Improvise. Adapt. Overcome: Identifying military-acquired, non-cognitive attributes guiding
student-veteran success in community college

by

Carlos Antonio Garanzuay

B.A., Texas A&M University-Corpus Christ, 2010
M.A., Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, 2013

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Adult Learning and Leadership
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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to identify non-cognitive attributes learned from enlisted military service that can guide student-veterans to success in higher education. Community colleges are showing poor completion rates for all the efforts toward student success and completion. Non-traditional students persist to completion and student success using a predominant set of non-cognitive attributes to overcome academic and cultural deficiencies typical of their demographic. As a niche subset of the non-traditional population, student-veterans are equipped with various non-cognitive attributes gained during their enlisted military service which they use to face unique challenges related to transitioning out of the military culture and into the culture of higher education.

This study sought to capture and ascertain the lived experiences of successfully completed student-veterans that managed to effectively transition out of the military culture and into the culture of higher education utilizing a primarily grounded theory approach. The researcher performed a qualitative study to identify and understand the types of non-cognitive attributes student-veterans obtained during enlisted military service which were later used to earn academic success and program completion in a community college, or postsecondary education. Eighteen successfully completed student-veterans were gathered through snowball-sampling, which represented a diverse, intersected crosscutting of demographics. The researcher conducted interviews implementing a semi-structured, open-ended interview protocol. This flexible interview decorum supported the process of data gathering as veterans shared their personal experiences transitioning from the military culture into the culture of higher education, earning a completion credential and academic success. The guiding research questions of this study included: 1) What attributes learned through enlisted military experience translate to student

success in higher education?; 2) What attributes learned through enlisted military experience correlate with the non-cognitive skills exhibited by non-traditional students that lead to success in higher education?; 3) How can student-veterans effectively apply their enlisted military experience as it relates to their student experience in higher education?

This study identified eleven themes which surfaced from interviews with research participants: Commitment/Discipline, Communication/Self-Advocacy, Leadership/Team-building/Military Core values, Goal-setting and Planning, Adaptability, Responsibility/Accountability, Self-awareness, Confidence in self/ability, Time Management, Perspective of risk/consequence, and Caution. The three predominant non-cognitive attributes characteristic of the larger non-traditional student population were present among student-veterans, although only two were identified as among the predominant attributes in this study. The following themes emerged from interviews as opportunities student-veterans can best apply their non-cognitive attributes: Identify scenarios which military attributes are appropriate and applicable, Network/Seek guidance, Establish personal habits/routines, Plan/prepare for transition before separation, Adapt rather than impose, Exercise cultural awareness/understanding, and Identify parallel structures that exist in both military and higher education worlds. The emergent themes led to recommendations for community college and higher education leaders to develop cultural competencies on campus which validate the experiences and identities of student-veterans, build cultural acclimation bridges that allow student-veterans to wholly transfer their identity and attributes to their postsecondary experience, and manufacture an integration process that elevates student-veteran completion rates that may also positively impact other non-traditional student demographics for greater overall completion rates and student success.

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Approved by: Approved by:

Co-Major Professor   Co-Major Professor
Dr. John Roueche   Dr. Steven Gonzales

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Dedication

To veterans learning to find their way post-service, people still fear what they do not understand. They do not fear you, personally. They may likely fear they will never fully understand what you have sacrificed for them.

Chapter I - Introduction

Introduction

Student-veterans are a vulnerable population of students as they reintegrate to a civilian society while navigating an oft-unfamiliar educational system. Meanwhile, institutions of higher education are investing more resources – even as state funding is dwindling - in an attempt to support student-veterans' academic success with relatively little research to guide the development of such programs. The purpose of this study is to identify non-cognitive attributes learned from enlisted military service that can guide student-veterans to success in higher education. While research has increased in recent years, the amount of research into the student-veteran population is relatively barren. Therefore, the collection of such research could offer institutions of higher education better insight to understanding student-veterans, resulting in more effective use of resources to support this population. Furthermore, it could improve student-veterans' perception of the identity transition process experienced as they integrate into the culture of higher education.

The U.S. government recognized the need to support veterans returning from military service as far back as 1944. After the Great Depression and World War I, resources such as money, housing, and health coverage were provided through the Serviceman's Readjustment Act, later known as the G.I. Bill (Kowalski, 2016). Using this newfound support from the U.S. government, America's "Greatest Generation" was born. The influx of military veterans into higher education contributed heavily to the burgeoning number of community colleges across the country (Spaulding, 2000).

Today, the number of veterans seeking to further their education is still sizeable. In 2013, Cook and Kim (2009) expected over 1 million student-veterans received military education

benefits. The Student Veterans of America (2021) reported almost 896,000 GI Bill beneficiaries, as of spring 2021. Although earned education benefits through military service is considered an advantage, Bauman (2009) notes student-veterans experience the unique process of reconciling a deeply embedded military-based identity role while transitioning into the civilian population - specifically higher education. Many of the qualities acquired and honed through enlisted military service do not translate to a post-military life, especially in a community college. Ackerman, DiRamio and Mitchell (2008) identified struggles veterans faced, such as financial issues, lack of academic preparation, and relational obstacles affiliated with attending an institution of higher education. A study by Rumann and Hamrick (2010) observed the impacts of military-peer engagement and non-military peer engagement, noting that non-military peer engagement often perpetuated stereotypes of military veterans. Schiavone and Gentry (2014) revealed that life experiences and experiences gained through military service left student-veterans feeling a greater disconnect with non-military, academic peers. Research on student-veterans is valuable and sparse, and the abundance of current research primarily focuses on challenges and obstacles rather than keys to success (Williams-Klotz & Gansemer-Topf, 2017). As a result, community colleges often lack the guiding insight to best utilize resources and develop programs or strategies directed at student-veterans supporting academic success.

As DiRamio et al. (2008) point out, lack of academic preparation – a common characteristic of non-traditional students - is often regarded as a significant obstacle to student success. However, research recognizes underprepared students rely on more than academic preparedness to generate student success. Students considered academically underprepared that achieve student success, exhibit specific sets of non-cognitive attributes to obtain that success (Amey & Long, 1998; Ley & Young, 1998; Ochroch & Dugan, 1986; Valadez, 1993).

Although military veterans serve for varying durations, they are all integrated into military culture through basic military training (BMT), or boot-camp. While BMT emphasizes suppression of an individualistic mindset and implements a collectivist mindset, many non-cognitive attributes are cultivated to achieve teamwork, discipline, and leadership (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2015). U.S. military service members often adopt a mindset of adapt and overcome, so much so the U.S. Marine Corps holds it as an unofficial mantra – "improvise, adapt, and overcome…" (U.S. Marine Corps, 2018). This philosophy constitutes good guidance for student-veterans in higher education. Furthermore, this cultural dynamic suggests that, from the beginning of their military service, student-veterans are developed with attributes necessary to meet and exceed challenges during their college experience.

This chapter will present a problem within community colleges pertaining to the lack of completion in the student population, the issue of identity transition for student-veterans as it pertains to academic completion, and how the embedded military identity of student-veterans may play a part in enlightening institutions of higher education about support of student success.

Statement of the Problem

Community colleges are struggling with student success, retention, and completion. Reporting on cohorts of students identified as first time, full time students in their first semester in 2012, The National Center for Education Statistics reported that the graduation rate of this cohort was less than 20% (Ginder, Kelly-Reid, & Mann, 2017). Additionally, 75% of these students were awarded some type of financial aid. In other words, there was an investment of money other than that of the student towards the education and expected obtainment of education credential.

Adjusting to civilian life after military service brings a myriad of challenges for military veterans. In addition to struggles reconciling roles and responsibilities with finances, family, personal relationships, and social circles, student-veterans experience dissonance transitioning into an academic context as a student (Schlossberg, 2011; Resnik et al., 2012). Shifting from a military culture into an academic culture leaves many student-veterans feeling disconnected and out of sync with higher education. This can set the stage for failure (Bauman, 2009).

Research more often identifies the obstacles and issues student-veterans face when attempting integration into higher education, rather than strengths and opportunities (Naphan & Elliott, 2015). Despite recent progress, higher education practitioners understand relatively little about this student population's reintegration struggles (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009). If they understand little of the struggles, it stands to reason, practitioners understand little about most effective supports, either.

Compounding this issue are the stark contrasts student-veterans share with the larger non-traditional student population. Student-veterans are non-traditional students, but they have different life experiences than the typical non-traditional student. This can be problematic when practitioners in higher education attempt to support a transitional process from military service to student success (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). The student-veteran population is, then, both vulnerable to ending their academic journey prematurely and being underserved in their student experiences.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify non-cognitive attributes learned from enlisted military service that can guide student-veterans to success in higher education. By identifying these non-cognitive attributes, the higher education community can facilitate an assimilation

process that does not alienate student-veterans. In doing so, higher education professionals mitigate student-veteran dissonance towards reintegration into civilian society while supporting student-veteran success. Moreover, student-veterans can feel empowered to apply – rather than abandon – military training deeply engrained in their identity (Bauman, 2009).

Similar to the larger non-traditional student community, student-veterans occupy multiple roles. Service members transitioning into college life may be losing a role (soldier, airman, etc.) and gaining several new roles, such as veteran, civilian, and student. Range of role changes will vary, depending on military service experience (Dill & Henley, 1998). These role exit processes take their toll on student-veterans, and create various adjustment struggles in many areas of life, including personal, financial, social, academic, vocational, emotional, and familial (Resnik et al, 2012).

