So that was his goal, which he achieved, and now he has moved on to the next goal, credentialing.

Paul already had a master's degree, and said "the degrees that were offered here weren't career-enhancing enough . . . to go through the effort." The other consideration that impacted his decision about pursuing a second master's degree was the fact that he was accepted to SAMS, so next year he is going to earn a second master's degree through that program. From Paul's perspective, "There really is no reason to try to go through a meat-grinder this year when there's going to be one available to me next year. A meat grinder that results in a graduate degree." He had developed a series of goals or milestones that defined

success for him in those areas that were important to him, and devised a plan to achieve those goals. Paul said, “From the time I joined [the Army], I wanted to get a master’s degree. So I looked at various programs along the way, including going to West Point to teach. The expanding grad school program kind of fell in my lap, so I guess that was a way that I didn’t know about, really, until it was offered to me. I wasn’t really quite sure what it was. And then just an at-large bid for advanced civil schooling were the ways that I was looking at. Again, had I not done any of those, I would probably be in a master’s program right now. Or, had applied to SAMS.”

Robert earned his master’s degree at North Carolina State University, after which he taught at West Point for three years and then was assigned as one of the transition team advisors to the Afghanistan Security Force. After two years of deployments and traveling to numerous different locations around the U.S. to participate in additional training exercises, he received orders for CGSC. He said, “I really hadn’t seen my family and been able to do stuff with them,” so investing additional time in a second master’s degree while attending CGSC wasn’t an attractive course of action. Since his long-term goal, however, is to teach at the university level, he applied for and was accepted into a PhD program at the University of Kansas that will enable him to return to teach at West Point again as a permanent professor.

Scott already has his master’s degree, and although he considered earning a second one while attending CGSC, he decided against it in order to have more time to spend with his family. He still wanted to improve his engineer credentials, though, so he enrolled in a CGSC elective course on engineer project management. He also enrolled in a course at Johnson County Community College in Kansas City, called Project Management Professional. It is a self-study, on-line program that he is paying for out of his own pocket,

but Scott said that “in the long run when I get out, I’m looking at earning ten to twenty thousand extra dollars . . . with the certification.” Although not a master’s degree program, it was post-bachelor’s degree work, at the graduate or certification level, so it communicates his ability to set and achieve goals. For him, his goal was to maintain currency and competitiveness with his peers, but when he balanced that goal against the importance of being able to spend time with his wife and children, he arrived at a compromise that achieved both.

Ted had a master’s degree when he arrived at CGSC, and after beginning the MMAS program and then quitting because it was not meeting his academic needs, he decided to focus on doing well in ILE and on preparing himself for whatever his follow-on assignment might be. He described his life goals as often changing, “but as far as up to this point in my life I’ve more or less achieved everything I’ve set out to do.” He said he gets beat “with the education club quite a bit” by both his father and his father-in-law, asking when he is going to get his doctorate. His response, at least in his own mind, is “when would I get it?” It has not ever been a goal of his, although it has always been an option he thought he could pursue at some point in his life, but at this point he is “Right where I think I should be, and pretty comfortable with that, I guess.”

Victor had a clear goal “to attend graduate school” while at CGSC, and said it was not a quick decision, but that it “was a rather lengthy process” to arrive at. “I honestly thought that my goal was [that while I was] at ILE I would do it [earn a master’s degree], but parameters change, and you think about what’s really important, and how you’re going to—plus getting older makes you look at things a little bit differently.” The various universities and colleges did not offer anything he was particularly drawn to initially, but after

researching further he said he, “Kind of found one that I sort of liked—enough for me to find out some more information later.” So that was his plan, his goal so to speak, at least at first. As he considered other factors, such as his wife’s work schedule, all the time he spent over the previous two years away from home on deployments and additional academic requirements associated with a master’s degree, he began to think that perhaps this was not the right time. He said, “I would still like to get one eventually,” but thought it was more important “to spend this time here reconnecting” with his family. He said he has a positive view of graduate school, and that “It’s something I still want to do. It’s a goal in my life I would like to get to,” just not while attending CGSC.

For Walter, a master’s degree while attending CGSC was never really an attractive course of action. After completing his undergraduate studies, Walter said it took about four years before he starting thinking about graduate school, “but there was really nothing pulling me.” When he switched from AG to public affairs, he was offered the opportunity to teach at West Point, contingent on his successful completion of a fully-funded master’s degree program at Colorado State University in rhetoric and composition. He said, “That was the motivation I need to pull me, really pull me in . . . knowing I could go back and go to school for something that I was interested in, that I would be able to relate directly to the follow-on assignment, and beyond.” Walter had the goal in his mind, but without a clear path to achieving it until the West Point teaching opportunity fell in his lap, and he looks back on his graduate degree as “one of my greatest accomplishments, not only because I have it, but because the experience was tremendous. The experience of spending one year on a piece of writing, from start to finish, getting so deep into it, and seeing it all the way through . . . all

that was really, really satisfying” and gave him “a level of confidence as a thinker and in academia and as a student that has always been really valuable to me.”

Kevin has no interest in graduate school or a master’s degree. Other than looking through some of the brochures that were available during Professional Development Activities Day, for him “Going to graduate school doesn’t appear new and different to me—I’ve already done it. I mean, I’ve already gone to school. To me, it’s just like more drudgery.” Kevin shared a different perspective than any of the other CGSC students participating in the study. He admitted that having a graduate degree was important to him, but that right now, “It’s not an immediate priority. In the back of my mind, down the road, probably; I guess when I get closer to making lieutenant colonel. It’s not burning, but it’s something I might need to get later. I’m going to push it off for now, let me put it that way.”

Summary-goal setting and achievement.

As a group, the CGSC students interviewed were effective at setting and achieving goals. The goals they set for themselves may differ, and the importance they assign to those goals when they are the same or similar may differ, but nearly all took a similar approach to achieving goals in their lives. The CGSC students were consistently motivated, usually set realistic but high goals for themselves, and in nearly all instances achieved those goals, although in some cases not the first time.

Persistence

Persistence is defined here as a personal sense of continuing to try, to not give up, and to work through whatever challenges the CGSC students encounter earning a master’s degree. Not all students interviewed shared their personal challenges and triumphs, but many did, and the stories they told of how difficult it was for them in terms of academic ability,

family support, guidance from senior leaders or mentor, and so forth communicated a sense that for some, quitting was not an option.

Persistence in some form was expressed by nearly all respondents, whether enrolled in graduate school or not. For CGSC students enrolled in graduate school, they often expressed a perspective that they were going to earn a master's degree regardless of how hard it was going to be or what sacrifices they had to make. For those not enrolled, since most of them already had a master's degree, they often expressed how thankful they were that they had continued their graduate work earlier in their careers, because they did not view the experiences of their classmates in graduate school with any sense of envy. Rather, in most cases, they felt bad for their classmates who were struggling hard to have a life while keeping up with the ILE curriculum requirements as well as graduate school. Of the students participating in the study, all but one who enrolled in a master's degree program or was already enrolled in one when the CGSC academic year began completed their respective programs and earned a master's degree last year.

Enrolled in graduate school.

Andrew said he began thinking about graduate school while still a cadet at West Point. He wanted to “pursue some kind of master's in mechanical engineering or some aerospace related degree,” but was concerned about how long it would take before he would be able to resume his academic goals. His first opportunity came when assigned to CAC at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, as a mid-career Major. He found himself with the time to pursue graduate school, so he enrolled in an MBA program through Webster University. Unfortunately, after his first year assigned to CAC and after completing several graduate school classes, he deployed to Afghanistan for a year.

Bob decided before arriving at CGSC that he was going to pursue a master's degree while attending CGSC. As a logistician, the supply chain management graduate degree was the most attractive from the perspective of both near-term utility and applicability while still on active duty, as well as having value after leaving the service. He was aware that for a select group, those selected for the scholars program, full funding may be available depending on budget decisions, but was by no means for certain. Regardless, he applied for and would have received tuition assistance to defray most his costs associated with the master's program, saying "I was going to do the program whether I was a 'scholar' or not." As it turned out, he was, in fact, one of the nine students selected for the scholars program out of a total of 33 who were enrolled in it, so in the end he did not need the tuition assistance.

Allen had tried to earn a graduate degree on two previous occasions, enrolled in and began a master's degree program both times, but experienced significant challenges with his ability to find time to devote to his studies. In 2004, while a company commander, he was too busy and had too many other distractions associated with a typical command to focus on anything else but that. He tried again in 2007 while assigned to a recruiting command, but experienced the same work-related challenges and had no better success. It was not until he arrived at CGSC that he found he was able to devote the time to enroll in and actually pursue an MBA, although even then he admitted that "it's really tough, with the reading I already have here [in CGSC], but it's positive—it helped me out." He first demonstrated this level of persistence when he was commissioned into the Signal Corps branch. His bachelor's degree was in microbiology from the University of Puerto Rico, so he had no prior experience or knowledge of electronic or signal-related topics. He therefore enrolled in computer classes at

a nearby university while attending the Signal Officer Basic Course to improve his familiarity and expertise in the field in which he was going to be working. His perception was that everyone else taking basic computer classes was having a much easier time than he was. In fact, he said he had to re-take his first test in order just to get a passing grade, whereas he thought “everyone else aced it.” But he persisted, despite his unfamiliarity with the subject matter and difficulty of the classes he was taking during his free time, in order to help improve himself as a future signal officer. At first, he was upset that he was commissioned a Signal Officer despite having no experience or background in communications or computers, but soon realized that he was going “to embrace this so I’m going to learn. I did it.”

Another example of Allen’s willingness to embrace new experiences as opportunities for growth despite initial set-backs, a demonstration of persistence, was his assignment as a commander of a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Afghanistan. He was with a team of individuals from different branches and different services, his first joint assignment, none of whom had any previous experience or expertise in their assigned duty positions, including himself. He saw the situation as “a challenge,” one that caused him and the others on his team to research PRT doctrine; “everybody had to research what they were doing.” As the PRT commander, he said he experienced a lot of “frustrations,” but looks back on the overall experience in a positive way because his hard work and persistence “helped me out in the long term.” When asked what would have prevented him from enrolling in graduate school, Allen responded “I was going to do it no matter what. No matter what.” Despite misunderstanding the time line for graduate school, and initially thinking he was late getting enrolled and beginning his classes, he said, “no matter what, I was going to stick with it.”

Edward was enrolled in a master's degree before attending CGSC, and found the only major impediment was the bureaucracy involved with getting financial aid for a graduate program that was not one of the several offered to CGSC students. Since he began his master's program before attending CGSC, and it was an online program through a university in Wisconsin, he often found himself working harder at resolving administrative issues than coursework—but again, he persisted, and expects to complete his last course before graduating from CGSC. He actually began his master's degree program while deployed to Iraq. He was not in a primary staff job and found he had time on his hands, so he “decided I was going to use my time wisely” and started working on a Master of Science in Engineering, with a focus on engineering management. Even when he was reassigned to a more challenging duty position in a different geographical region, he “continued to do courses,” although he did admit “it was a little bit harder, the [operational] workload was harder . . . but it was alright.”

Larry is enrolled in an MBA program, and said jokingly that the only thing that would have precluded him from enrolling in graduate school will attending CGSC was “death.” He said that once he determined the workload associated with maintaining academics standards for ILE, and realized he would be “able to sustain the two efforts,” it was simply a matter of good time management and pushing through. He got a head-start on graduate school by taking a condensed summer course because ILE actually began, which he characterized as “really hard,” taking classes three nights a week, back-to-back. When the CGSC classes began, he said “there were times in the middle of advanced corporate finance [one of his courses] that I was thinking, ‘I may have made a mistake here,’” but he persisted and expected to earn his MBA by June (which he did).

Oscar already had a master's degree in public administration, but as a strategist working with colleagues who have Ivy League graduate degrees, he wanted to improve his credentials. He said that "the instant I was on a glide path . . . to come here to CGSC, I was looking for grad school. I was going to do it somewhere; I just knew I was going to do it." He ended up in the Warrior Logistician program at the University of Kansas, and was accepted to attend SAMS. By the time he leaves Fort Leavenworth he will have earned two additional master's degrees, both of which will contribute to his standing amongst his colleagues.

Not enrolled in graduate school.

Without making any judgments or assigning value to a master's degree in any way, the group of individuals who were not enrolled in a master's program while at CGSC either already had one or simply did not deem it worth their time or feasible while also trying to focus on the academic requirements of ILE. Some students had considered pursuing a second master's degree, but either found themselves working a lot harder than they expected after classes began in ILE, failed to find a subject of sufficient interest to warrant the extra time and effort, or chose to focus on their family life during the 10-month hiatus from deployments and other operational requirements.

George expressed regret at not enrolling in graduate school and earning a master's degree at some time over the past decade or so of his military career, and still expects to achieve that goal at some time in the future. He said, "I always thought I would hit the point in my career where I'd say, 'Okay, this is the year I knock this out.' And I just never ran into that year, I guess." He shared his observations of other officers in his unit working long days and then closing themselves in their offices to continue working even more, but on their

master's program. At other times, he saw his peers leaving work to attend class, then returning from class to continue unfinished tasks at work, and said that degree of dedication or persistence was not for him.

Cheryl already has a master's degree, but wanted to enroll in the scholars program to study genocide and mass atrocities because she thought it tied in well with her Master of Science in Public Health. Unfortunately, she was not allowed to enroll in the scholars program due to an excessive number of applicants, and when she was advised to participate in the MMAS program instead, she decided to forego any graduate work and instead spend time with her family and friends who only live a few hours away, and to support her husband in his graduate school efforts. As a relatively newly-married couple, she did not think both of them focusing on master's degrees was that conducive to success in their relationship. Interestingly, the only thing she said would have prevented her from enrolling in graduate school was time to do the work at the standard she would expect of herself.

Harold expressed a similar perspective, saying that he could not think of anything that would have prevented him from enrolling in graduate school if he had wanted to, "except the Army telling me 'no.'" He already has a law degree and a master's degree from the Army Judge Advocate Generals school, so he did not feel any pressure to get a master's degree while at CGSC in order to keep pace with his peers. Regardless, he explored the Master of Science in Administration from Central Michigan University and was on the verge of actually registering for classes when he changed his mind because, as he put it, he was "doing something that wasn't going to contribute to my overall goal, and it really was not worth it." His overall, or long-term, goal is to earn a doctorate.