Accounting for and addressing student issues that are not directly related to classroom coursework has equitable value for both the student experience and student success (Tinto, 1994). Non-traditional students display a collection of attributes which help them to navigate the unfamiliar terrain in higher education and compensate for actual or perceived shortcomings in college academic preparedness (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005). It is reasonable to investigate which, if any, attributes learned through enlisted military service student-veterans are utilizing to drive towards academic success. Since colleges and universities are developing and funding more programs to support student-veterans, it would be pertinent to better understand relationships between student-veterans and their culture (Queen & Lewis, 2014). Recent efforts are more heavily based on perceived needs of student-veterans rather than being empirically research driven (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Eliminating these gaps in research is vital to ensuring the

effectiveness of efforts within higher education to support student-veterans (Herrmann, Raybeck, & Wilson, 2008).

Significance of the Study

Lack of student completion and success in community colleges is a problem in higher education (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, n.d.). Student-veterans are a specific group within the student population that are vulnerable to a unique set of challenges to success and completion (Schiavone & Gentry, 2014). Schlossberg (2011) recognized the tremendous challenges faced by military service members as they transitioned to the role of student-veteran. The experience is often riddled with struggles that do not end simply by completing a postsecondary education and earning a credential or degree. It is not uncommon for the obstacle of transitioning out of military culture to persist through post-military employment.

Consider, in 2000, one year before the September 11 attacks, student-veteran beneficiaries stood at approximately 350,000. By 2013, that count rose to more than 1 million – an increase of more than 285%, as military enlistments skyrocketed in response (Cook & Kim, 2009). Wood (2012) contrasts that while less than five percent of student-veterans reach graduation, nearly 90% of student-veterans were dropping out of their institutions of higher education, Callahan & Jarrat (2014) acknowledge that student-veterans are perceived to be experiencing lack of success in higher education. However, DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) point out that institutions of higher education are ill-equipped to effectively support this population, despite its exponential growth. The student-veteran community is left underserved, struggling with reintegration, and vulnerable to an incomplete education journey due to this substantial lack of knowledge and understanding of a population needs.

The numbers of student-veterans enrolling in postsecondary institutions of higher education reflect a steady climb in recent history (Vacchi & Berger, 2014). In response to the growing need, community college leaders are dedicating an increasing amount of resources toward supporting the student-veteran population - even at a time when state funding is declining or nonexistent (Hinojosa & Hinojosa, 2011). An improved knowledge base of student-veterans' relationship with their military identity will increase understanding and preparedness by community college leadership. As a result, community colleges can better strategize and develop support resources with the student-veteran population based on actual, rather than perceived, needs (Norelli, 2016). A proactive strategy of understanding and relationship building would lend critical guidance toward developing programs that generate meaningful student-veteran support (Moon & Schma, 2011).

There is contention to the reports of widespread failure or incompletion within the student-veteran population. In 2014, Cate found a completion rate of over 50% for student-veterans using G.I. Bill benefits to fund postsecondary education. There is not nearly enough evidence to indicate whether the varying levels of success are because of support from resources offered at community colleges, or in spite of it. It is just as easy to make a plausible statement either way. Since reports of student-veteran success indicate a wide range of results, insight into what student-veterans are doing to position themselves for success would be valuable. Student-veterans typically maintain trust in their military training and experience (Wilson et al., 2013). However, the shortage of current student-veteran research may hinder community colleges from more effective strategies geared at supporting student-veterans' transitioning of roles and achieving academic success. Learning which, if any, military-based, non-cognitive attributes drive student-veterans to academic success will have two significant benefits. This research will

provide student-veterans a framework that cultivates a bridge from their military experience to academic success. By learning how to apply these military-based attributes toward student success, transitioning between the two cultures becomes less problematic and traumatic. Moreover, community colleges will have a clearer understanding of developing programs and strategies to support student-veteran success, especially if the research finds that student-veterans are already equipped – through enlisted military experience – with the non-cognitive attributes necessary for student success and completion.

Design of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify non-cognitive attributes learned from enlisted military service that can guide student-veterans to success in higher education. This was a qualitative study using interviews to gather data from participants. This method allowed participants to identify key data through rich, descriptive feedback in their own words (Creswell, 2007). This strategy allowed for themes to emerge, be recognized, and appropriately categorized. The phenomenon that was studied, via interview, was the use of non-cognitive attributes learned through enlisted military service to propel student-veterans toward success in postsecondary education. Interviews were conducted in a manner that is comfortable, convenient, and secure for the participant and the researcher. Participants were selected from the student-veteran community, including the community college and university. Qualifications included enlisted military service prior to community college experience, having completed a degree or certificate, or be in the final semester of completion of a certificate or degree with good academic standing.

The timeframe of data collection was three months, extending from May - July 2020. Targeted sample groups were self-identifying student-veterans who served as enlisted military service members, and had gained postsecondary education, particularly community college, after

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their military experience. Additionally, qualifying participants: a) had earned a credential from a community college or b) were in their final year of obtaining a community college credential; and were earning at least a 2.0 GPA.

The theoretical framework is Schlossberg's (2011) 4S Model for a successful transition. A detailed explanation of this model can be found in Chapter Two. This framework identifies four influencing factors related to coping and success of transitioning identities: situation, support, self, and strategies. A focus of military training addresses self-discipline, especially when including experiencing variables outside of one's control (Livingston et al., 2011). Therefore, this research deals exclusively with the two factors most likely within the student-veteran's control – self and strategies.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to identify non-cognitive attributes learned from enlisted military service that can guide student-veterans to success in higher education.

1) What attributes learned through enlisted military experience translate to student success in higher education?

2) What attributes learned through enlisted military experience correlate with the non-cognitive skills exhibited by non-traditional students that lead to success in higher education?

3) How can student-veterans effectively apply their enlisted military experience as it relates to their student experience in higher education?

Chapter II - Literature Review

Introduction

Across the country, institutions of higher education do not seem to be staffed or trained to meet the unique needs of the growing number of veterans enrolled on college campuses (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Based on the escalating number alone, it is imperative that community college leadership assess, not only the number of veterans accessing their educational benefits, but the rates at which student-veterans are achieving success (Hinojosa & Hinojosa, 2011). DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) argued that student-veterans continued to struggle with numerous challenges and barriers to successful identity and cultural transitions. The prevalence of such obstacles warrants the attention of leadership at higher educational institutions. Continued interest and efforts toward understanding this population only improve the likelihood that the appropriate support and strategies will be developed. Community colleges have developed policies, departments, and programs that serve this expanding population (Queen & Lewis, 2014). However, empirical data does not drive most of the efforts; rather strategies are built from perceived veteran needs. Student-veterans actually struggle with many tasks and activities tied to assimilation that higher education practitioners often view as simple. This disconnect in cultural understanding suggests community colleges may not fully comprehend the magnitude of struggle the student-veteran is experiencing (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). The purpose of this study is to identify non-cognitive attributes learned from enlisted military service that can guide student-veterans to success in higher education.

The American Council on Education (ACE, 2015) published a report from the 2014 meeting of a Service Member and Veteran Academic Advising Summit. Attendees included student-veterans, U.S Armed Forces representatives, higher education representatives,

employers, and various military service organizations (ACE, 2015). Face-to-face engagement as a benefit was a major finding from the summit, as was the need for college professionals who would understand student-veteran academic, health, and financial needs (ACE, 2015). Research from Moon and Schma (2011) aligns with the student-veterans' recommendation for face-to-face engagement, noting that proactive engagement, rather than reactive, led to better program effectiveness and understanding of student-veterans' needs.

Though current research provides evidence that levels of student-veteran success might be improved by offering a supportive college environment, there are substantial gaps in research that pointedly link a supportive environment to student-veteran success (Herrmann, Raybeck, & Wilson, 2008). If there are considerable gaps significantly connecting a supportive college environment to student-veteran success, there is substantial space to question an assumption that a supportive college environment is the primary driver of student-veterans' success. As institutions of higher education are pouring an increasing amount of resources into supporting student-veterans, research repeatedly and consistently finds the strategies driving these supporting operations are based merely on the perceived needs of student-veterans. The gaps in research merit investigation to learn from student-veterans what attributes drive their achieving academic success, how those driving attributes were obtained, and if those drivers resemble the non-cognitive attributes described by Byrd and MacDonald (2005) – self advocacy, time management, and goal-setting. This chapter will review literature discussing student success and academic preparedness in today's community colleges, the non-traditional student population and the non-cognitive attributes associated with their success in post-secondary academia, student-veterans' and their place in the non-traditional student population, the military culture and its influence on the student-veteran identity, the transition from a military crafted identity to

that of a student-veteran in higher education, and an introduction to the theoretical framework organizing the study.

Student Success and Preparedness in Community Colleges

Let us begin with the idea of what it means to be college-ready and how that plays a part in the relationship between community colleges and the students they serve. "The mission of community… colleges is to offer access to high-quality, affordable education to all students" (McClenney & Mathis, 2011). Bailey, Jaggars, and Jenkins (2015) point out that over 10 million students obtain access to higher education through community colleges in the United States each year - nearly fifty percent of America's undergraduates. As a gesture of our country's pledge to educational opportunity, the top 100% of qualified applicants are accepted at community colleges. Consequently, the student population at a community college can be incredibly diverse, depending on the community they represent.

Acceptance rates at universities bear a distinct difference when compared to community colleges. For example, The University of Texas in Austin (UT) received just over 51,000 applications for acceptance from prospective students for the 2017-18 academic year. UT admitted slightly more than 18,600 qualified, first-time in college, first-year students – or approximately 37% - into their student body (The University of Texas Institutional Reporting, Research, and Information Systems, n.d.; The U.S. News & World Report, n.d.). Texas' other public, flagship university, Texas A&M University (TAMU) received slightly less than 34,800 admission applications from qualified, first-time in college, first-year prospective students for the 2017-18 academic year. About 23,400 applicants received acceptance to TAMU – or roughly 67 percent (CollegeSimply, n.d.; The U.S. News & World Report, n.d.). As one can see, universities are able to selectively admit students based on varying criteria. Contrarily, community college

systems are open to, and serve, all applicants regardless of academic need or preparedness. This traditionally-held practice of admission carries some residual consequences.

Community colleges are not excelling in the area of student success and completion. A common reason students are attending community colleges are the positive impacts a postsecondary credential can have for those who earn it. Earning a postsecondary education is increasingly intertwined with the advancement of both individual and socio-economic success (Johnson, 2008). Although community colleges:

> "reflect a common understanding of postsecondary education as the foundation
> for economic growth and upward mobility,… most students who enter these
> colleges never finish – fewer than four of every ten complete any type of degree
> or certificate within six years… These low completion rates reflect widespread
> failure, disappointment, frustration, and thwarted potential among the millions of
> students who to not achieve their educational goals" (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins,
> 2015, p. 4).

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) studied students who were enrolled full-time and in their first semester of postsecondary education in 2012, and reported on the graduation rates for these students based on how long it took them to graduate. Students graduating within two years listed at less than 20 percent. Slightly better than 25 percent graduated in three years. The last cohort had the longest time-to-graduate window of four years, and produced a graduation rate of 36% (Ginder, Kelly-Reid, & Mann, 2017). As a diversely represented state, Texas faired similarly.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) - Texas' organization responsible for the promotion of student success - provides data reflecting graduation rates based

on time to completion, as well. Graduation percentages were taken from three cohorts of the 2017 graduating class. For full-time (FT), first-time-in-college (FTIC) students at a large Texas college, less than 27% of the 2013 cohort graduated by 2017. Using the same criteria for the cohort entering college in 2014, the graduation rate fell to less than 22% by 2017. This was an interesting cohort specifically because it correlates with the average time to graduate, four years, for any student attending a large college in Texas. The 2011 cohort yielded the highest of the three cohorts at almost 34% graduation rate. These statistics emphasize community colleges' struggles with student success and completion.

Student success and completion is a complex topic, and one lens does not tell enough of the story. Schools with selective admissions processes often use familiar standardized testing tools and measures to gauge college readiness or preparedness (The Princeton Review, n.d.). The idea is that by determining academic readiness or preparedness, an institution can estimate the likelihood of completion benefitting their completion statistics. One common scale to assess levels of college readiness is a high school grade-point-average (GPA). Standardized placement tests are also used, such as the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT), or the American College Testing (ACT) exam. These are typical tools that institutions of higher education would also use to evaluate the academic readiness of traditional students entering post-secondary education (American Colleges Testing, n.d.; The Princeton Review, n.d.). As much value that is placed in the results of these tests, the accuracy of such methods is hardly substantive.

Standardized placement tests are inadequate assessors of student success, academic preparedness, retention, or completion. Research shows minimal correlative evidence exists that delineates a conclusive relationship between placement test scores or high school GPAs, and actual student performance or success (King et al., 1994; Armstrong, 1999). The most accurate

metric of student retention is the level of student performance in their first academic term (Hoyt, 1999). If the best predictors emerge after the first semester, institutions of higher education are left in a position of reaction, rather than proactively prepare students for post-secondary culture and student success. This premise also allows room to propose that being college-ready is more than being academically prepared, or that academic readiness is not the only skill(s) or attribute(s) needed to succeed in post-secondary education. Moreover, by asserting academic preparedness is not enough to dictate college-readiness, segments of the student population most likely deemed academically unprepared, such as non-traditional students, may be entering college equipped in other ways that drive student success to completion (MacKinnon & Floyd, 2016).

Non-traditional Students and Non-cognitive Attributes

Kett (1994) mentions the term non-traditional student used to be reserved for adult women prior to the 1980s, but has developed broader application with the diversification of the student population. According to Voorhees and Lingenfelter, (2003) an undergraduate student, age 25 years or older is referred to as a non-traditional student, in recent generations. Non-traditional students make up a significant portion of the student population at community colleges and are estimated to make up 61% of all undergraduate students by 2019 (Finch, 2016). There are some similarities within this assorted group. Typical non-traditional students are independent and have families. This population is inclined to be disadvantaged socially, economically, politically, or some combination thereof. They might be working against levels of elementary and secondary education which is often characterized as inadequate, or are seeking to leverage a postsecondary education to improve a socioeconomic situation or mitigate a life event (MacKinnon & Floyd, 2016). The learning environment most advantageous to learning for a

typical non-traditional student involves high engagement and real-world experience applications

of knowledge (Headden, 2009). Despite the challenges outlined by MacKinnon and Floyd (2016)

– poor foundational skills, part-time and reenrollment issues, technology gaps, family and

financial commitments, and lack of academic preparation – non-traditional students are not

consigned to failure.

Non-traditional students are finding ways to succeed despite the noted significant

challenges. Multiple disadvantages leave non-traditional students susceptible to missing the

cultural knowledge often used to navigate postsecondary processes, such as enrollment,

classroom expectations and preparedness, resource availability, etc. (Amey & Long, 1998). Ley

and Young (1998), Ochroch and Dugan (1986), and Valadez (1993) surmised the success of

underprepared students could be credited to sets of attributes, rather than academic preparedness.

These attributes impact student performance, increase retention rates, and improve the likelihood

of student success, especially if recognized and honed as early as the first academic term.

Byrd and MacDonald (2005) identified three non-cognitive attributes as being crucial to

student success. In multiple instances, research participants indicated these non-cognitive

attributes were valued more than academic skills for their student success and completion. Byrd

and MacDonald (2005) identified time management, self-advocacy, and goal-setting and

commitment. Time management deals with a critical attribute applicable to any situation -

understanding prioritization and managing life's most finite resource. Students, especially those

with competing priorities, must learn to integrate a relatively new and unique occupier of their

time – school. Postsecondary education often involves multiple aspects of time consumption.

Accommodations could involve more than making time for classes. Students may also be

expected to account for enrollment processes, travel time, studying, or homework, among others.

Any student new to the culture of higher education would need to account or accommodate for these new demands. The attribute of self-advocacy pertains to the abilities of knowing when to ask for help, knowing whom to ask for help, and the willingness to ask for help. Student service resources are offered on college campuses. They vary from financial aid, academic advising, tutoring centers, counseling, etc. Such services exist to provide students with assistance to improve the college student experience. Colleges expect students have a variety of needs, and each college strategizes its services to support students in their academic journey. Engaging in a postsecondary education takes determination. Another vital attribute that aids in a student's perseverance toward success is goal-setting - the abilities to set realistic short-term and long-term goals, and commit to those goals (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005). These can be set formally or informally. However, a student's understanding of the difference between a short-term and long-term goal is critical. It is also prudent for students to recognize when short- and long-term goals need to be revisited and revised.

These attributes were, by far, the most utilized to alleviate disadvantages typically impacting non-traditional students (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005). As stated earlier, the non-traditional faction is diverse. The subgroups of this population are varied in representation, as well. Nevertheless, there may be one group specially equipped with its own set of non-cognitive attributes, similar to the ones categorized by Byrd and MacDonald, which are used to drive them toward success – student-veterans.

Non-traditional Students and Student-veterans

The term non-traditional student can encapsulate a large portion of the student population. By delineating traditional from non-traditional students using a single characteristic, the non-traditional student population is not homogenous; rather, it is highly diversified. A

distinct group of non-traditional students on campus is student-veterans (Olson, Badger, & McCuddy, 2014). As a member of the non-traditional student faction, clearly, there are some shared characteristics between the group and subgroup. However, there are also qualities that further distinguish student-veterans from the rest of the non-traditional grouping.

Student-veterans make up a niche group of non-traditional students on campus (Olson, Badger, & McCuddy, 2014). Mutual qualities between student-veterans and the larger non-traditional student populace include academic preparation perceived to be outdated or insufficient, higher age grouping than traditional students, wide ranging life experiences, and various competing priorities such as personal, financial, academic, social, familial, emotional, and vocational (DiRamio et al., 2008; O'Herrin, 2011; Resnik et al, 2012). Since student-veterans are older than traditional students, they are more likely to develop and amass responsibilities correlative with their advanced age, such as a spouse, children, financial obligations, or a full-time job or career to name a few. Compared to typical traditional students, veterans and non-traditional students often experience greater stress from obligations at home and with family (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Dill & Henley, 1998). Rumann and Hamrick (2010) observed that military-connected students felt a greater sense of maturity and overall commitment to academics, which likely stemmed from their life stage and obligations.

For many veterans, the time dedicated in service to the defense of the United States might not offer much time to stay current on academics. This largely depends on the service member's military occupation specialty code (MOS). Regardless, it is reasonable to anticipate that some level of erosion could occur during their career. While in the military, service members are exposed to a wide range of experiences that both traditional and non-traditional students are not privy. Military service regularly exposed service members to separation from family and loved

ones, risk of death or serious injury, or facing dangerous situations on numerous assignments while on duty (Basham, 2008). By way of these experiences, student-veterans reportedly gained a perceived sense of a greater awareness of the world and a growth in maturity. Coincidentally, these personal advancements often leave student-veterans feeling at odds with the rest of the student population, specifically traditional students (Schiavone & Gentry, 2014). Consistent with the rest of the non-traditional populace, student-veterans continuously manage fluctuating priorities that can seem magnified when coupled with the cultural transition from the military to civilian society. It is not uncommon for student-veterans to confront, and even struggle with, new roles and responsibilities, such as health insurance, mortgage payments, and student roles (DiRamio et al., 2008). A closer look at student-veterans reveals there are significant differences that distinguish them from the rest of the non-traditional student population, as well.