Ted earned his master's degree from the University of Georgetown while assigned to the HRCat Alexandria, Virginia. His Georgetown experience was challenging: working full-time and going to school full-time, he said he "was just trying to survive and finish the program," so he demonstrated a high degree of persistence in that situation. Ted enrolled in the MMAS program because he it would help keep him engaged academically; he wanted to "use it as a forcing mechanism" to challenge him beyond what he thought he would be challenged with the ILE curriculum.

Summary-persistence.

CGSC students participating in the research, whether enrolled in a master's program or not, expressed a clear sense that they would not quit, not give up, and work through whatever challenges they encountered earning a master's degree. Many students shared their personal challenges and triumphs, the stories of how difficult it was for them in terms of academic ability, family support, guidance from senior leaders or mentors, and a sense that for almost all of them, quitting was not an option. Some said they were going to earn a master's degree regardless of how hard it was going to be or what sacrifices they had to make. For CGSC students who already had a master's degree, they were glad they did not have to endure the additional workload and pressure they saw their classmates in graduate school experiencing. Those students who did not already have a master's degree when they arrived at CGSC and chose not to pursue one made a conscious choice based on their personal priorities: family, ILE academic challenges, or some combination that worked against their being successful.

Time Management and Operational Tempo

Time management and operational tempo is defined as the ability to allocate time in one's life to pursue a master's degree, or finding that "margin of power" as McClusky described it (1963). Time management overlaps with operational tempo because some individuals participating in the study found it easy to balance their personal, professional, and academic requirements and still find time for graduate school, whereas others found it exceedingly difficult to the point of being impossible. This theme also overlaps with family considerations, in particular allocation of time and attention between work (operational tempo), family, and academics. Management of available time to pursue a master's degree, coupled with the competing requirements of a very high operational tempo, whether deployed or not, were common observations made by respondents during their interviews. Some found the challenges more than they could balance, some took advantage of the opportunity when time was made available to them, while others either made personal sacrifices or simply managed their time more effectively.

Operational tempo, both prior to arriving at CGSC and while in the ILE course, is defined from several different perspectives. One perspective relates to deployments, time away from home and family, and long periods of preparation and recovery on either end of those deployments. Another perspective relates to the stateside work environment in which the officer works long hours every day, often works weekends, is physically and mentally exhausted when at home, and does not really contribute to either the relationship with the spouse or with the children, if a parent. Another perspective addresses the challenges of the ILE curriculum. Many students in the study have not been in an academic environment for a number of years, have worked in jobs that did not necessarily prepare them for studying

strategy, operational art, logistics, and all the other major subjects in the course, and find themselves working harder than they expected to keep their heads above water. The rigor of the ILE curriculum, in conjunction with the other mitigating factors, produced an operational tempo that worked against pursuing a graduate degree, or in some cases a second degree, for many students in the study.

Enrolled in graduate school.

Before attending CGSC, Andrew found himself in an assignment that was not particularly challenging or demanding, and found that he had “free time,” and he “wanted to start a graduate degree program as soon” as he could. In fact, a number of his colleagues and supervisors told him, “you’re going to have free time on your hands, and we’re supportive of you . . . while you’re here, pursue that degree, because you have the time.” From his perspective, “the fact that now I was around [not deployed] and the opportunity was available” was sufficient motivation for Andrew to begin a master’s program. In his words, “being deployed or not didn’t factor. It was, do I have time available or not?”

Unfortunately, while assigned to a headquarters position in CAC, Andrew was tasked to deploy to Afghanistan for a year. While deployed, he tried to keep up with his classes, but soon discovered the operational requirements of his job overseas were too demanding for him to continue his studies. Having enrolled in an online class as soon as he arrived in theater, he was able to successfully complete the class requirements, but said he “struggled through being deployed and finishing [even] one class,” so he decided to postpone any further classes until his return.

Bob experienced challenges finding the time to pursue a master’s degree before arriving at CGSC, and was advised by fellow officers who were in the scholars program the

previous year that if he is accepted into the scholars program, he should leave his family behind for the year because, as they said, “You will have no time.” However, that was not a viable option for him, since he had already been deployed for 3 and a half years; in his words, “I wasn’t going to make this another deployment.”

Allen tried on several previous occasions before attending CGSC to earn a master’s degree, but never seemed to have enough time. The first effort he said he tried to find the time, to make it work, but was concerned that he was “going to fail, because I don’t have the time . . . I’m in command, I have no time, it’s constant.” His second effort a few years later while in a second command had similar results. Allen said “I didn’t have time to do it; I wanted to do it, but say hey, if I do, I’m going to fail.” When he arrived at CGSC, he expected to be able to find the time he thought he needed, but soon realized he did not have as much available time as he had expected, saying that “I thought I was going to get a lot of time . . . based on what other people did.” He struggled through the first couple of months, and said that without the encouragement and understanding of his wife would probably have quit, but persisted and is on schedule to receive his master’s degree on time.

Carl’s view was that “in order to do my master’s program I’ll have to have time, and this is pretty much the only time that I get credit for my military [experience] . . . and then I can take other classes on the side.” So for him, available time and the opportunity were both key. His rationale for this year being a good time and opportunity for earning a master’s degree was that he would be able to complete the graduate coursework “without interfering with my work” as part of CGSC. He said he “was one of those looking at a program that I could fit in my current schedule that was not as time-consuming.”

Before arriving at CGSC, Don had tried to complete a master's degree program while stationed at Fort Irwin, California, but said "the optempo was so bad . . . I did it for about a week, and then had to drop it" because of an unexpected increase in his duties and responsibilities at work.

Edward was already enrolled in an online master's degree program, and voiced a similar observation, that the only thing that would have prevented him from completing in graduate school would have been the ILE academic workload.

From Larry's perspective, "this was the most efficient use of the time, was to acquire it [a master's degree] here." This perspective was echoed in his description of his experience as a cadet at West Point when he remarked that "You get a bachelor's on paper, but you get a master's in time management." So the importance of managing available time is not a new or unfamiliar concept to him. Most of his graduate work is completed on the weekend "because there's no time to do the master's stuff during the week."

Neal said he decided to pursue a master's degree while at CGSC because, in his view, "There's no easy time to do it, and I haven't had the time to do a grad program on the Army's dime doing nothing else—because I've been in operational units—so therefore, this is the first opportunity where I don't have a huge amount of requirements for jobs or command or anything else in which to devote some time to get it done." He went on to say that CGSC "is an opportunity to do it [master's degree] where I didn't have to worry about deploying in the middle of getting through a master's program. And I knew that you could do it within the one year that you're here." His overall view of graduate school has been pretty positive, although now that he is writing his actual thesis it is a little less so. From his perspective, "if you fall behind and you're crushed for time, it's because I did something to

be crushed for time. It is the beast that you undertake on your own, so you have nobody to blame but yourself.”

Not enrolled in graduate school.

Time management was a common theme voiced by many CGSC students not enrolled in graduate school. Amy does not have a master’s degree, although she has successfully completed some classes toward one. She described her plan to resume her pursuit of a master’s degree, saying “my plans right now, after leaving here, depending on where I go, I want to do one class at a time; I think I could fit one and still do my job well.” So for her, even though a master’s degree was an ongoing goal in her life, it was more important to dedicate any free time she found on her hands to her job performance.

George also did not have a master’s degree, and described a similar challenge with respect to achieving a balance between CGSC academic requirements, family commitments, and pursuing a master’s degree in the evenings. He said he asked himself, “Do I really want to go ahead and take those nights out of the weeks, those weekends and stuff and do that?” He had already experienced several years of high tempo operations, both overseas and stateside, and said “I was never in a job in the Army where I could say, ‘Hey, this will be the perfect time for me to do a master’s degree.’” Despite saying he has a positive view of graduate school, for him “it was always hard to find” the time to devote to doing it as well as he thought he could. He said, “I just never found the right time in my career to do it.” George said that “once September 11th kicked off, then it was like, you know—I’ve got Army requirements, I’ve got family requirements, you know, how does a master’s work in on either of those?” His conclusion was that “I don’t want to do it. I just don’t feel like I can afford myself the time to do it.”

Irving earned his master's degree through an online graduate school program because, as he put it, "my life, at that time, didn't allow me to be a full-time student, and I wanted a master's degree, so I found a way to do it." He considered earning a second master's degree while attending CGSC because he had realized halfway through his previous master's program that he did not really have any interest in the doing the work he was studying. In addition, Irving thought he would have enough time while attending CGSC. However, after seeing the challenges his classmates experienced, he said he was glad he did not take on the additional challenge. The ILE curriculum was a lot more challenging than he expected it to be, not having worked in an operational assignment for a number of years, and learning about the strategic and operational aspects of joint doctrine required his full effort. He said "There's no way I would have been able to survive—I would have been killing myself like the guy in my class, getting two, three hours of sleep, spending all my weekends doing that, and reading and writing." For Irving, the only barrier to earning a second master's degree was the CGSC academic workload. For him, since he already had a master's degree, "There's no way I was going to—and I didn't have to, so it made it pretty easy."

John earned his master's degree when he was a company executive officer and a first lieutenant, before marriage, children, and all the other complications that come with getting on with his life and career. He considered pursuing a second master's degree, but when he arrived at CGSC, he said "I weighed the amount of time for night school versus the school load that I already had, and the desire to actually go to my son's soccer games, tae kwan doe, and spend some time with my wife . . . and the negatives outweighed the positives, and my already having a master's degree in my field—that was the cincher right there for me not to pursue one while I was here." He said he would like to get a "teaching certificate later on

and trying to find the balance of being able to devote enough time to finish it in a timely manner and spend time with the family and at work.” When asked if he thought about how graduate school might fit into his life, he replied, “I think about it all the time.”

Kevin arrived at CGSC thinking that this was probably going to be a good opportunity to earn his master’s degree, but quickly found the academic requirements of the course too challenging. I said, “I know my limitations, and ILE was enough, because I also wanted to spend time with my wife and two kids, so—I couldn’t handle both.” He said, “I don’t know where I would find the time to do both.”

Scott earned his master’s degree in conjunction with the Engineer Captains Career Course, a common option for many Engineer officers, but said “I was thinking about pursuing a second one while I was here.” However, he shared his perception that even though he had not been deployed in three years, his operational workload while stationed at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, “has just as rigorous a schedule” as a deployment.

Ted arrived at CGSC with a master’s degree, but was still interested in enrolling in the MMAS program to pursue some areas of interest to him and to serve as a forcing function to keep him fully engaged academically. When he began attending the initial research methods classes for the MMAS, however, he found it was more time-consuming than he had expected. When asked if he had thought about how graduate school might fit into his life before coming to CGSC, he replied, “I thought the MMAS wouldn’t be as invasive, I guess—not that it was a huge requirement, but certainly more than I expected.” Having earned a master’s degree from Georgetown University while at the U.S. Army Human Resources Command (HRC), he understood the additional work required, but said that when

he was at HRC working full-time and going to school full-time, at least he “didn’t have to take homework home from HRC.” In Ted’s opinion, pursuing a master’s degree while attending CGSC is harder than earning one while in an operational job.

Summary-time management and operational tempo.

Time management and operational tempo are two distinct themes that are treated together because they overlap in so many ways. CGSC students enrolled in a master’s degree program were generally more skilled at setting priorities, adhering to their daily and weekly personal schedule to accomplishment whatever they thought they needed to, and still allocating additional time for graduate school without sacrificing anything by doing so. Some of the CGSC students interviewed said the competing demands of family and CGSC academic requirements were already stressing their time management skills, and either chose not to take on the additional burden of graduate school or were glad they had “checked that block” prior to arriving at CGSC. CGSC students discussed the impact on their lives of the operational tempo both before arriving at CGSC and while in the ILE course. In terms of the former, deployments, time away from home and family, and long periods of preparation and recovery on either end of those deployments often took a personal toll on the individual. In terms of the latter, the ILE curriculum provided enough academic challenge, in many cases for officers who had not been in an academic environment for a decade or more, and graduate school never really seemed a viable option.

Life Issues

Life issues are defined as the complications of adult life that sometimes intrude on an individual’s plan, and include the broader category of quality of life issues. Some CGSC students in the study described significant emotional events in their lives that influenced

decisions they made later. Some shared the regret they have about not pursuing a master's degree sooner, or getting the wrong one, or one that does not have a terribly high reputation, and not having good reasons for any of it. Troubled children, marital strife, elderly parents and in-laws may be factors that work against pursuing a master's degree. Quality of life, in particular for students who have had extensive operational deployments, was an issue for all CGSC students in the study, but was expressed more often by those who decided not to enroll in graduate school. Their decision centered on doing well in CGSC academically while making an effort to reconnect to family or deal with significant family issues; the additional challenge of graduate school was too much for them to include in their priorities. Among those enrolled in graduate school, quality of life and family considerations were most often cited as factors that could have completely prevented them from enrolling, or staying enrolled, in graduate school.

Life issues, such as having children, sick parents or spouses, unhappy or unpleasant work environment, and so forth, can often impede academic pursuits. Some of these relate back to research question number 3 that asked if family issues influence CGSC students' decisions about attending graduate school. For some CGSC students, life issues are paramount, and mitigate *against* pursuing a master's degree or enrolling in a graduate school program. For others, they find time around the fringes of their already busy lives to squeeze in extra academic pursuits, sometimes regardless of the cost to the other things in their lives.

Surprisingly, not many CGSC students communicated conflict between earning a master's degree and life issues, such as family, children, parents, and so forth. This theme overlaps with the subordinate research question, "*Do family considerations influence a CGSC student's decision to attend graduate school?*" It is included as a separate theme

because some issues in the CGSC students' lives were not specifically associated with their respective families, but rather with other life issues, such as personal goals, financial capability, and so forth.