Estimates of military education benefit recipients nearly tripled from 2000 - one year before the September 11 attacks - to 2013 (Cook & Kim, 2009). The U.S. Census Bureau (2018) reports approximately 21.5 million military service members protect a U.S. population of over 300 million citizens, and as enlistment numbers increase, it is reasonable to expect that military education beneficiaries also increase. However, Jones (2013) points out there is very little empirical research that provides guidance or analysis of effective ways to support student-veterans, even as the student-veteran community grows, and more institutions of higher education are allotting financial resources to this cause. Without a sufficient level of preparation specifically for the cultural transition into higher education, many student-veterans are less likely to question the adequacy or appropriateness of resources offered in support of their journey (DiRamio et al., 2008; Wheeler, 2012). This dynamic can create a self-fulfilling prophecy. If an institution of higher education communicates to student-veterans that certain resources are what

is needed, those will be the resources sought by student-veterans with hardly a consideration to an alternative. When student-veterans seek out the resources they are prescribed, institutions can then use that as evidence the resources offered are what the student-veterans want or need without any empirical evidence suggesting student-veterans were not simply following instructions when making their choice to select particular resources.

Schiavone and Gentry (2014) indicate the college experience can generate feelings of invalidation with student-veterans. Even veterans who receive treatment from the Veterans Administration struggle with negative perceptions about themselves, their role in a civilian society, and prospects for a productive future (Bullock et al., 2009). These feelings of inadequacy permeate into the student-veteran population from the larger veteran community. The cultural and operational differences between the military and higher education are jarring to student-veterans attempting to transition. Types of difficulties reported by student-veterans were related to expectations with faculty and assignments, general concentration, forgetting simple concepts – including how to study – and managing a fluid list of priorities (Ford & Vignare, 2014). In 2012, news media reported a student-veteran dropout rate of 88% within their first year, and a graduation rate of three percent (Briggs, 2012; Wood, 2012). These stories perpetuated a perception that student-veterans were not succeeding in, and even unfit for, post-secondary education. Furthermore, they were unsubstantiated stereotypes because data reflected approximately 51% completion rate for vocational programs funded by the GI Bill (Cate, 2014). These negative stereotypes caused student-veterans to hide their status as veterans to support blending in with the larger student body, leaving them further distanced from the faculty and staff providing necessary resources for student success (Hassan et al., 2010). To fulfill the insistence by Rumann and Hamricks (2009) that more personnel with acute military

understanding should be hired within community colleges, it would be useful for community college leadership to understand the makings of an enlisted military service member.

Military Experience and the General Foundations of a Military Identity

Considering the substantial increase of service members – and correlating increase in military education beneficiaries – since 2000, a sharper look into the military experience and how a military identity is shaped is warranted. Doing so could offer a better understanding of potential connections between cultural and professional experiences that mold a military identity and Byrd and MacDonald's non-cognitive attributes.

Soeters, Winslow, & Weibull (2006) offer two defining statements about culture that apply when reflecting on military culture: a) culture is learned and develops from one's social environment, and b) culture is not genetically inherited. Hofstede (1991) offers a broader view of culture, stating, "Culture is the collective programming of the mind, which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (p. 5). Fennel (2008) observed that despite being comprised of people from various ethnic, religious, and other cultural backgrounds, the military population held a culture that was unique to its people. It is an independent, well-defined culture. Additionally, Martin and McClure (2000) support that, "the essence of military unit cohesion is the commitment to one's unit, the unit's mission and its members", (p. 15). Recognizing military culture as an independent, well-defined culture emphasizes its status as an exclusive subset of the larger non-traditional student assortment. With such a well-defined, organized culture, a review of the culture student-veterans come from is warranted.

The military "has its own history, laws, values, traditions, language, and customs" (Meyer, 2015, pp. 416). While many sectors of civilian society perceive war to be the military's industry, conversely, "the military upholds the value of peacefulness by preserving harmony,

which sometimes ironically involves waging war" (Coll, Weiss, & Yarvis, 2011, pp. 489). The

effort to uphold the value of peace by preserving harmony begins with values engrained in each

service member from their service branch. Each branch of the military – Army, Navy, Air Force,

Marine Corps, and Coast Guard - has core values its service members are taught during basic

military training, or boot camp. However, these core values will often impact a service member

beyond their time in service to their separation from the military or into retirement. The U.S.

Marine Corps and U.S Navy share three core values: honor, courage and commitment

(www.marines.com, n.d.; www.ethics.navy.mil, n.d.). The U.S. Army holds seven core values,

represented by the acronym LDRSHIP: loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity,

and personal courage (www.army.mil/values, n.d.). The U.S. Air Force has three core values:

integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do (www.airforce.com, n.d.). The U.S.

Coast Guard instills three core values with its services members – honor, respect, and devotion to

duty (Young, 2013).

The process to embed and develop the core values begins from the earliest stages of the

military experience. Houppert (2007) describes military basic training as an intense process of

eliminating one's dependence on family to instill a positive interdependence on one's teammates.

This is largely a cultural mindset and does not discourage one's ability to be self-sufficient or

highly adaptable. Rather, it is an emphasis on achieving more as a group instead of individually.

The military culture also emphasizes the importance of hierarchy and stresses that service

members abide by rules and regulations. Coincidentally, incoming college freshman that are

traditional students who have just graduated high school, seem to exemplify the antithesis of the

ingrained values of student-veterans (Soeters et al., 2006). The combination of a being immersed

into an unfamiliar culture and learning environment, along with the perception of being

surrounded by a population with unknown, even oppositional, values could be a significant facet

of the college experience that contributes to a dissonance within the student-veteran.

Service members endure intense training and a wide array of extremely difficult

conditions during military service, which makes it challenging to comprehensively characterize

veterans (Sanders, 2012). However, in learning to overcome various stressful conditions military

service members also learn to be persistent, committed, mentally strong and focused, and be self-

sufficient; each of these attributes are imperative to one's adaptability despite fluid variables in a

given situation (Livingston et al., 2011). Typical stressors involved with the military experience

include facing the separation from loved ones, dangerous situations, multiple deployments to

dangerous locations, and risk of severe injury or death (Basham, 2008). Whether a service

member's military service lasts for one enlistment or a career, veterans often embrace strong

identification with their military service and culture. This is an indication of the importance,

intensity, and significance of acculturation within the military (Johansen, Laberg, & Martinussen

2013). Some veterans express signs of their military service through dog tags, bags, and haircuts

well after their enlistment ends. Occasionally, they may also discuss their service overtly –

though the frequency of this type of communication is more likely to occur with peers.

Additionally, others try to blend in with their nonmilitary peers as they assimilate into college

life (Wheeler, 2012). Similar to the diverse backgrounds that make up the military culture, the

way veterans process their military experience may vary. The likelihood and style in which a

veteran applies military training toward transition and success also varies.

Despite feeling "lost when you come back to a normal life", veterans leaned on training

that molded them into goal-driven, mission-oriented individuals (Gaita, 2010, p. 1). According to

Norelli (2016), veterans show a heavy reliance on self-based resources – personal or professional

experiences, outlook, and individual strengths - during their transition to higher education. Student-veterans accredit their military service for developing self-sufficiency and performing with pride. Self-sufficiency, which can lead to self-reliance as well as increased confidence and pride, is an esteemed quality that begins at boot camp. Since the culture of higher education is regarded as much less structured than that of the military, these attributes could greatly benefit the student-veteran in the effort to navigate the college experience. As military culture is represented by diverse populations, another skill veterans might leverage towards student success is their experience working with individuals from different cultures on a regular basis. This contributes to an ability to work with others who are culturally different from themselves (Ryan et al., 2011). Research suggests other qualities learned by veterans may play an integral part in their potential to transition into a successful student: goal establishment and implementation, balancing priorities, personal accountability, and focus, (Ackerman et al., 2009; Callahan & Jarrat, 2014; Wilson et al., 2013). Fennel (2008) highlighted cultural values generally shared among veterans: 1) maintaining physical fitness; 2) training for deployment to minimize casualties; 3) no man/woman is left behind; 4) the mission and the team come before self; 5) never show weakness to the team nor the enemy. By addressing both internal variables, such as preparation, outlook, strategizing, training and external variables, such as concern for the team members, concealing deficiencies, and defensiveness towards uncontrollable elements, student-veterans display an understanding of situational intelligence and a capacity to improvise. Equipped with the attributes gained from military experience, student-veterans may come equipped to engage fluid challenges presented by an identity transition from military to higher education culture. This does not suggest student-veterans are flawlessly prepared for the rigors of post-secondary education. Clearly, they have trained for situations that require adaptability,

mental flexibility, resourcefulness, and the like, but based on research, there is clearly a need for guidance and support regarding the transition to higher education. To learn how community colleges could provide better support in this area, it is necessary to take a deeper look into the transition of roles and identities from an enlisted service member to that of a student-veteran.

Identity Transition from Enlisted Military Service to Student-veteran Role

The U.S. launched efforts to provide educational benefits to military service members in 1944 to help ease reintegration efforts of World War II (WWII) veterans back into an American society and workforce following the war (Breedin, 1972). This piece of legislation is largely known as the Montgomery GI Bill, or simply, the GI Bill. The original version of the GI Bill has been modified over the years, with the most recent version being the Post 9/11 GI Bill (http://www.military.com/education, n.d.). In 2011, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provided benefits for almost one million veterans and beneficiaries (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014). This bill can provide up to full tuition, a housing stipend, and textbook allowance. The previous version of the Montgomery GI Bill did not provide a living stipend, making the current version a significant improvement that potentially allows many veterans to attend school full time without having to work off campus (http://www.military.com/education, n.d.). Student-veterans are capitalizing on the benefits of the Post -9/11 GI Bill as a resource easing the financial burden of post-secondary education, with those numbers of student-veterans swelling every year since 2010 (Vacchi & Berger, 2014; Osagie, 2016). Approximately 300,000 active duty service members enroll in institutions of higher education each year using the Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits (Military OneSource, 2014). Annually, approximately 945,000 students use their GI Bill educational benefits (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014).