Barbara was an exception. Despite describing how it was her intention to attend graduate school right after completing her undergraduate degree, and how she was only prevented from doing so by her financial challenges [she could not afford it], she put off her pursuit of a graduate degree for nearly a decade. She was eventually able to begin a master's program in international relations, but then was unable to complete the program until she was selected to teach at West Point, at which time she was able to complete her master's degree in political science with a certificate in international studies through the Kansas State University program. Barbara was also accepted into a Kansas State University doctoral program, which she began while at West Point, but admitted that life sometimes gets in the way of academic pursuits. She said, "you kind of have to be dedicated to one or the other, and sometimes when it comes to family we sacrifice . . . it's not a given, but the probability is really high, especially when you start getting to dissertation and that stuff, so you need a very flexible family that will help you and support you." Whether or not that was the case for Barbara was not clear, but after nearly 20 years of marriage she only recently found herself divorced soon after arriving at CGSC.

When asked if she had thought about how graduate school might fit into her life, she said she did not really think about its impact on her personal life—she was taking one class at a time, it was manageable in small pieces, and she thought the impact on her family life was minimal. In fact, she said it was nothing compared to when she was doing graduate school full time, which she said had a "substantial" impact on her family life. Barbara said, "I can't

say that I consciously gave thought to how much the schooling would really impact since I had never been in that situation—I was more focused on the benefits after graduation.”

Oscar said he could not see anything short of an ill child at home that would have prevented him from enrolling in and completing his master’s degree while at CGSC. As he put it, “I think that would have been a bridge too far; that would have broken our family,” and that was not something he said he was willing to sacrifice.

For George, he was unable to find what he called “the perfect time for me to do a master’s degree.” For him, work was his primary focus, and when he was not focused on work he was trying to be the best husband and father he could be. He said, “As time goes by it’s harder and harder to get back into that [master’s degree program].” For him, success was not measured in academic achievement, but when he gets home at 3:30 in the afternoon and plays with his 3-year old for a couple of hours—“to me, that was success.” He said he wants to “take her to school, watch her ball games.” Growing up on a farm, he remembers his father “always busy, always doing something,” and wanted “to kind of take that year [at CGSC], reconnect with the wife, be with the daughter, do stuff with her. In the end, that ended up bumping that above pursuing a master’s while here at CGSC.” In his calculations, he determined “the three things I can do while I’m here: do well in ILE, reconnect with the family, knock out a master’s. Of the three, what are the two I have to do well? And to me, it was ILE and the family.” He did not want to have any regrets about not taking advantage of the 10-month hiatus from deployments and 18-hour workdays: “If I did a graduate program, and ended up deploying, I’d be out of the fight for two years with my family,” as he put it. That did not track with his desire to be a good father, as he said, “If I get the chance to be a dad, I want to be a good dad.”

For April, life issues were a little more straightforward: she already had her master's degree, and her husband was working on his while attending CGSC, so she "thought two of us doing master's degrees in the same household when I didn't need it—I didn't need that." When she was refused admission to the scholars program, that was the deciding factor for her: "they keep telling us this is the year to take a break, and I was going to take a break."

For John, already having a master's degree was reason enough not to take time away from his family for a second one, and as he put it, "Like anything else, stuff happens, demands of your work, demands of your family; it only takes one very bad illness—family illness—to derail everything. It's like everything else—you have competing issues with your time and your effort and your focus."

Kevin's view of pursuing a master's degree was straightforward and negative; when asked how graduate school might fit into his life, he responded, "It doesn't right now." He did not want to have the same experience as a friend of his who started graduate school after getting married and having four children; he found it was "just too tough when you have a wife—and he has four kids."

Mitch said he "never thought about it" when asked if he had considered how graduate school might fit into his life; he just "knew at some point I would have to get a master's degree." He describes himself as being "in a different point in my life now" than he was when he earned his master's degree, "less focused on me and more focused on how to better serve her [his wife] with respect to her career aspirations and job prospects.

Paul said he has spent some time thinking about how graduate school might fit into his life, and in discussions with his wife decided "We're either going to get out or we're going to do this," meaning continue on active duty in the Army and find an opportunity for a

master's degree. In terms of where he thinks he is in his "life cycle," he and his wife already have one child, would like to have another, and are wondering whether to remain in the Army after reaching the 20-year point. Scott had a philosophical perspective on his time here at CGSC: "If you don't look at this course as a time of change in your career or in your life, both personally and professionally, then I don't know what you're doing here. Or why you're still in the military."

Scott earned a master's degree from the University of Missouri at Rolla in conjunction with attending the Engineer Captains Career Course at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, but was thinking about "pursuing a second one while I was here through the down time," as he put it. The two factors that mitigated against him following through with that initial plan were cost, since the Army was not going to pay for a second master's degree, and spending time with his family. Scott had been stationed at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, for the past three years, and said that even though he was not deployed, he has "just as rigorous a schedule . . . and haven't really had an opportunity to know my two young ones." He also said that "trying to reconnect with the wife" has been a challenge.

Ted saw his time at CGSC as preparation for the "transition that starts right after, as soon as we walk out the door here into our next jobs that really will decide the rest of your career. So then when you start thinking about the factors of grad school or not, that's definitely a consideration for 'not.'" If he had wanted to enroll in a master's degree program, he could not think of anything that would have prevented him from doing so, other than "a significant injury that I had to do rehab to go to my next job; that's way more important."

For Victor, the decision came down to between spending “this time here reconnecting with her [his wife] and my family, or do I want to put that extra time in getting a master’s degree,” and he opted to spend more time with his family. For him, those really were the only two options: “do I want to put all my time that I’m here into class or do I want to enjoy the fact that I get home at 2 o’clock in the afternoon and can hang out with my wife and we can go do stuff on weekends. That was the deciding factor for me.” He also had some challenges with his 18-year old stepson, who was raised pretty much solely by his mother during two of his four years of high school while Victor was deployed. He said, “That was another aspect of it, was trying to get his [stepson’s] feet back underneath him during this year, as opposed to me sitting at a desk or going to the library trying to get my research done.” In his mind, “the situation with my stepson was too volatile.” Victor was interested in the MMAS program, but said that only lasted “until I started looking at the workload that was expected, and it just wasn’t worth it—the payout wasn’t worth it to me.” For him, the expense was one impediment, but “the other impediment was the time with family—making that decision, do I want to sacrifice time with family or do I want to sacrifice getting my graduate degree?”

Walter explained that when he was considering graduate school while at CGSC, which would really mean a second master’s degree since he already had one from Colorado State University in rhetoric and composition, he wanted “to focus, obviously on family time,” since he “had just got back from deployment in March of 2011, so—wanting to reconnect.” For him, he said “there wasn’t a program that was enlightening enough or intriguing enough to me to really consider. It just didn’t seem like it was the right use of my time.” If he had wanted to enroll in graduate school while at CGSC, however, the thing that would have

prevented him from doing so would have been “Not feeling like I could achieve the necessary balance while being here. If I didn’t feel like I was going to get the requisite amount of family time with my two-year old and seeing my wife and all that, I think that would have killed it for me, if I was really seriously looking.”

Summary-life issues.

The theme of life issues overlaps with research question number 3 that asked if family issues influence CGSC students’ decisions about attending graduate school; it is addressed separately because life issues extend beyond just family issues. Some challenges in the CGSC students’ lives were not specifically associated with their respective families, but rather with other life issues, such as personal goals, financial capability, and so forth. Academic achievement often takes a back seat to the challenges of life: children, spouses, aging parents, extended family issues, personal fitness, and everything else that sometimes seems to make life so complicated. Some CGSC students in the study described significant emotional events in their lives that influenced decisions they made later. Some shared their regret about not pursuing a master’s degree sooner, or getting the wrong one, or earning one that does not have a good reputation. Quality of life, in particular for students who had multiple operational deployments, was an issue for all CGSC students in the study, but was expressed more often by those who decided not to enroll in graduate school. Surprisingly, only a few CGSC students communicated conflict between earning a master’s degree and life issues.

Guidance and Mentorship

Guidance and mentorship was a theme that emerged during the interviews in two different directions. For those students in the study who had a perspective on this topic, they

either received clear guidance about pursuing a master's degree while attending CGSC or they received no guidance or mentorship at all. Advice from peers or other officers about their experience attending CGSC and whether or not they pursued a master's degree fell somewhere in between.

Guidance and advice from counselors, mentors, or other more senior officers was not consistent among the respondents. Some sought out and received guidance and advice from their senior leadership, mentors, or colleagues, while many others either did not seek any advice or what they received was not particularly helpful to them. In some cases, the influence of senior advisors or mentors was clearly stated and the students shared the guidance they received in their interviews. In other cases, students said they sought the perspectives of colleagues at work, but never sought out any guidance or direction from more senior officers.

Andrew said he “talked to peers at work, maybe my first-line supervisor, and another civilian who went through something similar where he ended up getting . . . an MBA back when he was in the Army.” He said he “didn’t discuss it with branch” at all, which might have been a logical source of objective career advice.

In some cases, their advice was clear and unequivocal: “it doesn’t matter, you have got to get a master’s while you’re there” was how one senior leader advised Bob. Such advice led him to state, “So I don’t think I had an option, almost, of coming out here and not getting one.” Bob said his mentor advised him that he has to get a master’s degree while at CGSC, unless he wants to try and get one after he gets to his next assignment: “this is kind of the last place to get one.” Bob saw it as an unstated requirement: “I don’t have a master’s, so it was kind of a—that block had to be checked.” Allen was told by one of his commanders

that, “if you want to succeed in the Army, or you want to stay longer, you have to be competitive, you have got to . . . start thinking about this [a master’s degree].”

Donald only spoke with his friends at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, and asked them what they suggested. Only one provided any real advice, which was a recommendation to enroll in a master’s degree program at Webster University.

Larry was likewise referred to the Webster University program by his senior Army instructor years ago when he [Larry] was still in high school. His instructor had earned an MBA from Webster when he attended CGSC.

Neal learned of the opportunity to earn a master’s degree while attending CGSC from others in his brigade who had done it. They told him he could do it in the year he was at CGSC, and would not have to worry about deploying in the middle of trying to complete his academic requirements.

Oscar did not actually solicit any advice from his boss, but viewed him “not only as a mentor, but a great role model,” since he had three master’s degrees that he earned at a civilian graduate school (twice) and from attending the School for Advanced Military Studies (SAMS).

Similar to CGSC students who enrolled in a master’s degree program, the incidence of guidance, advice, or mentorship with respect to graduate school was uneven for students not enrolled in a master’s program. Amy, for example, said she talked “to a few instructors and some other students” after arriving, but received no formal guidance or counseling one way or the other beforehand. No one in her chain of command or organization provided her any advice about graduate school while attending CGSC. When she asked her career manager, she said, “I was reminded, you don’t have to have it.”

When George asked his branch manager about graduate school, he said, “They just kept saying, ‘Hey, focus on doing your job. Do your job well.’” He said he might have been more inclined to enroll in a master’s degree program while at CGSC “If my branch manager would have said, ‘Hey, you need to look at this. Here’s ILE, here’s your date. If you’re going to get a master’s, this is the time to do it,’” or something similarly direct and unequivocal. He got similar advice from his senior raters in his battalion and brigade, who told him to, “Focus on your job, take care of your family; if there’s something left in the tank after that, then pursue a master’s.” In his discussions with his senior leaders, he said he would be told “the top five things you need to do to be an officer,” and “never had that guy who said, ‘Hey, you need to do this,’” meaning get a master’s degree. For him, he said the only advice he received was “Hey, man, you want to do your master’s—I won’t say if you want to commit suicide, but if you want to knock it out, you can knock it out,” while at CGSC. George said, “It was always framed to me in that manner, and that just kind of stuck in the back of my head, and then when I showed up and here it was just like—I just felt like I didn’t have enough prep time to go down and talk to someone.”

Irving said he was thinking about getting a second master’s degree while attending CGSC, but after “talking to some mentors and talking to folks—instructors here—they said, ‘If you don’t have to, then don’t, because the school load for CGSC was already, at the front side, heavy enough . . . it was probably better not to do it.’” So he chose not to.

John was also interested in a second master’s degree, in particular through the MMAS program because, as he put it, “I’m a cheap guy, and whenever I found that you can get a second master’s degree . . . for free,” that appealed to him. His decision was ultimately based on the advice he received; John said, “I have enough mentors that I bounce different things

off of them. Some are better at giving me advice in some areas than others.” Since he was enlisted, though, he has always felt that his mentors provided good advice, from recommending attendance at OCS and getting his commission, to enrolling in a master’s degree program as a lieutenant when he had the time and resources available, so when they advised against graduate school at CGSC, for him it was a “no-brainer.”

Kevin did not have a master’s degree when he arrived at CGSC, briefly considered pursuing one, but decided instead to focus on the ILE academics and his family. He did not solicit, nor did he receive any guidance or advice from anyone other than his previous commander, who, Kevin said, “mentioned it.”

Scott already had a master’s degree and was considering a second, saying that ever since he was “a lieutenant back in 2001, it was the biggest thing that some of your mentors and people in the military would tell you about—was that you need to get a master’s.” He also said, “You’ve got mom and dad who have both been to college, and they’re like, ‘Hey, your college degree’s great, but if you look at the workforce, people who have master’s are getting picked up more than those without one.’” So he received some encouragement from that direction, but as far as a second master’s while attending CGSC, Scott only discussed it with his peers. He said he “talked to a couple of people from Fort Irwin who had done the MMAS program, and they said, ‘Hey, this is what it’s like.’ I received emails from guys I knew at NTC [National Training Center] who had come to this course before me and had talked to me about the master’s degree programs. The thing that first prompted me was when we got the first information packet from the school, there was stuff in there about the ability to pursue a master’s degree while you were here.” So for him, advice regarding a master’s degree while attending CGSC came from his peer group initially, and then the college itself,

with little or no senior level mentorship or guidance. In fact, Scott said he became aware of the opportunities for a master's degree from "talking to people who were graduating or who were in the class ahead of you."

Ted already had a master's degree, initially enrolled in the MMAS program but then quit, and said he gets a lot of encouragement from his father and father-in-law to continue his education. As he put it, "I've got my father and my father-in-law that both beat you with the education club: get more degrees, get going back to school, and doing those types of things."

Victor did not have a master's degree when he arrived at CGSC, and spent a while determining whether or not to work on one while attending CGSC. He said, "You kind of do the G-2, talking to other classes, people who've been before: 'Oh, yeah, it gets to the point where it kind of peaks, and then it goes down a little bit, and it's not so bad.'" He said, "Some of them said it was really hard, and some of them said it wasn't too bad. Some said it depended on the program they were in, but I didn't have any foreknowledge of the MMAS program. Talking to the other majors who came out of ILE, they never mentioned that, 'You got Webster's, you got KU [University of Kansas], and then also in class they have an MMAS program.'" He also said he "Talked to some mentors in the past and asked, 'What is more important? Is it to do these combat deployments and get these job skills sets or is it to get my master's degree?' The mentors that I looked up to, who I respected the most, said 'Don't worry about your master's degree. Get the combat experience, get the job experience, go with that and try to find some way down the road where you'll get it, be it as a PMS [Professor of Military Science] at a college, or assistant PMS, something like that. Or you just wait until you get to the War College if you stay in that long.'" So for Victor, the advice he received did not urge him to pursue a master's degree while attending CGSC.

Summary-guidance and mentorship.

CGSC students participating in the study said that the guidance and mentorship they received with respect to pursuing a master's degree while attending CGSC fell into one of two categories: either their mentors clearly recommended they earn a master's degree while attending CGSC, or they got no guidance at all. There were not many cases that fell in between. None of the guidance CGSC students received from their mentors said they should not pursue a master's degree, although the branch managers were more focused on performance in operational assignments than academic advancement. From their perspective, a master's degree was not a requirement for promotion and selection to command or schools, and they did not recommend for or against it.

Quality of Degree

Quality of the master's degree was a common theme expressed by both CGSC students who were enrolled in graduate school and those who were not. For those students enrolled in a master's degree program, most of whom already had a master's degree, they expressed dissatisfaction with previously earned master's degrees in terms of quality; they wanted a higher quality graduate degree, not one they earned just to "check the box," as many put it. Some were enrolled in graduate school in order to improve the "cachet" of their additional educational achievements; they already had a master's degree, but wanted one from a university that had greater name recognition or prestige. Some CGSC students in the study who were not enrolled considered getting a second master's degree, but for various reasons chose not to. The key aspect of the latter group is that they even considered taking on the additional work involved in pursuing a master's degree while also completing the CGSC curriculum speaks volumes about their view of their current graduate degree.

Related to this was the perception that “two is the new one,” meaning that since virtually all majors and lieutenant colonels have advanced degrees, in order to set oneself apart from the rest of the year group it is more advantageous to have more than one master’s degree. This observation implies that there is a qualitative consideration to the number of master’s degrees an officer has earned, not just a quantitative consideration.

Carl viewed CGSC as the only chance he was going to get to “get a degree in what I wanted,” as he put it. He said he wanted “a hard school name when you go into anything after here,” which is why he chose the Central Michigan University master’s program. He explained that “There’s a lengthy university name behind that program.” From his perspective, “Webster’s is probably one step from Phoenix, really.”

Barbara expressed a similar sentiment, saying that she earned her bachelor’s degree in business so she could get a job, but that she always had the idea that she would return to school “and get a degree in that I was really interested in.” Eventually she achieved that goal, earning a master’s degree in political science with a certificate in international studies from Kansas State University, and beginning a doctoral program in the same discipline.

Walter had previously passed up the opportunity to earn a master’s degree in conjunction with the Adjutant General Captains Career Course through Webster University, and would have received credit hours for his military classes toward the degree, but said, “I didn’t want to take it just for the sake of getting a master’s degree. I wanted to go to graduate school for the experience of diving in, being buried in books, really putting my effort into something.” He said he did not want a “cookie cutter master’s degree . . . just for the sake of putting it on my ORB [Officer Record Brief].”

Ted enrolled in the MMAS program because “two was the new one when it comes to master’s degrees in the Army,” meaning all officers at some point in their careers earn a master’s and to stand out from the rest of his peers he felt he needed a second one. He got this perspective from having worked at HRC, where he said the last battalion command list had 8 or 9 individuals selected, and all but one had a master’s degree.

Donald had always wanted to earn a degree in an area he was actually interested in, rather than simply completing his undergraduate requirements to earn his commission. He was commissioned through OCS with an associate’s degree, and earned a bachelor’s degree in 18 months because that was how much time he was allowed to retain his commission. He earned a master’s degree through an on-line program that he eventually realized was not really in an area he had a long-term interest in.

Irving said, “I wasn’t pleased with my original master’s,” so he is glad not to be in the situation where he feels he has to dedicate the additional time and effort on top of CGSC to earn one. He realized halfway through his studies that the degree he was going to earn would enable him to work in a field he had little interest in, but that “because I had started and wasn’t going to quit,” he completed the program and earned his master’s. His plan, though, is to “someday get another master’s degree or a doctorate” a subject area he is interested in. Irving said, “I want to get the next graduate degree for me. I want to do it for me.”

Oscar described his sense of inadequacy in terms of his academic credentials, a master’s degree in public administration from Webster University he earned in conjunction with his Captains Career Course at the Engineer School, when compared to his colleagues with graduate degrees from Harvard and Johns Hopkins. He saw his time at CGSC as an opportunity to improve his credentials with a Master’s in Science and Business from the

University of Kansas, an institution he felt had greater “cachet” than Webster University (a “better one,” as he put it), and will earn a third master’s degree from SAMS next year. In his mind, the two additional graduate degrees will go a long way toward improving his standing with his colleagues.

Scott said when he received the CGSC welcome letter it caused him to start thinking about his goals: “what are my short-term goals, what are my long-term goals, both professionally and family, and after the military, that kind of started me thinking that having two master’s [degrees] is better than one.” He considered enrolling in a second master’s degree program while attending CGSC, but did not find any programs that would benefit his engineer background.

Summary-quality of degree.

A “check the block” view of a master’s degree emerged during the interviews. The expression, “knocking it out,” referring to earning a master’s degree, as if it was a necessary but inconvenient stepping-stone to some greater good was used frequently by CGSC students when describing their decision about graduate school. Many CGSC students described how they recognized the importance of a master’s degree regardless of the area of study; for them, it was a code on their Officer Record Brief that kept them competitive with their peers, or at least prevented them from falling behind others in their year group. In hindsight, however, some of the CGSC students interviewed said they regretted not spending more time deciding on the kind of master’s degree they earned, both from the perspective of the area of study and in terms of the university from where they earned their master’s. The number of graduate degrees was also an issue for some CGSC students: more is better. Many of the students

enrolled in a master's program already have one graduate degree, and some CGSC students not enrolled in graduate school with a master's degree considered pursuing a second.

MMAS Program

Students participating in the study described their perspectives on the MMAS program with respect to how they decided whether or not to pursue a master's degree. The level of disdain most CGSC students, and the more senior leaders and mentors advising them, expressed for the MMAS was not expected. The majority of respondents said they were either advised not to participate in the MMAS program because it provided no long-term benefit and is not recognized by most organizations outside the Army, or those individuals already held that opinion. Except for one individual who expressed a strong sentiment in favor of the MMAS degree compared to those offered by civilian universities, most respondents did not have a favorable view of the MMAS, for reasons they described. Some were advised against it by senior leaders or mentors, others made their own decision regarding the advantages and disadvantages of an MMAS compared to a master's degree from a civilian university, but those who considered it were very similar in their perspectives.

Ted earned a master's degree at Georgetown University, and when he arrived at CGSC he enrolled in the MMAS program. After a few weeks of classes, however, he said he found it too basic and "industrial," asking "why do I have to sit through 20-30 hours of research methods" if he has already demonstrated his ability to conduct research with a previous master's degree from a reputable university? He said, "My take on the program was almost taking a step back academically to do the MMAS, for me." So he withdrew from the program after the first term.

Carl talked to several colleagues about graduate school versus the MMAS, and decided that “if I get out of the military, what does the MMAS mean to a civilian corporation or anything like that in your follow-on job?” When he compared the name recognition of the MMAS to what he described as “a brick and mortar, by name program [that] somebody can look back and say, ‘This university,’” meaning a recognized institution of higher education like Kansas State University or the University of Kansas, he decided against the MMAS.

John was initially interested in the MMAS program, but when he consulted with one of his mentors, he was advised that the MMAS degree “would not help me that much as far as professional development,” which mitigated against that course of action.

Larry considered both the MMAS program and a graduate degree from one of the civilian universities, and was advised by various mentors not to waste his time on the MMAS, “because you can’t use it on the outside.” He was advised to “use that time to get a real degree that is applicable to real life,” so he enrolled in an MBA program.

Summary-MMAS program.

The MMAS program was not well-perceived by those CGSC students who expressed a perspective on it. Of those who considered the MMAS master’s degree, all but one were either advised against it or already had a low opinion of its value, both while on active duty and after leaving the Army. While not a majority of CGSC students who were interviewed, the unambiguous and consistent negative view of the program and the degree was noteworthy enough to warrant inclusion as a theme. A minority perspective was expressed by two CGSC students, one of whom chose the MMAS over the other civilian master’s degree program because he thought it would garner greater respect in the long run, coming from “an institution that might be respected.”

Themes Summary

Interviews with CGSC students revealed a number of themes that students shared with each other. Although not directly contributing to answering the research questions, they helped provide greater insight into how CGSC students made their respective decisions in areas that were not anticipated. In some cases they overlapped with the research questions, and in other cases they overlapped with each other, but including them in the analysis provided a broader, deeper, and richer understanding of the students' perspectives. The themes identified by the researcher were persistence, time management and operational tempo, self-efficacy and confidence, life issues, goal setting and achievement, quality of degree, life issues, the MMAS program, and guidance and mentorship.

Chapter Summary

Interviews with CGSC students who participated in the research provided answers to the research questions. Each of the topics in the research questions influenced CGSC students' decisions, to a greater or lesser degree. That is, military career requirements, post-military career requirements, family issues, and previous academic experience all influenced their decisions about whether or not to pursue a master's degree while attending CGSC. In addition, a number of themes revealed themselves in the interviews that were common to many of the participants. Although those themes did not contribute directly to the research, they were significant enough to warrant inclusion and examination in this chapter. They suggest a number of potential areas of future research or lines of inquiry that may be worth pursuing.

Interviews with CGSC students not only served to answer the research question, they also provided a broader view of the students' perspectives on pursuing a master's degree

while attending CGSC. The interviews identified several common themes shared by CGSC students who participated in the study. These themes were not anticipated by the researcher, but rather provided unexpected insights into how CGSC students decided whether or not to attend graduate school. In many cases the themes revealed a different aspect of how students who participated in the study think and feel about pursuing a master's degree. Some of these aspects overlap with the research question analysis, but others are unique in how they provide additional insight into how CGSC students decide whether or not to attend graduate school.

In some cases, themes informed the analysis of the specific research questions; in other cases they suggested future lines of inquiry or research. Those themes identified as common to all CGSC students who were interviewed are: persistence, time management and operational tempo, self-efficacy and confidence, life issues, goal setting and achievement, quality of degree, the MMAS program, and guidance and mentorship.

Chapter 5 - Conclusions and Recommendations

Overview

This chapter will discuss the research findings, address implications with respect to those findings, provide some recommendations for policy and procedures in the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC) regarding graduate school enrollment and participation, and finally recommendations for further research. The findings emerged as a result of interviews with 26 U.S. Army CGSC students who voluntarily shared their experiences with deciding whether or not to attend graduate school while at CGSC. Some were already enrolled in a master's degree program, others had earned a master's degree prior to arriving at CGSC, and some of those individuals chose to earn a second master's degree through the Master of Military Art and Science (MMAS) program or a civilian university graduate school program. Although Cross's Chain of Response model served as the theoretical base for developing the interview protocol and as a framework for their responses, the interviews were semi-structured in order to allow the participants to tell their stories in their own words.

Interviews with the CGSC students answered the primary research question and the four subordinate questions. The purpose of the research was to explore how U.S. Army officers attending CGSC decided whether or not to attend graduate school. The subordinate questions expanded this exploration with respect to the influence of military career requirements, post-military career aspirations, family considerations, and previous academic experience. The interviews with CGSC students addressed the research question themes and contributed to the exploration of the how they decide whether or not to attend graduate school. Additionally, several unexpected themes arose from the interviews that provided a

more well-rounded, and in some cases in-depth, perspective on how CGSC students made this decision. Those themes were self-efficacy and confidence, goal setting and achievement, persistence, time management, life issues, guidance and mentorship, perceived quality of the degree or value, and the CGSC master's program (Master of Military Art and Science).

Discussion

An examination of the research findings necessitates an understanding of the professional, social, and academic environment in which newly arrived CGSC students find themselves. In virtually all instances, CGSC students have arrived at Fort Leavenworth from high-stress, fast-paced operational assignments, whether overseas or stateside. Some have recently returned from Afghanistan or another hazardous duty assignment, while others have been assigned to major staff or training assignments that consumed the majority of their personal and professional waking hours. The typical expression shared by CGSC leadership when welcoming the new arrivals is that, "This is (or can be) the best year of your life," which many CGSC students (and their spouses) take to heart. For some, it does end up being the best year of their lives, at least from a productive, professionally developing, and academically broadening perspective. For many others, however, it is far from the best year of their lives. They find themselves struggling with achieving a semblance of balance between work and family, work being defined as attending ILE classes. They find themselves struggling with new relationships both within and outside their families, with adjusting to being part of a 16-person staff group that often meets outside of class for social activities that involve spouses and children, and in many cases reacquainting themselves with a more or less "normal" day-to-day routine. They find themselves struggling to adapt to an

academic, rather than operational, environment which for some is a very different context in which to work and one which they may not have experienced for over a decade.

All of these stressors mitigate against the upcoming year being the best in their lives, and the decision about whether or not to enroll in graduate school may only add to the stress CGSC students are already experiencing. Some students said they were advised by their mentors that CGSC “is the place to get your master’s degree,” and *failing* to get it would not be career-enhancing. Branch assignment officers are the personnel managers at the U.S. Army Human Resource Command (HRC) who are responsible for each officer’s assignment and, to some extent, their professional development career path. When CGSC students were asked what, if any, advice their respective branch managers gave them, all of them said their branch manager did not encourage getting a master’s degree. Their advice to CGSC students was to focus on doing well in CGSC and preparing for their next assignment after graduation.