Even with student-veteran populations on the rise and community colleges allocating more financial resources in their support, the strategies being developed for these resources to help student-veterans achieve academic success are not based on empirical evidence (Jones, 2013). William-Kotz and Gansemer-Topf, (2017) point out that multiple qualitative studies have examined the experiences of military-connected students, such as those by Bauman (2009); DiRamio, et al. (2008); Livingston et al. (2011); and Rumann and Hamrick (2010). Research by Suter et al.(2006) examined how socialization of language, in the context of communities of practice, shape the military identity by studying former WAVES (Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Services) who served in the Navy during World War II. To preserve their military heritage into their new civilian roles, the WAVES engaged in communities of practice - which promoted socialization of language gained through military experiences - amongst various veterans' groups. The preservation of their military heritage enabled a more manageable reintegration into their civilian roles by not invalidating their military service. This revelation suggests that contemporary military members might transition into the culture of higher education as a student by leveraging their experiences from military culture.

In spite of some common challenges faced by student-veterans, many believe their college experience is actually benefitted by their military background (Wilson et al., 2013). Unfortunately, current literature focusing on student-veterans varies tremendously in scope and depth. Consequently, universities are ill-equipped to effectively address performance and satisfaction of student-veterans because they do not fully understand the student-veteran experience (Norelli, 2016). The American Council on Education, or ACE, (2015) found social acculturation continues to be an issue for student-veterans with 55% of higher education institutions. This was a 22% increase compared to ACE's 2009 study. Ironically, greater maturity

and scope of worldview – a quality that most might presume to provide an advantage – left

student-veterans feeling disconnected from peers they deemed less mature. To glean more

insight from the student-veteran's transition to higher education, Pfeiffer et al. (2012)

recommend continued research into the development of positive, pro-active relationships with

faculty, staff, and their own family members. Familial support has benefits, but because

integration predicts persistence in student-veteran populations, the bigger threat to student-

veteran success remains an inability to connect with peers (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods,

2007).

Bauman (2013) explains that college can hold invalidating experiences for student-

veterans. First, student-veterans find training obtained in the military does not transfer easily, if

at all, to college credit (Pellegrin, 2013). In addition to feeling their time in service is not

respected or recognized at all, other students and faculty may not understand or appreciate the

kind of knowledge obtained through military service that a student-veteran brings to the

classroom or how it applies to the subject at hand. They may underestimate student-veterans'

non-cognitive skills, such as leadership, strategizing, or communication (Callahan & Jarrat,

2014). Another such invalidating experience that is critical to learning the role of a student is the

need to relearn study skills. Memorization is a dominant style of learning in the military, and is

usually done post-lecture or briefing. This means the service member is given only critical

information and often has a minimal amount of time to memorize. This is a significant contrast

to the learning environment in a community college where the demands of the learning process

can fluctuate. In higher education, learning style may vary from subject to subject; teaching

styles often vary from instructor to instructor (Ackerman et al., 2009). Osborne's (2014) finding

that student-veterans' military cultures demand a high level of self-sufficiency and adeptness

interferes with the need to ask for assistance when it is wanted or needed, which magnifies the disconnection from the college experience."

Livingston et al. (2011) asserted that a mental paradigm shift away from the highly structured military to the very fluid, contextual college experience is necessary in order to most effectively acclimate to the role of the student. The military life offers clear, defined structure which is usually a sharp contrast to the college campus environment which offers no clear chain of command (Ackerman et al., 2009). With little transparency or clear lines of authority, student-veterans often perceive an absence of accountability with faculty, administration, and higher education as a whole (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). A transition to a new environment and new processes are made easier with well-defined roles and expectations. Conversely, an organizational structure that offers little transparency or clear lines of authority and that can vary from institution to institution is a disruption to that transition (Goodman et al., 2006). Requiring community colleges to adopt a uniformed organizational structure is unlikely and unreasonable, so Baechtold & De Sawal (2009) proposed hiring faculty, staff, and administrators who are either military veterans or have intimate knowledge of both the military lifestyle and the struggles faced by student-veterans when dealing with this life-changing transition. With the personnel community colleges currently employ, Kuh (2010) advises that interactions between student-veterans and community college employees, in particular faculty, be meaningful and practical. Furthermore, interactions which stress activities or behaviors that are important to education and career goals tend to hold the most value. Research has shown that veterans perceive traditional students to be immature and to lack understanding when it comes to military culture and the experiences student-veterans endured on deployment. This has resulted in increased frustration when trying to connect with traditional students (Wheeler, 2012).

Bauman (2013) identified a role incongruence returning soldiers felt once re-immersed in a campus environment and how that experience negatively impacted some of their social and academic interactions. Although Demers (2011) implores continued research into student-veteran relationships, and Rumann and Hamrick (2010) stress the impact of peer relatability as they pertain to their role transition, the values student-veterans had engrained intensely, and hold dear– discipline, authority, service and team before self – are largely disregarded or valued less in higher education (Ryan et al., 2011). Understanding how to capitalize on them, instead of encouraging or allowing student-veterans to abandon them, might ease the transition into the student role.

In the enlisted military culture, explicit instructions and expectations are given. Roles, relationships, and conventions are more clearly defined. In college academic culture, protocols can vary from instructor to instructor, student to student, and instructions can often be vague to allow for interpretation (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Ford and Vignare (2014) shared that the situational unfamiliarity created a sense of detachment for student-veterans and a longing for the tight-knit, well-understood relationships they had with their enlisted service members. The struggles military-connected students face, which amplify the sense of detachment are: a variety of role changes, insufficient academic preparation, cultural unfamiliarity, and perceived insufficient financial support (DiRamio et al., 2008). Serving in the military, service members were expected to complete duties without complaint. This cultural gap can sway student-veterans away from advocating for themselves, risking the appearance of incompetence (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014). The disconnection from peers and from faculty or staff perpetuates a feeling and process of isolation which may lead to a variety of other issues (Osborne, 2014). Many veterans suffered a dissonance between their lives as enlisted military service members and their lives in a

civilian society "could not identify with society in general," (Brenner et al., 2008, p. 219).

Student-veterans even expressed concern over revealing their status as veterans due to the

perception that media portrayals of veterans may influence community colleges seeing them in a

negative manner or holding an anti-military sentiment (Briggs, 2012). These feelings and

perceptions, whether accurate or not, leave some veterans feeling less valued, supported

inadequately, or unwelcome on campus (Nichols-Casebolt, 2012; Ryan et al., 2011). Many

student-veterans also expressed a difficulty with the overgeneralizations that "all veterans

returning to college have PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder], TBI [traumatic brain injury], or

suffer from other mental health issues," and how those misconceptions effect how they are

received on campus (Burnam et al., 2009, pp. 775). Research has mounted enough evidence to

identify a role incongruence that negatively impacts some student-veterans' social and academic

interactions (Bauman, 2009).

Despite the negative perceptions and impacts of identifying as a veteran, many veterans

believe their college experience is enhanced by their military experience. Although identified

through observation, the perception by researchers was that student-veteran study habits, time

management, and organizational skills developed through military service were an academic

advantage (Ackerman et al., 2009; Jones, 2013; Schiavone & Gentry, 2014; Wheeler, 2012).

However, for student-veterans to have a comprehensive and meaningful transition from the

military to academia, it is still widely believed they need to adapt faster to better manage the

balancing school, work, and family (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010).

Nevertheless, research consistently reports that veterans experience significant,

ambivalent feelings over leaving military brothers and sisters and the residual camaraderie the

military culture imbues (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008). Research does not offer

empirical evidence how to address this challenge. Norelli (2016) proposed that student-veterans leverage their perceived superior maturity and leadership ability to navigate their role transition and promote persistence. All the same, an abundance of current research either lacks the production of empirical evidence or is not quantitatively confirmed. Higher education institutions could improve student-veterans' college experience, identity transition, and role exit, and academic success, but current literature merely investigates the student-veteran experience while overlooking the absence of a "holistic understanding" (Vacchi & Berger, 2014, p. 115).

Theoretical/Conceptual Frameworks

Higher education's concern is that student-veterans get stonewalled in their academic journey because of academic obstacles. Yet, for many student-veterans, they begin their academic career as FTIC, or maybe even first-generation, college students. Social acculturation is a greater threat to their success. Given their military background and culture, their needs and challenges are not homogenous to the rest of the non-traditional student populations, though some may be similar. The cultural difference between higher education and the military creates a misalignment of priorities. Additionally, military culture tends to develop service members who are mature, humble, and prideful. As a result, veterans typically preferred a transition that allowed them to blend in or assimilate to the general student population, but this brought the consequence of rendering student-veterans invisible (Livingston et al., 2011). So far, research has indicated this process of transitioning one's role or identity is not necessarily an easy process. It is important to understand what this concept of transition involves.

Schlossberg (1981) asserted, "A transition can be said to occur if an event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships" (p. 5). Schlossberg (2011) developed the most

commonly used model for student persistence, and claimed the transition that veterans endure post-deployment, upon separating from military service and enrolling at community college is riddled with difficulties that can follow them to the civilian workforce. To emphasize this point, Tinto (1975) states that in order to predict persistence of a student in college, it is vital we include a student's level of academic and social integration into college life. Tinto's (1993) work dealt primarily with student retention in higher education and how the importance of social support and interaction effect this relationship. Davidson and Wilson (2013) point out, however, Tinto's model concentrated on residential students who were also highly likely to be traditional students. Understanding the significant differences between traditional and non-traditional students, this model will not likely suit the student-veteran population. Kasworm's (2005) social identity theory could prove useful as it acknowledges that the adult student mediates their identity using parameters established through interacting roles - self, worker, family provider, learner, or citizen, and contextual environments, such as the institution, workplace, home, or classroom. The interaction points between these roles and contextual environments are not seamless, as Bauman (2009) reminds that having a military crafted identity and attempting to function in an educational community generates a role incongruence for student-veterans. Bauman's focused claim of a role incongruence in the identity transition process fuels the DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) demand for increased training of faculty and staff by community college leadership pertaining to the specific needs of student-veterans. Bichrest (2013) contributes that colleges can provide better support, if a given problem is more understood. This statement aligns with previous critiques about the lack of empirical evidence regarding student-veteran literature. Studying the acculturation process and, by extension, the experience of transitioning role identities from military to higher education culture will inform a greater

understanding of the processes, perhaps to the point of predictability. If community colleges can see patterns, the prospect of navigating that process becomes less overwhelming. The norms, behaviors, and values veterans display were learned through military service. It stands to reason that they would benefit from learning the norms, behaviors, and values associated with higher education. A considerable gap in this premise is how student-veterans are expected to replace or unlearn the dominant set of norms, values, and behaviors when it is such a vital component of their identity.