Much of this—how hard the ILE curriculum will be, how much time will be available on the margins to pursue graduate school, how much time family activities will entail, and so forth—is largely unknown when CGSC students are presented with the opportunity to enroll in one of the many graduate school programs available to them during the 10-month academic year. They have not met their faculty advisors, the other members of their staff groups (which actually have not been organized or determined yet), or been given much insight on what they can and should expect in the next ten months with respect to CGSC academic demands and requirements. Those students with high confidence and ability may elect to enroll in a master’s program and find success, while others with less ability may enroll in a master’s program, perhaps feeling that they do not want to miss the opportunity being provided, and find themselves overly burdened with two sets of major academic

workloads. Some feel the pressure of their peers—“everyone else was enrolling, and they didn’t look any smarter than me”—and signed up for a master’s degree program with little consideration of what that would eventually entail.

The graduate school program directors do not have to “sell” their product—CGSC students interested in a master’s degree usually seek them out, solicit some information, and make their decision, sometimes without a full appreciation of the workload associated with earning a master’s degree. Some CGSC contact the graduate school program directors before arriving, others find their way to the installation education center where the graduate school offices are located, and still others wait until the Professional Development and Education Day activities to pick up whatever information they think they need.

In their interviews, CGSC faculty advisors said they wished they could advise their students before they make a decision about graduate school, but are unable to do so. In many cases that decision is already made, usually before or during the week prior to the first class meeting as part of in-processing activities. When instructors meet their students for the first time many have already signed up for one of the graduate programs available to them. All of the civilian instructors have at least a master’s degree, as do many of the active duty instructors. The more experienced instructors have had students in previous years who were enrolled in a graduate program, whether civilian or the MMAS, and know how much work it involves. They could provide an experiential perspective on graduate school—what was it like for them, how much work it is going to involve, how much it will impact on the ILE curriculum, and so forth.

Significantly, nearly all the students interviewed who were not enrolled in a master’s degree program already had a master’s degree (10 out of 14). Some of them expressed relief

that they had already achieved that goal, particularly after witnessing their classmates' challenges. Neither category, enrolled or not enrolled in graduate school, thought their classmates found it easy to be in both ILE and graduate school at the same time. Many said that despite the additional work, and the challenges their classmates experienced, they would have enrolled in a master's program if they did not already have one. This perspective indicates how important CGSC students think a master's degree is, whether in terms of military career security or post-military job marketability.

Several of those students enrolled in a master's degree program already had a master's degree, and viewed their year at CGSC as an opportunity to improve their competitiveness and academic credentials by earning a *second* one. Those students who decided to pursue a second master's degree expressed dissatisfaction with their first master's degree for various reasons, the most common being the lack of prestige associated with it. They recognized the importance of having a master's degree on their official military record, but were initially less concerned with where it was from or what field of study it was in, as long as it was a master's degree. In most cases, they got their master's through a cooperative degree program in conjunction with their Captains Career Course, usually through a local university. They said in some cases they only had to complete 15 to 18 or so credit hours, did not have to write a thesis, and concluded that anything that easy must not have much value.

Findings of the Study

The answers to all four subordinate research questions were affirmative, that is, each of the four areas influenced a CGSC student's decision about graduate school. Military career requirements, post-military considerations, family considerations, and previous

academic experience all influenced the decisions of CGSC students who participated in the study regarding graduate school participation. The degree to which each of them impacted the CGSC students' decisions varied, but all four influenced whether or not they enrolled in graduate school. This is consistent with research on barriers and impediments to adult learning activities (Cross, 1981; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991), characteristics of adult learners (Polson, 1993; Kasworm, Polson, & Fishback, 2002; and Knowles, 1980), and adult development (Lemme, 2006; Hoare, 2006; Mezirow, 1991; Kegan, 1992; and Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner, 2007).

Research question #1.

Do military career requirements influence a CGSC student's decision to attend graduate school? If so, how do they influence the decision? If not, why not?

Military career requirements played the strongest role in CGSC students' decisions about attending graduate school. CGSC students described their branch managers focus on doing well at CGSC, with no recommendation or advice about getting a master's degree at the same time. Despite the lack of advice for incoming CGSC students from HRC personnel managers regarding graduate school, according to CGSC students who were interviewed, all Army officers interviewed for this research perceived that earning a master's degree was mandatory for them to be successful in their career. Officers defined success in various ways, to include getting promoted to the next higher rank, being competitive for command selection, and in some cases simply being retained on active duty in order to complete a full career and retire with a lifetime annuity pension. Regardless of how they defined success, however, in the minds of the CGSC students interviewed a master's degree was required to achieve it. Despite mixed messages from their senior leaders and mentors, and ambivalence

from their branch managers, somehow they arrived at the conclusion that a master's degree was part of the career progression of a successful Army officer. As one student said in his interview, "The myth out there right now is you're not going to get promoted to light colonel without a master's degree. Are there guys out there who are going to get promoted without it? Surely there are. But, if you're not the really smart guy, all things being equal, I would rather be the guy who has a master's on his transcript than the guy who doesn't."

For more than a decade, the Army's focus was on manning a force to conduct two wars overseas (Dempsey, 2012). One of those wars has essentially ended, and an end to the other is in sight. The Army has already begun to decrease its end strength, lower the promotion rates, and identify individuals for removal from active duty. The increasing competitiveness of the officer corps has increased the importance to the officer corps of improving their individual personnel records, to include military and civilian schooling. Without the repetitive deployments to combat zones or areas from which combatants are directly supported, Army officers will have to find other ways to distinguish themselves. As one CGSC student said in his interview, "If everyone has a master's degree, then having two is better than only having one."

The perception held by CGSC students that a major in the U.S. Army must earn a master's degree at some point in his or her career was prevalent, and that belief was supported by this research. Nearly half the CGSC class of Academic Year 2011-2012 (Class 12-01) arrived with some form of an advanced degree, either a master's, a doctorate, or some other specialty degree. This proportion further indicated the importance Army officers attached to graduate school to be successful in their military careers. The importance they attached to a graduate degree after military service is less clear. The literature on graduate

degrees for U.S. Army officers is unequivocally supportive of them, from joint publications to Army regulations to position papers and articles written by senior Army leaders. Thus, the U.S. army majors are executing the guidance provided to them by their chain of command, in spite of the contrary advice CGSC students described being provided to them by their branch managers at HRC. The branch managers who were asked about getting a master's degree while at CGSC consistently advised students that it was not a requirement for them to have a master's degree, in spite of the plethora of graduate school programs available and the perspectives of the most senior leaders in the Army.

Research question #2.

Do post-military career aspirations and requirements play a role in a CGSC student's decision to attend graduate school? If so, how? If not, why not?

Post-military career aspirations and requirements played a role in some CGSC students' decisions, but not all. In some cases it was *the* most important consideration, but those instances were few. In most cases, the students interviewed did not have a clear vision of what they expected to do after leaving military service, but still felt that having a master's degree would put them in a better position to find employment than *not* having one. Some CGSC students expressed their belief that a graduate degree would provide flexibility after leaving the Army, in spite of not knowing what they wanted or expected to do post-military.

The general sense of not knowing what they wanted to do after leaving the Army was prevalent, translating into a common view that having a master's degree can only be positive. Many students expressed the importance of having a marketable skill after leaving the service. CGSC students interviewed said they wanted to have their portfolio straight for when they did leave the military. Others wanted to build up their long term resumé, and

having more than one master's degree might help set them apart, open more doors, provide greater opportunity, and improve the likelihood of finding a job. While not seen as an automatic ticket to post-military employment, "it's better to have a base for a future job."

Increased salary or monetary compensation was not foremost, although most agreed a master's degree could improve individual marketability. In some cases the marketability consideration weighed against the Master of Military Art and Science (MMAS) program, because translating a military art and science master's degree into something that could be understood by civilians was not feasible. For others who had the monetary benefit in mind, their choice of master's degree was influenced by what they thought it "would equate to" after leaving the service, though not with much specificity. Some believed a tangible reward would result from having a master's degree in terms of job placement and a higher pay scale. Other students who were interviewed expressed their belief that there *are* tangible monetary benefits, quoting between 5 and 10 thousand dollars a year difference between a master's degree and an individual with only a bachelor's. Being "set up" through a master's degree for various post-military jobs that relate to military experience was another benefit.

In many cases, CGSC students expressed concern about their employability after leaving the service, and how attractive their resumés will be in a civilian job market in a few years. Research by Wendler and others (2010) indicates that many people pursue a graduate degree to improve their "employability" or as a way to pursue a possible second career path.

A common view expressed by CGSC students was the need to have a marketable skill. Some felt that to be competitive in a civilian job market, continuing education was a requirement. They said that a master's degree was a discriminator, particularly after leaving the Army, because nearly all officers *have* a master's degree. Some thought a graduate

degree provided an advantage for certain jobs, but were not as convinced that it would help earn more money as well. There was some pessimism expressed about the advantages of a master's degree in the civilian job market, evidenced by one CGSC student who said he thought there were PhDs working as Wal-Mart door greeters.

Research question #3.

Do family considerations influence a CGSC student's decision to attend graduate school? If so, how? If not, why not?

Family considerations were influential in each officer's decision whether or not to attend graduate school. The degree to which family considerations influenced the student's decision varied, but in most of the interviews the respondents described discussing graduate school with their spouses and communicated the importance of being in agreement about it. This is consistent with Mbilinyi's observation that family members are often the most influential person in an individual's decision to enroll in graduate school (2006). Even though the spouse was usually cited as a sounding-board or as someone who was brought into the decision making process, the most typical response or input from the spouse was that the officer should do whatever he or she thought was needed to improve his or her career.

Only one individual interviewed did not consult his spouse at all about graduate school, but simply came home from class one day and informed her of his decision. In his case, the student recognized the importance and the opportunity of a master's degree and relegated the spouse's perspective to a secondary importance. According to Shea, "Attending graduate school was an individual decision. It was also a decision that impacted the entire family in terms of the time and commitment necessary to balance both CGSC and XX University along with the other demands of father/motherhood" (2010, p. 139).

A factor that might have been a negative influence on graduate school enrollment was marital status, since unmarried graduate students and married students without children are more likely to complete a graduate program, according to Nevill and Chen (2007). Most CGSC students are married and most also have children. Furthermore, married graduate students are less likely to earn a graduate degree, regardless of gender, than unmarried graduate students (Mbilinyi, 2006; Mullen, et al., 2003; Nevill & Chen, 2007; Payne, 2006).

The amount of separation due to deployments and military operational requirements has been recognized throughout the force, and has had an equally recognized adverse impact of families and marriages. According to Shea, “There is a tendency among CGSC students to disconnect from family during the academic year. It is not planned. It just happens” (2010, p. 100). This may be a result of the long-term sacrifices that have already been made as a result of multiple deployments, separations, and time spent away from home. If a CGSC student sees the 10-month academic year as another cycle in his or her professional development, they may view the path to success as one that is a continuation of previous separations and sacrifice. For some, personal sacrifice to achieve professional success has become the norm for Army families.

Cross’s COR applies to the influence of family on the graduate school decision. In the COR model, the importance of goals, or the value assigned to a master’s degree as a means to achieve those goals, was sometimes a perspective shared by both the CGSC student and his or her spouse. If attending CGSC is viewed by the student and his or her spouse as an opportunity, this would also be consistent with Cross’s model. It describes opportunities and barriers as becoming more important when he or she “is motivated to participate” (Cross, 1981, p. 127).

Extended family, parents, in-laws, and siblings, for example, were influential for some CGSC students who were interviewed. They described encouragement, or pressure, to continue their academic development from extended family members. The extent to which this influenced their decision whether or not to enroll in a master's degree program is consistent with Kegan's Stage 3 of adult development. In Stage 3, what is right is "living up to what is expected by people close to you" (Kegan, 1992, p. 52), such as parents, in-laws, and siblings. This is consistent with research by Mullen, Goyette, and Soares (2003) who found that parents' education levels had an influence on enrollment in master's degree programs. They also found that individuals with highly educated parents, defined as both having either a master's degree or a doctorate, are more likely to pursue a graduate degree.

Only one student said he could not bring himself to ask his wife to shoulder the responsibilities of raising two children and running a household on her own because he wanted to concentrate on improving his educational and academic credentials. In most cases, the decision was in the other direction, perhaps because the spouse had an equal awareness of the increasingly competitive nature of the Army, and supported his or her efforts to ensure continued service and success as the main provider for the family.

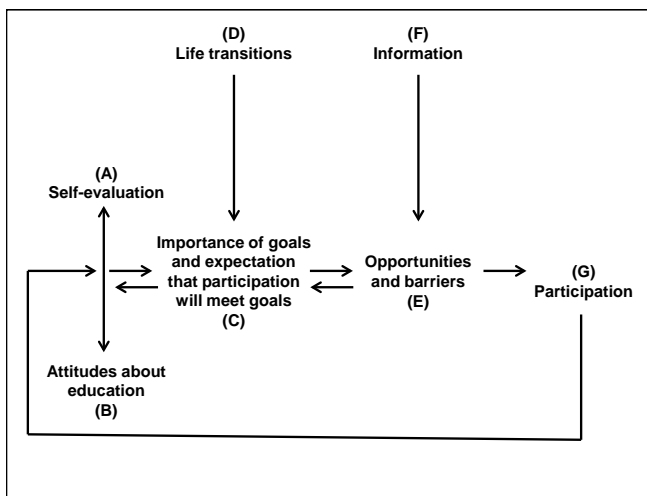
Research question #4.

Does previous academic experience influence a CGSC student's decision to attend graduate school? If so, how? If not, why not?

The Cross COR model provided a framework for this research (Figure 5). The interviews with CGSC students contributed to answering the research questions, but the COR model helped organize those answers in order to make sense of them. The influence of previous academic experiences was addressed by [B], Attitudes about education, which also

influences and is in turn influenced by [A] Self-evaluation. [D] Life transitions may include graduation from previous academic institutions or a wide range of both positive and negative experiences associated with earlier academic activities. The ease or difficulty an individual experienced in gaining access to a particular learning activity and how readily available the key information was concerning that learning activity are addressed by [E] Opportunities and [F] Information. All of the respondents had previous academic experience earning their bachelor's degrees, and many also had experience in previous master's degree programs.

Figure 5-1. Chain-of-Response (COR) Model



(Cross, 1981)

Most CGSC students interviewed expressed *positive* previous academic experiences. Many already had master's degrees and said their graduate school experiences were almost all positive. Interestingly, only 3 of the 14 students who participated in the study who decided not to enroll in graduate school did not already have a master's degree. Many said they would have pursued a second master's degree if they had not been so concerned about the CGSC academic workload. Of those not enrolled in a master's program, two of them had either completed some graduate school courses or equivalent graduate level work (e.g., 47 weeks studying at the Defense Language Institute).

Of the CGSC students who *were* enrolled in a master's degree program, three of them were earning their second graduate degree, either through the MMAS program or one of the graduate programs available to them. In addition, a few of the students interviewed, whether in graduate school or not, had been accepted to attend the School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS), successful completion of which will earn them an additional master's degree.

For those CGSC students currently enrolled in graduate school, their undergraduate experiences or previous graduate school experiences were predominantly positive, and said they looked forward to graduate school while attending ILE. Some wanted to build on their undergraduate experience, and said they would have begun a master's degree immediately following graduation if they had been able to financially. One student described his undergraduate experience as very positive and was looking forward to graduate school. Another CGSC student said she had a generally positive attitude toward graduate school as a result of her undergraduate experience and the classes she took as part of her master's program. Her positive attitude toward graduate school was consistent with Erikson and Bandura's view that success or failure is dependent not only on one's current situation, but also on what has occurred in the past (Bandura, 2001; Lemme, 2006).

Another student's positive academic experience influenced her decision to initially pursue a second master's degree through the MMAS program, although she eventually dropped from that program due to other reasons. One student's positive experience as an undergraduate, graduate, and law student influenced his interest in pursuing an additional master's degree, but he decided instead to set his sights on a doctoral degree at some time in the future.

Another student who expressed a positive view of graduate school said it was good to have “the experience of learning more,” and that he learned how to conduct research in graduate school, and to “actually start thinking, more than just passing tests.” One student said his undergraduate experience was very positive, as well as his graduate school experience, which he thought was professionally rewarding. Another said his experience at West Point was positive, but that his master’s degree experience was a terrific broadening experience.

For CGSC students whose previous academic experience was less positive, some still expressed an interest in graduate school because they wanted to continue learning and further develop the expertise they had gained as an undergraduate. Others said their previous attempts at graduate school were unsuccessful, but their lack of success was not a deterrent, but rather encouraged them to continue to try. Only one student said he was glad to be done with his college experience, and did not have any interest in going back to anything similar. Not that he thought it was particularly bad, but rather that it simply was not something he enjoyed.

Conclusions

Conclusions and the implications of this research emerged from a purposeful sampling of CGSC students who volunteered to be interviewed to share their perspectives on deciding whether or not to attend graduate school. The following implications are suggested by the results of this research. Perceptions of military career requirements and post-military service career requirements varied. For CGSC students enrolled in a master’s program, they did so because they believed it would benefit their career, both from a competitive viewpoint and a retention viewpoint. For CGSC students not enrolled, while they also recognized the

value of a master's degree to their success in a military career, in most cases they had already earned a master's and were glad they did not have to devote additional time and energy into completing one on top of the already rigorous CGSC academic burden. It is noteworthy that only 3 of the 14 students *not* enrolled in a master's program did not already have one; that was the most common reason given for not pursuing a master's degree—they had one already.

1. Most CGSC students interviewed expressed a sense that they had to earn a master's degree while attending CGSC if they didn't already have one. They viewed CGSC as their only opportunity to earn a master's degree. Few of the students interviewed expressed any expectation of being selected for a fully funded master's degree program, so for them, this was their only chance, and they felt pressure to take advantage of it. When asked what advice their HRC branch assignment manager (career advisor) provided them about graduate school while attending CGSC, none of the students interviewed said their branch manager recommended enrolling in graduate school. All of the students said their branch manager at HRC advised them to focus on doing well in CGSC and preparing for their next assignment.

2. All CGSC students interviewed who were enrolled in a graduate program said they had the full support of their spouse or that their spouse would support them and continue to manage family responsibilities while he or she pursued a master's degree. The decision to take time away from family activities and the marital relationship was expressed by the students in terms that communicated the importance of remaining competitive for promotion and retention, and that the sacrifice was necessary. This support was forthcoming in the absence of a full understanding of what enrolling in graduate school would entail in terms of

class hours, additional study requirements, additional time spent outside of the home, and so forth. In most cases, the influence of family on the decision about graduate school extended equally to both groups of CGSC students, those enrolled and those not enrolled. In nearly all instances, spouses were consulted, the decision was made jointly, and the possible sacrifices were considered. For CGSC students who enrolled in graduate school, it was a joint decision made by both husband and wife. For those who did not enroll, most often it was due to the time away from the family a master's degree program would require. For many, this was a sacrifice they did not view as essential, nor were they willing to make.

3. Most of the students interviewed expressed high levels of self-efficacy, confidence, and a sense that whatever the "mission," they were going to be successful—"can-do." For most of the students interviewed, not being successful or failing was not an option they considered—they were going to succeed and earn their master's degree, no matter what the cost or how hard it was going to be. In most cases, they have returned from combat deployments where they were successful in a wide range of circumstances for which they had no prior training or experience. In other cases, their training mission in preparation to deploy or in support of units already deployed was such a significant challenge they sometimes said they might as well have *been* deployed—they often returned home after a long duty day or after *many* long duty days only to find their spouse or family already in bed. They described an expectation of being successful in their new circumstances, whether the CGSC classroom or a graduate school classroom, because they have been successful before in their military careers in very challenging assignments.

The CGSC students interviewed described how they set goals for themselves and planned how to achieve those goals. They were usually successful, which relates to the

previous implication regarding their level of self efficacy, but the point is they are goal- and achievement-oriented. When they recognize the value of achieving a goal, they will determine a way to be successful, sometimes regardless of the personal sacrifice. If provided an opportunity for self-improvement, such as earning a master's degree while attending CGSC, and they view this as having value, it will happen. This research has shown that most CGSC students who do not have a master's degree will exert a great deal of effort to earn one while attending ILE. Of the 26 CGSC students interviewed, most of those *not* enrolled already had a master's degree; only 3 of the 14 students interviewed did not. Many of the students who had a master's degree said if they had not earned one before arriving at CGSC, they would be in a master's program because they thought it was an unspoken requirement for commissioned officers to have a graduate degree.

The influence of previous academic experience on their decision about graduate school varied. Some CGSC students who had a positive undergraduate experience were optimistic about pursuing a master's degree, but others with similarly positive experiences said it did not play a major role in their decision. For those individuals for whom previous academic experiences did not influence their decision, other factors were more influential. One individual tried on two previous occasions to earn a master's degree, but was overcome by the demands of work; he enrolled upon arriving at CGSC, however, and was able to successfully earn his master's degree this time. For CGSC students not enrolled in a master's program, only one individual was concerned about being successful with both the CGSC academic demands and those of graduate school, and chose to focus on CGSC. Even that individual, however, was confident in her ability to earn a master's degree at some point, just not now.

4. Most of the students interviewed described how busy they were in their previous assignment, whether deployed overseas or stationed back in the U.S. In some instances, students said they had only a few weeks after returning from a deployment to reunite with the spouse and family, make arrangements to move their household, and arrive at Fort Leavenworth to begin the next phase of their career in an academic environment. Many expressed a sense of exhaustion, both physically and mentally, in addition to stress at the adjustments they have had to make in transitioning from high-paced work environments to the academic environment at CGSC. For CGSC students enrolled in a master's program, they made trade-offs between time with family, time devoted to CGSC academic requirements, and personal time. For others, achieving this balance and managing the limited available time to pursue a master's degree was too hard, and those chose not to make those trade-offs.

5. Many students said they enrolled in a master's degree program because they felt they "should" or they were told to, that CGSC was the place where you could "check the block" on the perceived master's degree requirement as an Army officer. Few of the students interviewed, whether enrolled in a master's degree program or not, expressed a sense of realizing the value of a master's degree beyond that of improving their Officer Record Brief. Only a few expressed their perception that a master's degree program was an intellectual development process, and that much of the benefit of graduate school resulted not from earning the degree, but the from the development of increased critical thinking skills and a broader view of the world beyond the military perspective.

Implications

1. The personal cost of earning a master's degree while attending CGSC was a cost most students interviewed said they were willing to pay. From their perspective, they have already been successful in much more challenging environments, whether deployed or working in a high-stress, high-tempo assignment in the U.S., and they were willing to pay whatever the cost to take advantage of the opportunity to earn a master's degree. Likewise, in most cases students said their spouses were of a similar mind, that is, they also agreed that it was important to use this opportunity to earn a master's degree for the benefit of their family's security. Some students interviewed explained that their spouse was already used to taking care of their children on her own (most were female), and that it wasn't too difficult to continue that same practice to a large extent.

2. In many interviews, students described their lack of understanding about what it was going to take to successfully complete the CGSC academic requirements while also pursuing a master's degree. In a similar fashion, they described their spouse's lack of understanding of what graduate school entailed with respect to additional workload, late hours studying, hours researching at the library, and so forth. In some cases, students said this lack of a clear understanding of the magnitude of work required in graduate school resulted in either the student or the spouse becoming either overwhelmed or discouraged and disenchanted with the whole idea of graduate school. Initial support sometimes was reduced to grudging acceptance of what students described as "more of the same," meaning the spouse was on her own most the time to take care of everything at home, the same as she was when the officer was deployed.

3. The sense expressed by many of the students enrolled in graduate school was that while success was not a foregone conclusion, it was fully expected. However, some of the students interviewed said they were surprised at the academic rigor of the CGSC curriculum, and at how much reading and preparation for class they had to do. Adding the additional burden of a master's degree program on top of the CGSC academic workload was unexpected, and several students said they had moments when they were unsure whether they had made the right decision or not, but most persevered, regardless of the cost to their personal lives. Their perspective was that nothing they were going to face at either CGSC or in graduate school was going to be any harder than what they have already faced, and at which they have been successful in the past. The "can-do" attitude prevalent in military organizations, to some extent, bled over into the academic environment of CGSC and graduate school. CGSC students enrolled in graduate school said that once they had made the decision, there was no turning back, no acceptance of failure, or even serious consideration of it.

4. The realization that most CGSC students without a graduate degree will try to earn one while attending ILE has implications for the college in terms of class scheduling, the length of class days, and extra time for those students to split their focus between the CGSC academic requirements and graduate school. Despite the physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion upon arriving at CGSC described by many students in their interviews, they still viewed CGSC as a break from the high-paced operational environment they just left. For some, the additional stress of CGSC and a master's degree program can be overwhelming, and can impact some students' overall academic performance (Shea, 2010). Many said they expect to return to that same high-paced environment after they graduate. If

Army officers coming to CGSC think a master's degree is required for their continued success, which was a perspective addressed by many students in their interviews, most will try to earn one before they leave, often at great cost to themselves and their families.

5. The pressure to earn a master's degree while attending CGSC in order to "check the block" as part of what some CGSC students described as an expected part of their professional development as officers sometimes led to poor degree choices. Some CGSC students said they enrolled in a master's degree program because they were told to by a senior leader. Others said they chose the one that granted the most number of credit hours toward the master's from CGSC. Another rationale for which master's program to enroll in was that classes only met on the weekends, which provided more time at home during the week with the family. Students interviewed described a wide range of criteria used to select a master's degree program, but only a few developed criteria that related to their area of expertise, academic interests, or utility either while still on active duty or after leaving the service. CGSC students said that convenience, scheduling, and ease of completion were often the overriding considerations.

Recommendations

1. The importance of earning a master's degree, particularly earning one while attending CGSC, should be clarified from several different perspectives. Department of Defense, Department of the Army, Training and Doctrine Command, the Combined Arms Center, and CGSC all need to contribute to clarifying what mid-grade officers should strive for academically in the military careers. The lack of clear guidance, or conflicting guidance, is a detriment to the career decision making of CGSC students. Senior leadership in the U.S. Army (Dempsey, 2001; Petraeus, 2007) extol the virtues of graduate school as a broadening

experience that has multiple benefits to the Army beyond just the credential. Personnel managers at HRC, however, did not advise any of the officers interviewed that earning a master's degree should be a goal of theirs while attending CGSC. Rather, when asked, they recommended focusing on doing well in their CGSC studies and preparing themselves for their next assignment. Senior leaders and mentors in units from which CGSC students come, when they provided any advice about a master's degree while attending CGSC (which was not often), recommended getting one, usually without any further guidance with respect to major area of study or topic. Department of Defense and Department of the Army publications provide a wide range of leader development, continuing education, and personnel policies with respect to graduate school, but only a few of the CGSC students interviewed were familiar with those policies.

2. There is a need for a better understanding of what CGSC and graduate school require in terms of time, effort, and work. The spouse and family invariably support a CGSC student when he or she has decided to pursue a master's degree without a clear understanding of the academic workload involved with attending CGSC, what graduate school entails in terms of additional workload, or how either academic endeavor is going to impact them. CGSC should provide greater clarity of what the students and their spouses can expect when they arrive. Many of the students interviewed said they did not have a clear picture of what to expect, how hard it was going to be academically, or how much extra time they would have to pursue a master's degree. The lack of useful information or guidance from their peers who previously attended CGSC, or from their leaders who attended a decade or more ago, only contributed to their ignorance. The welcome letter provided by the college addresses a wide range of important information for incoming students, but is only able to

provide a couple of paragraphs concerning graduate school. The college leadership, the Human Resources Command personnel managers (assignment officers), and senior leaders in the operational force need to provide clearer guidance so CGSC students and their families have a better understanding of what will be required of them.

3. A more detailed description of the various master's degree program available, and the academic requirements *those* involve, in addition to the CGSC workload, but provide greater clarity to incoming students trying to weigh the cost of graduate school. Without a clear understanding of the academic requirements and challenges of a master's degree program in *addition* to the CGSC curriculum, many students said they found themselves struggling a lot more than they expected early on in the academic year. This unexpected struggle could be alleviated with a better explanation and description of what both CGSC and graduate school requires. The prevalent attitude on the part of CGSC students that they can accomplish any mission, regardless of the personal cost or sacrifice, based on their operational experiences over the past decade, can result in them taking on a greater burden than they expect or realize until it is too late. A description of the typical duty day for CGSC students, how much time they can expect to spend in class each day, how much reading they will usually have, and preparation time required to fully participate in the classrooms discussions would help set the stage for clear expectations.