Michelson (2011) realized non-traditional students learn more about their student identity by writing their own autobiographical narratives. This process, called narrative theory, helped non-traditional students discover new and different understandings of who they are as college students. In a sense, this experience of writing their autobiographical story served as a transition by changing the perception they previously held of themselves, their roles and responsibilities. Schlossberg (1981) also considered what happens to people as they made transitions at different stages in life. Student-veterans are an exclusive representation of traditional students, so their decisions seem contingent on their particular life-stage. Schlossberg (1981) also recognized that not all adults adapt to changes, internal or external, in their life and it forced him to ask the question, "How can we understand and help adults as they face the inevitable but non-predictable transitions of life?" (p. 3).

Bean and Metzner (1985) developed a theory geared toward non-traditional student attrition by emphasizing significant differences between non-traditional and traditional students. Bean and Metzner (1985) also noticed many non-traditional students receive their social support outside of school, so both academic variables and environmental variables are hardly affected by the lack of social integration. Although this model is useful, it might provide an inadequate

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picture of the student-veteran population. Previous research already states the importance of social integration to the student-veteran's success. Schlossberg's (2011) Transition Theory identifies a correlation between easy transition experiences and roles that have unambiguous norms, but the theory does not explicitly address the concept of acculturation, nor has it ever been used as a theoretical framework to analyze student-veterans (Norelli, 2016). This is not to suggest that the transition theory cannot prove fruitful. Schlossberg's (2011) theory is broad enough to remain relevant yet organizes appropriate aspects of the transition process to allow the researcher to address the issue of acculturation. Moreover, Griffin and Gilbert (2015) correlate the theory with current research and unique challenges military service members and veterans endure when transitioning to college.

Schlossberg (1984) identified four key factors that influenced a person's understanding of coping strategies and adaptability to transition. These factors are known as the 4 S's - situation, support, self, and strategies. These factors play a big part in understanding how student-veterans strategize the new transition and assimilation process to the culture of higher education from a military culture. Schlossberg (1981) noted, "Although these transitions don't occur in any sequential order, nor does everyone experience the various transitions in like manner . . . these changes require a new network of relationships and a new way of seeing oneself'" (p. 3).

The variables identified by Schlossberg (1981) - "role change (gains or losses), affect (positive or negative), source (internal or external), timing (on-time or off-time), onset (gradual or sudden), duration (permanent, temporary, uncertain), and degree of stress" – seemed of far greater importance to the process of transition than the starting and ending points of transition themselves (pp. 8-9). Understanding this focus placed the importance of the individual, as in the outlook and handling of the transition, above the underlying forces of the transitional event or

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non-event itself. Logically, the more disruptive a transition proves to be, the more resources a person will need or occupy to adapt and overcome that transition (Schlossberg, 1984). Welborn (2015) investigated a variety of experiences - framed within Schlossberg's (2011) 4S Model - that lent to the successful transition of United States military veterans, male and female, who served overseas during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars prior to enrolling in community college: self, situation, support, strategies.

Livingston et al. (2011) describe this theory as fitting for the student-veteran population in their transition from a highly structured military culture to a higher education culture that is largely self-directed and lacking structure. Norelli (2016) supports the use of Schlossberg's models stating:

Schlossberg's Transition model provides a useful structure… This model consists of a framework that breaks down the assets and liabilities individuals bring to a transition. Of course, individuals may not explicitly break down each of these assets and liabilities themselves. The model examines transitions in general and is not specific to transitions to college. Schlossberg's Transition model starts by identifying the nature of the transition and determining whether its components are anticipated, unanticipated, or non-event. A transition can result in changes within relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles, and it can involve subtle changes. Anticipated transitions are expected events, and unanticipated transitions are not scheduled. Non-events are those that one expected but never occurred. The same event could be anticipated or unanticipated for different people, and it can also be viewed as positive or negative by different people. The impact of a transition is less about the event or non-event and more about how much it alters

one's daily life. The more daily life is altered, the more resources it requires and

the longer the transition takes. The difference between pre-transition and post-

transition environments is one indicator of how difficult the transition will be.

While the model is general, it is addressed below in application to the veterans'

transition situations. The 4 S system (situation, self, support, and strategies)

describes the factors that influence a person's ability to cope during a transition.

The factors identified in this system can be assets or liabilities, and the ratio of

assets to liabilities can explain why different individuals may react differently to

the same transition (p. 6).

Of the factors listed, the second factor identifies self. Self pertains to characteristics a

person brings that influences their transition, such as gender, health, age, socioeconomic status,

psychological resources, and outlook (Norelli, 2016). External self-factors, such as age, ethnicity

and the like, directly influence people's perception and assessment of life. Additionally, internal

characteristics determine one's outlook coping strategies with transitions. These characteristics

may be represented through optimism, morals, and values (Schlossberg et al., 1989). The fourth

factor in the 4S theory is strategies. Evans et al. (2010) explains that these strategies pertain to

the ability to adapt to transition through individual mental focus, outlook, and behavior (Merriam

& Caffarella, 1999). Taylor (1998) concedes that strategies are used to accept, overcome, or cope

with situations/transitions that overwhelm or create dissonance. People use these psychological

exercises to acclimate or change their perception towards transitions. There are both responses

and approaches to coping. Three types of responses to coping are listed as: change the situation,

regulate stress levels once the transition has happened, and control the context of the problem.

The four approaches to coping, which are used in conjunction with the responses above, are:

prompt action, cessation of action, seek out information, and internal psychological behavior (Evans et al., 2010; Goodman & Anderson, 2012; Goodman et al., 2006). Transitions can create havoc and disturbance in a person's life; therefore, a person may need to adopt new behaviors (Schlossberg, 1984). Based on the preceding assessment, Schlossberg's Transition model will guide this study.

Summary

Understanding student-veterans' transition difficulties, and by extension the coping mechanisms used, community colleges will be better prepared to serve this population of military men and women (Wheeler, 2012). Community colleges can facilitate student-veterans' transition to higher education by upgrading their ability to execute appropriate, effective responses (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). Research shows that integration is a great threat to a student-veteran's ability to both complete their academic journey and transition back into a civilian society. For many veterans, it is a greater threat than being academically unprepared. Yet, student-veterans represent a unique and exclusive type of non-traditional student. The culture from which they come, specifically the enlisted military culture, seems to equip them with a set of attributes which may parallel the abilities Byrd and MacDonald (2005) identified as non-cognitive attributes.

Chapter III - Methodology

Introduction

Across institutions of higher education in America, lack of degree completion is a concern. A particularly vulnerable subset of the student population is that of the student-veteran. Their struggles to transition identities from military service to the higher education culture are indicative of the challenge to reintegrate to a civilian society as veterans (Ford & Vignare, 2014). Comparable to the larger non-traditional student population, also an academic obstacle to student-veteran success, is the erosion or lack of academic preparedness (DiRamio et al., 2008). Research of non-traditional students indicates there are types of non-cognitive attributes utilized to alleviate disadvantages stemming from lack of academic preparedness (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005).

To help with the move into higher education, institutions are allocating increasing levels of resources, including financial, to support student-veterans in their identity role exit. However, many of these strategies and programs are based on perceived needs by community college leaders of student-veterans. There is a dearth of research surrounding student-veterans compared to research available about traditional students and other populations of non-traditional students. Available research is predominantly focused on disabilities originating from military service, or the difficulties stemming from military service identity role exit. As a result, there is very little research available to offer community college leaders how to best deploy services tailored to the actual needs of student-veterans (Jones, 2013). Yet, there are portions of student-veteran populations achieving student success and completion. Understanding that student-veterans typically maintain strong ties to their military culture and heritage, community colleges would benefit to learn more about the student-veteran population through research to more effectively

support this community (Wheeler, 2012). The purpose of this study is to identify non-cognitive attributes learned from enlisted military service that can guide student-veterans to success in higher education.

Research questions focused on: 1) what attributes learned through enlisted military experience translated to student success in higher education, 2) what attributes learned through enlisted military experience correlated with the non-cognitive skills exhibited by non-traditional students leading to success in higher education, 3) how student-veterans effectively applied their enlisted military experience toward their student experience in higher education, and 4) how community college support programs and strategies could build upon these related experiences. The first question attempted to learn what attributes student-veterans are using from their enlisted military experience to work towards student success. The second question attempted to find, if any, correlations between student-veterans' attributes from enlisted military service that drove their student success and the non-cognitive attributes typical non-traditional students used to drive their success. The third question sought to learn how student-veterans used any parts of their enlisted military service towards their student experience in higher education. Lastly, this research attempted to ascertain from student-veterans how they felt community colleges could improve the programs directed at their population.

Rationale for Methodology

The methodology for this research was qualitative. A qualitative researcher sought "to answer research questions that consider how our reality is constructed in interaction… They tend to focus on studying the way in which their research participants understand, describe, and see the world. Qualitative research methods are best used when there is not much previously known about the topic, when the topic is personal, and when you want to know more in great detail

about a small unit or event… Qualitative research strives toward the goals of preserving human behavior, analyzing its qualities, and representing different worldviews and experiences (Davis et al., 2010)."