4. Given the fact that many CGSC students have arrived from very fast-paced assignments, and that they are going to pursue a graduate degree at whatever the cost, the college could provide some indirect support to their efforts. Shorter class days, more predictability in the class schedule, increased number of individual research days, whether for CGSC studies or graduate school, would all provide greater flexibility and increased

“margin of power” for those master’s students. Several of the senior service colleges, such as the Army War College and the Naval War College, schedule a break from classes every week for individual study, research, and reflection. A similar program at CGSC could provide additional “breathing space” for new students arriving at CGSC from exhausting operational assignments.

5. A more robust program of mentorship, counseling, and advice on graduate school in general, and on pursuing a master’s degree while attending CGSC, could fill perceived gap students described between what they believe, what their leaders in units advise them, and what their branch managers at HRC have told them. The disconnect between the most senior leadership, such as the Chief of Staff of the Army, and the lower level leadership, such as battalion and brigade commanders, and the personnel managers at HRC contributes to this gap. A clear description of the benefits of a master’s degree program in terms of professional development as an officer, in terms of improved critical thinking and communication skills, and in terms of personal gain from lifelong learning, all packaged in a single document or pamphlet, could help CGSC students begin to realize the value of a master’s degree beyond just a “check the box.” The U.S. Army already has a mentorship program as part of its leader development doctrine, but students interviewed did not express much value in the advice or mentorship they received about earning a master’s degree while attending CGSC.

Recommendations for Future Research

Impact/value of MMAS in civilian context.

The students’ perspectives on the impact of earning an MMAS in the civilian job market, or when comparing its value to that of a master’s degree earned from a civilian university was surprising. Additional research to determine if there is a value-added

component associated with the MMAS would be useful to future CGSC students, in particular with respect to their decisions regarding graduate school. Interviews with MMAS graduates, surveys sent to MMAS graduates after leaving the service and seeking employment in the civilian sector, and discussions with CGSC student enrolled in the MMAS program to determine their decision making process would benefit the college, its administration, and future CGSC students.

Sequencing decision making with respect to graduate school.

As previously described, many CGSC students interviewed made their decision about whether or not to attend graduate school before having the benefit of coaching and counseling from their faculty advisors. Moving the assignment of faculty advisors earlier in order to enable those key instructors to meet with and discuss the upcoming academic year and what it will entail could be beneficial to the students and to the instructors teaching them. Moving the enrollment dates for the various civilian universities is somewhat outside the purview of this research, but would have the same effect. Some incoming CGSC students will have already made up their minds, and research showed that they did so sometimes before their arrival, but for others the research indicates they would have benefited from a little more guidance and a better understanding of what they were about to experience academically in ILE. Previous academic experience, the success or lack of success as an undergraduate, the pace of requirements and workload of the CGSC curriculum, and the differences between various master's degree programs all are topics on which CGSC students could use some additional advice.

Achievement of educational outcomes through shorter class days.

Time management and optempo of the CGSC academic year is a two-sided challenge for many students. Despite their extensive experience dealing with training schedules, short suspenses, and a nearly constant focus on meeting deadlines, managing personal time, academic time, and family time leaves some students struggling to make ends meet. The college proudly describes its long-term association with several civilian institutions, some for several decades, but at the same time it has shown a tendency toward filling each day with academic activities in the classrooms, guest speakers, and mandatory attendance for accountability, all of which detract from the “margin of power” CGSC students need to pursue a master’s degree. Shortening the academic day to something closer to 4 hours of classtime each day, or providing a day for individual research each week would help alleviate some of the challenges CGSC students face. Research on determining the feasibility of a shorter class day or a day for individual research while still achieving the prescribed ILE learning objectives and educational outcomes could prove fruitful.

The uniqueness of the CGSC student body.

Officers attending CGSC are unlike students attending civilian graduate schools. They are usually older, more experienced, and more focused on achieving whatever objectives they have set for themselves. While civilian university graduate students are motivated and success-oriented, the CGSC students have over a decade of focusing on mission accomplishment, problem solving, and allocating resources to achieve their goals. Research that compares and contrasts the CGSC study body to a notional civilian student body would inform both the college policies and procedures with respect to ILE and to graduate school, and would also inform the civilian university graduate programs.

Extrapolation to satellite campuses.

The four CGSC satellite campuses teach only the Common Core, the first semester of the ILE academic year. Their students are mostly non-operational branch officers, but the classes are not comprised of only functional area officers; there is some mixing of operational career field and non-operational career field, such as comptrollers, finance, nuclear surety, acquisition, and so forth. Many of the non-operational career field officers attending CGSC at a satellite campus have already earned a master's degree as part of their functional area qualification. Determining how they made *their* respective decisions about graduate school would supplement the research conducted on resident, predominantly operational career field officers.

Longitudinal study.

Repeating some form of the interviews and analysis over time would help determine if the conclusions reached as a result of this particular academic year remain the same or similar over time, or if they showed a trend in one direction or another. While such research may be too resource-intensive to be conducted every year, periodic revisiting of the research questions and interviews with a similar cohort of CGSC students would help determine the validity of the conclusions reached in this research and whether recommended changes have had a positive impact over time.

Reflections

The interviews with individual CGSC students served as a reminder of how difficult their lives are in many cases. Family separations due to numerous, repetitive deployments to dangerous regions of the world, take their toll. The level of dedication and persistence exhibited by nearly all the students who participated in the study was encouraging to the

researcher in several respects. The adjustment to an academic environment, CGSC, after a decade or more of focusing on operational requirements of two wars, is not easily achieved. The impact of multiple deployments, separations from family members, extended duration training, preparation, and recovery from combat operations, all have left their marks on our students. The stress of combat is well-documented in military medical writings, and the adjustments many of the CGSC students have had to make, are becoming manifest in the classrooms.

In Closing

Despite the challenges many CGSC students face, academically, socially, physically, and so forth, many of them made time in their already busy schedules to share their perspectives in this research effort. They willingly opened themselves to a stranger from “the other side of the building,” where they only rarely venture, in order to provide the college a greater understanding of how they decide whether or not to attend graduate school while at CGSC. For that, the researcher is deeply grateful and hopes that whatever the final result of this research, it represents those students who participated in a fair and accurate light, and tells their stories as they would want them told.

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Appendix A - KSU IRB Approval



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TO: Dr. Sarah J. Fishback
Educational Leadership
354 Bluemont Hall

Proposal Number: 5836

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair 
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: April 19, 2011

RE: Proposal Entitled, "Determination of factors that impact a Command and General Staff College student's decision to attend civilian graduate school"

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects / Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Kansas State University has reviewed the proposal identified above and has determined that it is EXEMPT from further IRB review. This exemption applies only to the proposal - as written – and currently on file with the IRB. Any change potentially affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation and may disqualify the proposal from exemption.

Based upon information provided to the IRB, this activity is exempt under the criteria set forth in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, **45 CFR §46.101, paragraph b, category: 2, subsection: ii.**

Certain research is exempt from the requirements of HHS/OHRP regulations. A determination that research is exempt does not imply that investigators have no ethical responsibilities to subjects in such research; it means only that the regulatory requirements related to IRB review, informed consent, and assurance of compliance do not apply to the research.

Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, the University Research Compliance Office, and if the subjects are KSU students, to the Director of the Student Health Center.

Appendix B - Student Survey

CGSC Student Graduate School Survey

Welcome, and thank you for your participation in this survey.

CGSC takes great pride in its heritage as a quality educational institution, and for many years has had a cooperative relationship with various graduate schools. Many students have taken advantage of the opportunity to earn an advanced degree during their time at CGSC, either through a civilian university or the MMAS program. How each student makes his or her decision about graduate school is largely unknown and of interest to both the CGSC leadership and graduate school program directors from participating universities.

This survey is administered as part of a Kansas State University doctoral research study with the support and approval of CGSC. The purpose is to identify U.S. Army CGSC students who considered attending graduate school this academic year and either enrolled or decided not to enroll. Participation in this survey is voluntary and results will be kept confidential. If you are a U.S. Army officer and have considered graduate school while attending CGSC, you may be asked to participate in a follow-up interview. Follow-up interviews will be conducted at a time convenient to you and should only take less than 45 minutes. As with this initial survey, the interview results will also be voluntary and your responses will be kept confidential.

Please take a few minutes to complete this short survey; it should only take about 5 minutes. Completion of this survey constitutes informed consent to participate, with the understanding that participation is completely voluntary and that you may withdraw your participation at any time.

Thank you for participating in this survey. Through it, you are contributing to the sustained improvement of the CGSC academic experience and our understanding of how the graduate school programs add to that experience.

If you have any problems or questions about this survey, please contact me, Charles D. Vance, in Room 4533 of the Lewis & Clark Center; you can also call me at (913) 684-4130 or email at charles.vance@us.army.mil.

You may also contact the principal researcher, Dr. Sarah Jane Fishback, at Kansas State University, Department of Foundations and Adult Education, 355 Bluemont Hall, 1100 Mid-campus Drive, Manhattan, Kansas, 66506, or call her at (785) 532-5554.

Contact info:

{Enter answer in paragraph form}

[Name:

Phone number:

Email address:]

Thank you for participating in this survey. Please click "Finish" to submit your responses.

Appendix C - Informed Consent

Research title: How CGSC Students Decide Whether or Not to Attend Graduate School
Principal Researcher: Dr. Sarah Jane Fishback; *Co-Investigator:* Charles D. Vance

You are asked to participate in a study that examines the factors that impact CGSC students' decision making with respect to graduate school. The ultimate purpose of this research is to understand, describe, and explain how CGSC students decide whether or not to enroll in graduate school, how they make that decision, and the factors that impact on their decision.

This research study is predicated on interviews with a series of individuals beginning in September 2011 and continuing through October 2011. If you decide to assist in this project, your contribution would involve participating in a semi-structured, informal interview.

Interviews will be recorded, transcribed, and then stored at another location to ensure confidentiality and the integrity of the research. A transcript will be made available for you to check for accuracy and fidelity.

Your identity will be protected by the use of fictional names if any portion of the interview is used in the research report. Your confidentiality is paramount to the success of this research. At any time if you feel unable or unwilling to continue, you are free to withdraw your consent and stop both the process and your participation.

Problems or questions:

Please contact me: Charles D. Vance, Lewis & Clark Center, Room 4533, or call me at (913) 684-4130.

You may also contact Dr. Sarah Jane Fishback at Kansas State University, Department of Foundations and Adult Education, 355 Bluemont Hall, 1100 Mid-campus Drive, Manhattan, Kansas, 66506, or call her at (785) 532-5554.

I have read the statement above and been advised of procedures to be used in this study. I understand that this is an exploratory research project and my participation is purely voluntary. I further understand that I may withdraw my participation at any time.

Please check the one that applies:

_____ I volunteer to participate in this study

_____ I do not volunteer to participate in this study

Signature of Participant

Date

Please print your name above

Contact IRB Chair:

The institutional review Board at Kansas State University approves all research conducted with human subjects. If you have any questions about the manner in which this study is conducted, you may contact the Chairman, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, Kansas State University, 1 Fairchild Hall, Manhattan, Kansas, 66506, or call (785) 532-3224.

Appendix D - Interview Protocol

The following questions will help guide the interview. They are not intended to be rigidly adhered to, but to serve as a reminder to the researcher of the subordinate research questions that should be answered. The questions are designed to help uncover and to describe the respondent's point of view. The semi-structured interview format will start with the following list of questions, with the understanding that not only are they open-ended, but also that they may be modified based on responses from earlier participants.

Questions for CGSC students.

How did you decide whether or not to attend graduate school while attending CGSC?

[A] What was the first thing you can remember that prompted you to think about attending graduate school while here at CGSC? Second thing? Third?

[A] Was there a series of related or unrelated events that you think may have prompted you to consider enrolling in graduate school while you were at CGSC?

[A] Do you have a positive, negative, or neutral view of graduate school?

[A] Have you previously thought about how it might fit into your life?

[A] Do you think you would be successful in a graduate school program if you *did* enroll?

[A] How confident are you that you would probably be successful?

[B] What your experience been in academic activities, such as undergraduate or other adult learning activities?

[B] What are the experiences of your friends and "significant others" in your everyday life with respect to previous academic activities?

[B] Do you belong to any groups, such as fraternal organizations, volunteer, church, or civic groups, or some other organization (besides immediate family) that has expressed a perspective on education in general or, more specifically, on graduate school?

[A&B] Do you normally seek out new experiences? Are you eager to do so? Do you think you will usually be successful at new experiences?

[A&B] Do you view new experiences as having a potential for personal growth? Do you *enjoy* challenges to your accustomed way of thinking and behaving?

[A&B] Do you normally *not* seek out new experiences? Do you seek new experiences in order to achieve personal growth?

[A&B] Do you view new experiences as having the undesired potential to challenge your accustomed ways of thinking and behaving?

[C] Is having a graduate degree important to you?

[C] Do you think you would be successful in a graduate school program?

[C] Will the graduate degree provide some kind of tangible or intangible reward, such as increased job security, promotion, selection, and so forth?

[C] Would you expect to be successful in graduate school? Do you have concerns about not being successful?

[D] Do you think you are in a period of change at CGSC that may require some adjustment?

[D] How would you describe where you think you are in your “life cycle?”

[E] What impediments to enrolling in graduate school have you encountered since arriving at CGSC?

[E] Did you find them to be significant barriers to enrolling in graduate school or determining what you needed to do in order to enroll? Did you find them to be insignificant impediments?

[E] What, if anything, would have completely prevented you from enrolling in graduate school?

[E] What opportunities to enroll in graduate school were you unaware of until you began to explore the possibility?

[E] How readily were the opportunities made available to you?

[F] Did you experience any challenges or issues getting the information you thought you needed to make your decision about graduate school?

[F] Was the information accurate, timely, and helpful?

[G – AB] Have you participated in graduate school before? Have you taken any previous graduate-level classes? Was it a positive experience? Or negative?

[G – AB] How do you think it impacted your overall attitude toward education, in particular *graduate school*?

Questions for CGSC faculty.

1. How do your students decide whether or not to attend graduate school?
2. What kinds of questions do they ask you for advice on?
3. What advice do you provide your students who are considering graduate school?
4. At what point in the academic year do you become involved in your students' graduate school decisions?
5. Are most of your students already enrolled in a graduate school program the first time you counsel and coach them?
6. Under what conditions or circumstances, if any, would you recommend against an individual enrolling in your graduate program?
7. What advice do you provide your students regarding the CGSC academic workload, additional duties, and so forth? How do they usually respond to your advice?

Questions for graduate school program directors.

1. How do CGSC students decide whether or not to attend graduate school?
2. What questions do most CGSC students have?
3. What advice do you provide CGSC students?
4. Under what conditions or circumstances, if any, would you recommend against an individual enrolling in your graduate program?
5. What decision making process do CGSC students communicate to you that they are using to decide about graduate school?

Appendix E - CGSC Faculty Interviews

Informal interviews were conducted with select CGSC faculty based on the researcher's knowledge of their relative experience coaching and counseling students. The specific question they were asked to provide their perspective on was "*How do CGSC students decide whether or not to attend graduate school?*" The interviews were not recorded, but the researcher took notes, transcribed those notes into summaries, and provided to the faculty member interviewed for verification and member checking. Those summaries are provided below. Names, departments, and any other personal information that could identify the individual faculty member were deleted in order to maintain their confidentiality.

Interview #1 (July 13, 2011)

They have five main reasons they think they need to get a graduate degree while here at CGSC:

1. They want to get promoted, and they think a master's degree will either make them more competitive or help them sustain their competitive level.
2. They think a master's degree will help them after they leave active duty.
3. They have a personal goal, to earn a master's degree.
4. They want to stay busy, and do not think the CGSC curriculum is sufficiently challenging to keep them busy—applies mostly to “geographic bachelors.”
5. They think this is the last opportunity they will have to get a graduate degree; “not gonna happen anytime in the future.”

And some really do just have a “love of learning.” An example was the student who already had a PhD and simply wanted to earn another master’s degree while the opportunity presented itself.

Interview #2 (July 13, 2011)

For students thinking about a non-MMAS graduate degree, what is topmost in their minds is how a graduate degree will be beneficial both while on active duty and after leaving the service:

They think it will be a discriminator in their post-Army job search.

They think this is probably going to be their last, and best, opportunity to get a graduate degree.

The geographic bachelors think it will help keep them busy and keep their minds off not being with their families.

Many students simply guess. They think they may need a master’s degree of one kind or another, usually do not really understand the differences between the programs, are unclear or unsure what they think they may do post-Army, so they just pick one.

In virtually all cases, a CGSC student who is interested in graduate school has already enrolled in one of the graduate school programs before talking to a faculty member or staff group advisor. The graduate school briefings occur during in-processing, which is a week or more before the staff groups have been sorted and student assignments are complete. Many students have already decided they want to attend a graduate school program before they even arrive at Fort Leavenworth.

CGSC students do not know how busy they are going to be, what the ILE course workload is going to be, or whether it will be a truly full-time job or not.

Interview #3 (July 21, 2011)

They have a perception that it will be a “ding” on the record (perhaps promulgated by HRC, but not sure) if they do not have an advanced degree when considered for promotion or selection for command.

Initial counseling occurs within the first two weeks of class. I use a *Developmental Timeline* framework to help students talk about where they want to be and what they want to be doing at different times along their career progression. It includes columns for personal and professional development, as well as family development in terms of children’s ages, school year, and so forth. The timeline is a useful construct to portray where potential conflict may occur, such as between possible battalion command and a son’s or daughter’s senior year in high school or freshman year in college.

I advise my students that they need to consider the “whole person” concept when thinking about graduate school. The CGSC curriculum will compete for their time and energy if they are also working on a civilian graduate degree or an MMAS. Any family issues, medical issues, or personal challenges should be taken into consideration. For geographic bachelors or bachelorettes, they may find it easier to find the extra time required to complete both sets of academic requirements.

I also ask them to consider their own physical, mental, and spiritual well-being over the course of the upcoming academic year. For students coming from a recent deployment, getting back in shape in terms of a regular PT program may be in order. They need to ask

themselves whether or not they think they may be suffering from some form of PTSD or other mental or psychiatric affects.

The timing of their decision about graduate school is significant. The students have already participated in the Professional Education Day activities during in-processing, been exposed to the graduate school opportunities available, and perhaps made financial commitments to one of the graduate programs before our first counseling session.

Interview #4 (July 21, 2011)

I ask my students to spend some time thinking about graduate school, but not to rush into a decision. Many seem to think this may be the only chance they are going to have to get a graduate degree and do not want to miss the opportunity. I try and help them look at the upcoming academic year from a couple of different perspectives. Certainly it is an opportunity to get a master's degree, but it is also an opportunity to re-connect with their family and loved ones, as well as time to recharge their batteries after a year or more of deployments, high optempo, and long workdays.

Few students have a clear understanding of what their academic workload is going to be during CGSC. The four to six-hour class day can easily extend into a seven or even eight-hour workday with the dynamic class schedule. Appreciation of what that means, how it may impact their daily and weekly rhythm, and what might suffer if additional time and energy is taken up with a graduate school class is not always clearly understood.

Some students think they need a master's degree to remain competitive in their branch or career field. This may be a misconception on their part or some "unspoken truth" promulgated by their branch assignment officers, but it is not official policy.

Advanced degrees require both a cognitive and emotional commitment: cognitive commitment in terms of having the academic ability to read, write, and communicate at a higher level than perhaps they have grown accustomed to since graduating from college so many years ago; emotional commitment in terms of having a genuine desire to earn an advanced degree that will not wither in the face of adversity, challenge, and sometimes disappointment. I liken the experience to a marathon, an activity that requires some patience, fortitude, and endurance.

Interview #5 (July 21, 2011)

Some students are pressured by their gaining command to get a master's degree while they are here. Others were pressured, or strongly advised, by their losing command to do so, perhaps as part of an exit briefing or counseling. The gaining commands sometimes pressure ILE students to come with an advanced degree from ILE because they will not have time to pursue such a degree in the unit. Officers they have talked to from that unit have told them it would be better to come with an advanced degree.

Most students see this year as an opportunity not only to learn what the CGSC curriculum has to offer, but also to improve their academic credentials. In most cases they prefer a classroom setting ("brick and mortar") to an online educational experience.

Students want to know if the MMAS really counts as a graduate degree or if it only has meaning or significance in a military, or Army, environment. I tell them CGSC is an accredited institution.

Some students have already signed up for a graduate program by the first coaching session. The Webster program seems to be popular, although I have had students in all the available advanced degree programs. It is not clear to me what the motivation is, however,

for an MBA from Webster University, and the students are not always able to clearly articulate its attraction either.

Students think they are going to have time to pursue a master's degree while at CGSC. They do not really understand the academic workload. Sometimes they have been advised by senior officers who attended CGSC nearly two decades ago when the workload was different (less, perhaps). Most senior leaders do not realize the difference between the "legacy" course and ILE.

Interview #6 (August 3, 2011)

In many cases, students say their branch managers strongly encourage them to get a master's degree while at CGSC. They are not exactly told they *have* to get one, but are "encouraged."

The perspective of the college leadership has evolved over the past five or six years. At one time, CGSC students were told to try and take advantage of all the additional activities that are available to them, to include the opportunity to get a master's degree. Both the military master's degree (MMAS) and the civilian advanced degrees were highly recommended. This year the college leadership, to include the Deputy Commandant and the CGSS Director, have clearly stated that earning a master's degree is secondary to successful completion of the ILE curriculum. It seems they realize that not everyone has to time, energy, resources, or ability to fully participate in the CGSC academic experience and pursue a graduate degree at the same time. Some can, and some do, but many begin and find themselves overwhelmed by trying to do both. Invariably, when faced with deciding between full application of effort to either ILE or a master's degree, the ILE work took second place. This is a situation the college leadership wants to avoid.

Enrollment in a graduate program often occurs before staff group advisors or faculty members have had an opportunity to meet one-on-one with the students in the initial coaching session. The MMAS overview briefing does not occur until sometime the first week of classes, and enrollment is not until several weeks later. Civilian graduate school classes for new students begin the first week of CGSC classes, so many students have already bought books, paid tuition, and perhaps even attended one or two classes by the time a faculty member has discussed the ramifications of graduate school with an individual.

Some students do not seem to appreciate the time and effort required to complete a master's program while attending CGSC. They do not know what the ILE academic workload or the graduate school academic workload is going to be, but sign up for graduate school anyway. Often it does not seem that they have even discussed the issue with family or spouse, almost as if the decision is theirs to make and does not impact the home.

The "type A" personality, "I can do whatever I set my mind to" mentality often seems to present itself in individuals. They do not want to be told that something may be too hard or too much; they believe they can overcome whatever challenges they may face. Some students do not appear to have considered the "big picture" and are focused on getting as much as they can from the CGSC experience while they have the chance.

Appendix F - Graduate Program Director Interviews

Informal interviews were conducted with the program directors for each of the graduate schools that have a presence on Fort Leavenworth. The specific question they were asked to provide their perspective on was “*How do CGSC students decide whether or not to attend graduate school?*” The interviews were not recorded; the researcher took notes, transcribed those notes into summaries, and provided the summaries to the program directors for verification and member checking. Aggregate summaries of those interviews are provided below. Any personal information that could identify the individual was deleted in order to maintain their confidentiality.

Graduate program directors.

Many students walk in after getting a recommendation from a previous student. One Air Force major in particular was basically told by an Air Force general officer that he *would* attend [graduate school] while he was at CGSC. Not sure how serious he was or whether it was actually a lawful order, but he got the point that earning a master’s degree while at CGSC was a smart move. Other alumni have recommended [graduate school] to incoming CGSC students, so they must have had a positive experience.

The biggest single concern they express is with getting promoted. Most CGSC students want to make lieutenant colonel, and despite high promotion rates they also are aware of the impending force reduction and do not want to get caught short-handed.

Another concern relates to what they want to do after leaving military service. Many students are thinking about their post-military career and want to try to set themselves up for a successful second career. They view a graduate degree as a key component of that solution set. One of the first questions we ask is which graduate degree they think they want and have

them talk through why they think that is the best one for them. Applicability is a key consideration in this discussion: are they going to be able to use their degree later in life, or will it just be a “check in the box” on their Officer Record Brief? They usually want a degree that will be useful after military service, but some also want to be able to use what they learn while still on active duty.

The number of credit hours required for the degree is attractive. [Our graduate school] only requires students to take six 3-credit hour classes. Students get credit for 18 credit hours from their CGSC coursework, which combines for a total of 36 hours for their master’s degree. This means they can take one class at a time, which positively impacts their additional workload. The schedules are flexible, but generally meet Friday evenings and Saturday every other weekend, which most students seem to like.

There is a concerted effort to recognize and appreciate the stress many CGSC students have been under with multiple deployments to operational assignments overseas. Many students have only recently returned from a combat zone or actual battlefield, and with all the other adjustments they are finding themselves trying to make adding an additional stressor to their lives is not helpful. Injecting humor in the initial meetings seems to be a great help, particularly when introducing the “stress balls.” Humor “breaks the ice,” and you can sometimes see a physical response from individuals in terms of reduced tension in their posture and expression.

Flexibility is a big consideration. The [graduate school] schedule for the academic year is designed with the CGSC schedule in mind with respect to federal holidays, winter and spring breaks, and so forth. If the students are not scheduled to attend CGSC classes, we try not to make them have to attend [graduate school] classes. If they find themselves getting a

late start in the program, they can either make up classes or extend the time to graduation. Students have up to seven years to finish their coursework, and there are over sixty [graduate school] sites across the US, Canada, and Mexico they can transfer to if unable to complete during the CGSC academic year.

The students are concerned with getting a graduate degree from a legitimate institution; they do not want a piece of paper from a “diploma mill.” They ask about instructor credentials, and we make an effort to provide them information about our faculty, who are all PhDs with considerable teaching experience.

Cost is not usually a major concern. Some students prefer to use post-911 GI Bill benefits, but others try to save that for their family members and use the tuition assistance instead. On the other hand, the tuition assistance program incurs an additional service obligation that may not fit in with an individual’s personal timeline. We point out that attending CGSC already incurs an additional service obligation, and they run concurrently, so the service obligation from using tuition assistance is usually negligible.

The writing assistance center and library are useful to the students. Many have not written academic papers in over a decade, and find it very helpful to receive assistance with their writing. The librarian is flown in and provides an overview of the services available to all the students in terms of books, articles, and other materials for their research.

Most CGSC students are looking for an advantage, something to help improve their competitiveness for promotion. They view a graduate degree as a discriminator when their records appear before selection boards.

They also are thinking about their post-military career. Most students are past the mid-way point in their military careers, and many have no intention of remaining on active

duty after reaching 20 years' service. They have served their country, in many cases been on multiple deployments and spent a lot of years away from their families, and want to still have a family after two decades of military service. They are looking for a graduate degree that will be useful in their second career, and often have a pretty good idea what that second career is going to be.

I try to help them select a degree in an unemotional manner. Sometimes CGSC students come in and say they want a master's degree--any will do--they just need a degree. Some students already know they want in terms of the type of master's degree available.

I try to provide them information and counseling about what degrees we offer, how they might fit in with their future plans and post-military career, and encourage them to make a rational, unemotional decision about graduate school. I spend time explaining to them what to expect in terms of the CGSC academic experience, what a typical day is like in terms of class hours, reading, homework, guest speakers, and so forth, so they can see how graduate school fits in.

Our class schedules offer a lot of flexibility to the students, which they seem to appreciate. Classes meet in the evenings, Monday through Thursday; there are no weekend classes. Each semester is only six weeks long, so it goes quickly. They can attend class either one night a week or two nights a week, depending on what they think their CGSC academic load is going to be. For the MBA, they have to attend class two nights a week in order to complete the additional requirements in the scheduled ten months.

We grant 12 to 15 credit hours toward their master's degree from CGSC coursework; they need to complete an additional 21 to 24 hours to meet the 36 credit hour requirement.

Cost is not usually an issue. Some students prefer to use their post-911 GI Bill benefits, whereas others want to save that for their family members. Students also have tuition assistance available, although taking advantage of that program may entail an additional service obligation that they do not want. We talk through different alternatives and arrive at an amenable solution.