The methodological approach is a mix of epistemology. Davis et al. (2010) indicate that epistemology is a search for understanding how we know what we know. The two positions associated with epistemology are the objectivism and subjectivism. Objectivism asserts that there are patterns, commonalities, which can be observed for data and generalized to the larger population. Subjectivism takes the perspective that knowledge, or what is known, is dependent on the persons involved (Davis et al., 2010). The persons experiencing a given event are the creators of the knowledge derived from that event and the knowledge is understood through their perspective. This study borrowed from both perspectives. The student-veteran group is impacted by a unique integrative process relative to the rest of the student body. Objectively, student-veterans shared a similar induction phase of basic military training that engrained values, attributes, and skills to military service members. Then, with little formal guidance, they are released to re-acclimate and reintegrate to an unfamiliar societal and educational culture. This experience was common enough that it could be generalized as a student-veteran experience. However, subjectively, each student-veteran managed this transition differently depending on a variety of circumstances.

This study incorporated a social constructionist perspective. Foster and Bochner (2008) proposed that reality is represented, constituted, and understood through communication. Communication is how beliefs and meanings were forged and negotiated. This communication, or social interaction, manufactured identity. The purpose of this study is to identify non-cognitive attributes learned from enlisted military service that guided student-veterans to success

in higher education. The student-veterans' use of their prior military experience as a tool to guide their identity and role transition was studied with this lens.

Research Design

This research design was primarily grounded theory. It could be argued that there are aspects of phenomenology embedded in the methodology. Phenomenology aims to take an unadulterated look at a phenomenon that eliminates lenses of assumption or theory which might frame or organize anticipated responses (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). By bracketing – the process of cataloguing one's own preconceived paradigms – the researcher was conscious of the assumptions they brought to the study (Davis et al., 2010). This allowed the investigative scholar to be cognizant to a participant's experience with an open-minded approach. The process of data gathering and types of data gathered were unique to performing research based on phenomenology. The point was to understand, in great depth, the specific experience of a participant. Several common methods are used to gather this data: 1) a researcher can observe actual participation during an experience being researched, 2) data can be gathered using in-depth interviews or focus groups where participants are empowered to revisit and describe an experience in complete detail, or 3) part of the data gathering process from this research could incorporate a way to collect artifacts or documents in an effort to immerse more fully into an exact moment experienced by the participant (Creswell et al., 2007). A phenomenological researcher might delve into their own experiences in an effort to extract greater comprehension of that event (Davis et al., 2010). This research aimed to find a deeper understanding of how student-veterans made use of their military experience to succeed and earn completion in higher education. However, this particular research was helped since a theory organized and framed the approach.

Grounded theory, like phenomenology, seeks to understand behaviors and interactions. However, it is not looking to focus on one specific event. The scope of engagement studied is more general because researchers wanted to understand the meaning associated with behavior, the social interactions stemming from participants' lives. Grounded theory was used to ground the interpretation of data into some theory that explained or predicted research participants' behavior (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). When collection and analysis of participant data reached a point where no new themes emerged, research reached a point of saturation (Daviset al., 2010). This phase signaled to the researcher that themes were exhausted for the targeted sample. If the researcher was looking to develop a theory, rather than apply one, the design of the theory became emergent. This meant the development of the theory can be tweaked and adjusted as more relevant significant data became available. Grounded theory also impacted sampling methods, since targeted recruitment of participants provided meaningful data relevant to the topic being studied (Davis et al., 2010).

This research did not analyze a specific event or experience. It focused on understanding the use of prior military experience in a successful higher education context and how student-veterans made meaning of their military identity to improve their student experience. This research used a modified version of a theory which organized and developed the process going forward. This means the data collected did not dictate the researcher's process of analysis.

Researcher's Role

The researcher's role in this process was active. As a qualitative research, the researcher constructed interview questions. The investigator held multiple biases. The researcher is a military veteran who spent seven years in the U.S. Air Force. Furthermore, the examiner is the son of a retired U.S. Coast Guard chief petty officer, and has extended family members and close

friends that are also either military veterans or retirees. The academic investigator began their student experience post-military service, and progressed through postsecondary education by leveraging military training and military culture upbringing.

Guidance for the cultural transition was conflicting and inconsistent. The messages passed from the military culture emphasized that parts of the identity crafted during military service were incompatible to reintegration into the civilian culture. This messaging was reinforced, sometimes explicitly, by the culture of higher education which is that to be accepted and successfully assimilate, a military veteran needed to abandon portions of their highly-engrained identity. The researcher faced this challenge differently than their peers largely because it was a cultural transition already faced. As an American born from Hispanic heritage, assimilation and acceptance was earned by learning to abandon behaviors and traditions associated with their ethnic culture in favor of those stereotypically recognized as American. This time, however, the researcher chose which behaviors and traditions were kept and which were expunged.

The researcher developed ways for colleges to build relationships with their student-veteran population. They designed a pin for employees to voluntarily wear that identifies them as veterans. This allowed student-veterans an opportunity to identify a fellow veteran that can answer questions, offer assistance, or even mentorship. The researcher also designed a commemorative challenge coin to be awarded to student-veterans upon completion of their graduation. Coins were often a military gesture to commemorate accomplishments, service in a particular department, or under a particular commander. The coin designed by the academic investigator was meant to symbolize a better effort by the college at recognizing the culture from

which student-veterans hail. The researcher transitioned between, bridged, and navigated the two cultures in their own way.

Population and Sample

The population – group(s) of persons the research focused on - of this study was made up of prior and current student-veterans (Davis et al., 2010). The sample for this study was purposive because the researcher sought student-veterans who have directly experienced the phenomenon being studied (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). The reason for purposive sampling was to gather data from participants who met specific criteria and provided empirical insight to a unique set of experiences, rather than risk targeting participants with no direct experience. Participants sought were enlisted-service veterans who were later postsecondary students. These student-veterans obtained their postsecondary credential. These criteria supported the focus of the research which explored the non-cognitive attributes obtained during enlisted military service and their effects, if any, on a following student-veteran experience.

Sampling Procedures

The researcher utilized purposive sampling because they targeted specific groups of qualifying, willing participants based on specific criteria. However, as mentioned in the Chapter 2 – Literature Review, student-veterans often omit or avoid engagements or interactions that may involve inquiries into their military background, so as to assimilate or blend in with the rest of the student population. This may even happen with other veterans, if the environment dictates. The researcher intended to and began recruitment using purposive sampling but resorted to snowball sampling when purposive sampling strategies failed to garner research participants. To effectively execute snowballing strategies, the researcher communicated directly with veteran organizations and asked known veterans to recruit qualifying participants (Davis et al., 2010).

These sampling strategies were appropriate based on the purpose of the research. Student-veterans are the only population that can provide direct insight to the experience being studied. Enlisted-service veterans who were later postsecondary students, qualified for participation in the study. These student-veterans completed their postsecondary program and obtained the correlated credential.

The researcher reached a point of data saturation – a level of sample participation that no longer produces new information about the topic being researched (Davis et al., 2010). The invitation process depended largely on recruitment, the responses received, and the number of participants. Student-veterans that completed their program or obtained their postsecondary credential were targeted because these participants reached a level of discernable success. Qualifying participants experienced their military service prior to any postsecondary education. This qualifier was important because it increased the likelihood student-veterans would need to lean on their knowledge base of military training for guidance to success, as they were inexperienced in the culture of higher education prior to enrollment.

Instrumentation

According to Davis et al. (2010), instruments are typically used to measure a specific construct, or experience, from two separate points in time. As an instrument, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with participants. Interview questions consisted of 14 open-ended, semi-structured, core questions. Three to four questions pertained to military experience. The intent of the questions aimed at how student-veterans made sense of and recalled military experience, lessons, or skills. The next three to four questions addressed challenges faced in student experience. The purpose of the questions identified where student-veterans indicate perceived challenges, difficulties, or made sense of their student experience. The last three to

four core questions inquired about the use of military-learned attributes student-veterans utilized to recognize, problem solve, and mitigate dissonance. The researcher was mindful to leave room to explore meaningful answers relevant to research.

Data Collection Procedures/Techniques, Managing and Recording Data

The timeframe in which the interviewer gathered data was from April and July, 2020. Each interview was approximately one hour. The only in attendance of each interview were the participants, researcher, and recording device to capture interviews. The recordings served as tools to transcribe the interview. Questions were made available to each participant upon request. Meeting spaces depended on the type of interview requested by the participant. Face-to-face interviews were preferred, but accommodations were made in consideration of the participants' and researcher's schedule. Face-to-face (F2F) interviews were held in the researcher's workplace conference room. In instances this was not amenable, interviews were held in a comfortable, convenient, secure location agreed upon by participant and researcher. Videoconferencing was available for participants in geographic locations that made F2F interviews disadvantageous. Phone interviews were a last resort option for participants for whom F2F or videoconferencing were not viable.

Confidentiality was maintained by keeping all data collected on a private hard drive maintained by the examiner. In accordance with Creswell (2007), each participant's identity has been kept secret. The researcher kept a key to discern the participants and knew the identity of participants and when they were interviewed. This information will be withheld from anyone else. The confidentiality agreement for this study can be found in the appendix 1.1. Participants were asked to verify the transcripts for accurate interpretation of communication and interview.

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A diligent effort will be made for follow-up. Interviews and any other data gathered in reference to the study is held in secure storage on private, external hard drive maintained by researcher.

Data Analysis

According to Davis et al. (2010), a researcher will want to condense the data to a more manageable collection. This can be done through a process known as coding, as described by Davis et al. (2010):

> …coding generally consists of a multistep process that involves, first, reading through the data (transcript, recording, filed notes, texts, etc.) and jotting down notations on what you think the data are saying. In this stage, it's important to be familiar with your data and with what it is saying… This first step is followed by a step in which you review your notations and begin to build a code list, or code book, which is an organized listing of your categories and codes and the rules for documenting and applying them. Your book should include a detailed description of each code, inclusion and exclusion criteria, examples of text for each code, and examples of text that would not fall in each code (p 372).

The researcher utilized a grounded theory approach to coding, which means the coding process was not performed in a progression of steps, as it pertains to organizing themes. The manner of coding was an on-going process that begins as soon as data starts being collected (Davis et al., 2010). The researcher performed open coding – an early phase of coding that allow themes, concepts, or ideas to emerge. This task of organizing continued all the way until the end of the data gathering process. After data was collected from participants, the researcher

developed axial codes, or meta-codes, that aggregated the categories into broader themes. Participant data was then incorporated through a process called negative case analysis which categorized data into an already-existing theme, created a new theme, or revised an already-existing theme. This process continued until no new themes emerged from the data (Davis et al., 2010). The researcher aggregated relevant themes into appropriate categories that addressed the study's research questions.

Validation of Findings Based on Methodology

Validity, in terms of qualitative research, is a concept almost held in disregard. The idea of validity runs contrary to the point of qualitative research. By stressing the validity of data, one implies that some data may not be valid. In qualitative research, Maxwell (2013) suggests that rather than trying to meet an objective standard of validity, researchers would be better served to preserve the quality, genuineness, and authenticity of the data gathered. It is, after all, a participant's account of a given experience. Data gathered is inherently subjective of the participant and not objective. The threats to validity, or the manners in which a researcher could be misinterpreting the data, ignoring data, or participants are being untrue, are better mechanisms to justify the trustworthiness of the data. Another word for trustworthiness is credibility. Credibility – in the context of research - can be defined as "the believability of the research to the reader, or how much the reader believes the research to represent the participant's reality" (Davis et al., 2010). An additional manner to build validity of data is triangulation. Triangulation "is a validation approach based on the search for convergency of results obtained by using multiple investigators, methods, data sources, and/or theoretical perspectives (Johnson & Christensen, 2014, p. 299). By using more lenses to corroborate the data, the more one can expect the data to hold up to scrutiny. Researchers can also provide the research participants with the data they

contributed in order to confirm or correct the reported material. This technique is called member checking (Davis et al., 2010). If a researcher checks "the consistency between raters, or between a rater and an expert", they are performing interrater reliability. "This information is necessary when measurement involves subjective interpretation, such as open-ended questions" (Roberts, 2010, p. 152). Despite being a qualitative study, there was no discernable reservations regarding the substantiation of the data gathered. The data gathered from qualitative studies were far less defined, in terms of measurability, because the primary purpose of this data is to provide understanding. Therefore, the validity of the data had a different focus. Validity was defended by illustrating authenticity, credibility, and trustworthiness.

Assumptions

Johnson and Christensen (2014) propose that assumptions are variables which a researcher has virtually no control over yet believes to be true or plausible. A primary assumption of the researcher was that participants were honest and offered the best of their recollection of their experiences. The researcher assumed that participants interviewed were truthful about their veteran status and order of their enlisted military service relative to their postsecondary education. Completion and GPA status were participation criteria the investigator assumes were honestly met.

Limitations

"Limitations are particular features of your study that you know may negatively affect the results or your ability to generalize. Limitations are usually areas over which you have no control" (Roberts, 2010, p. 162). Limitations include response rate, sample size, and methodology constraints. A significant limitation was the researcher's ability to verify veteran status, chronology of events, GPA, and accurate reflection of events participants offer.

Conclusion

Through qualitative strategies, the researcher identified non-cognitive, learned attributes from enlisted military service that guided student-veterans to success in higher education. In Chapter Two, research acknowledged the scarcity of strategies - that are not prescriptive - to provide student-veterans with support. Further, research highlights that student-veterans are still achieving post-secondary success, despite a myriad of challenges unique to the assimilation from military culture to civilian/college culture.

Schlossberg's 4S transition model provided a structure on which to concentrate questions on two internal foci – self and strategies. Through interviews, the researcher collected data from participants that was coded into themes. These themes substantiated the types of non-cognitive attributes learned from enlisted military service that guided student-veterans to success in higher education. Emergent themes from interviews were analyzed using Byrd and MacDonald's (2005) non-cognitive attributes linked to non-traditional students. These themes were used as collaborative, inclusive strategies of cultural assimilation by student-veterans into higher education and civilian cultures.

Chapter IV - Results

Introduction

As stated in Chapter One, the purpose of this study was to identify non-cognitive attributes learned from enlisted military service that can guide student-veterans to success in higher education. This chapter provides an overview of the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, and the research questions that guided the exploration for this study. The chapter then offers an organized reflection of data sourced from participant interviews and the resulting emergent, recurring themes derived by interview questions. Lastly, this chapter provides a summary of the data findings.

Statement of the Problem

Community colleges continue to struggle with low rates of student success, retention, and completion (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, n.d.). The 2012 cohort of first time, full time students in their first semester reported a less than 20% graduation rate by The National Center for Education Statistics. Furthermore, 75% of students in this cohort were awarded some type of financial aid. (Ginder et al., 2017). This means that the majority of students in this cohort were accepting an alternative source of financing beyond out-of-pocket funds. This alleviated a significant barrier to completion, however, no return on investment was seen. Now consider that over 10 million students in the United States - nearly fifty percent of America's undergraduates – get their start in post-secondary education on community college campuses (Bailey et al., 2015). It is understood that placement test scores and secondary school GPAs are poor predictors of student performance and success, and that there is little meaningful evidence linking the two, which demands community colleges choose a tool to estimate things like student success and completion (King et al., 1994; Armstrong, 1999). Hoyt (1999) helped in

this area, as his research highlighted that what does provide an accurate, meaningful gauge of student performance is each student's level of performance in their first academic term.

Mitigating the supposed academic-preparedness advantage of the traditional student, research widens the lens in understanding preparedness to include non-traditional students – a population whom MacKinnon and Floyd (2016) found to typically suffer deficient levels in academic preparation, family and financial commitments, poor foundational skills, and issues pertaining to part-time and reenrollment. All this withstanding, the academically-underprepared non-traditional student population does not find itself restricted to failure. Rather, Ley and Young (1998), Ochroch and Dugan (1986), and Valadez (1993) realized academically-underprepared students executed sets of attributes which guided their journey to academic success. The most common attributes, by far, leveraged by non-traditional students in this capacity were the non-cognitive attributes of time management, self-advocacy, and goal setting and attainment (Byrd and MacDonald, 2005).

Olson et al., (2014) recognized student-veterans as a uniquely specific sub-group of the non-traditional student community. Research already found higher education woefully deficient recognizing and addressing student-veteran challenges with reintegration to a civilian society, and more specifically, assimilating into the culture of higher education (Ackerman et al., 2009). Conversely, when exploring opportunities to support this distinct culture - rather than seeking strengths and opportunities - research almost exclusively showcases traumas, obstacles, and issues faced by student-veterans attempting integration into higher education (Naphan & Elliott, 2015). It is reasonable to suggest a paradigm shift from struggles and obstacles preventing acculturation and assimilation to underestimated advantages and benefits that bridge and guide student-veterans to completion and academic credential attainment (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014).

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Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify non-cognitive attributes learned from enlisted military service that can guide student-veterans to success in higher education. Bringing these attributes to the forefront of institutional leaders' awareness can support the student-veteran transition to the community college by nurturing advantageous characteristics engrained during enlisted military service and embedded in the military identity. Failure to do so can complicate or even destroy a veteran's ability to reintegrate into civilian society. (Bauman, 2009). The benefit is reciprocal, since improved supports can result in increased student-veteran completion and success rates which reflect on the performance of community colleges.

For the purpose of this study, Schlossberg's (2011) 4S Model served as a theoretical framework. The 4S Model identified four driving factors related to coping and success of transitioning identities: situation, support, self and strategies. A more detailed explanation of this model can be found in Chapter Two. A principle of military training addresses self-discipline, especially when experiencing variables outside of one's control (Livingston et al., 2011). Therefore, this research dealt exclusively with the two factors most likely within the student-veteran's control – self and strategies. Byrd and MacDonald's (2005) three non-cognitive attributes that are valued even more than academic skills by non-traditional students as being crucial to success - time management, self-advocacy, and goal-setting and commitment - serve as a compare and contrast model. The researcher explored the lived experiences of student-veterans, told through their narrative, and identified which non-cognitive attributes learned during enlisted military service student-veterans intentionally executed to build their path toward academic success and completion.

Research Questions

The following three questions guided this qualitative study:

1. What attributes learned through enlisted military experience translate to student success in higher education?

2. What attributes learned through enlisted military experience correlate with the non-cognitive skills exhibited by non-traditional students that lead to success in higher education?

3. How can student-veterans effectively apply their enlisted military experience as it relates to their student experience in higher education?

Interview Findings

The results from the interviews were organized into the following categories: demographic characteristics, learned enlisted military attributes, correlation of learned military attributes to primary non-cognitive attributes, and opportunities to apply learned military attributes.

Participant Population

The participant population derived of enlisted military service veterans who began their higher education program at a community college and completed their higher education program after their military service. A completed higher education program results in an earned credential, e.g. a certificate or degree, regardless whether it was completed at their first institution or if the student-veteran transferred to another school or university. With an earned credential, the participants exhibited academic success. Military officers were not in consideration as participants, since officers are typically commissioned after their experience with higher education, earning a baccalaureate degree in a given field. Research participants chose to be a

part of the American military community and adopt its cultural qualities, making it a community

of choice. Enlisted military service veterans entered military service through boot-camp, where

the immersion and training process to adopt the military's values, customs, laws, etc. began

(Meyer, 2015). Since veterans chose to be a part of and adopt cultural markers of the military

community - a uniquely collectivist community in an individualist society (Hofstede, 1991) -

demographic traits the researcher sought were hometown, branch of service, years of service, and

career specialty. Diversity in the participant population was represented through these

demographics. Therefore, characteristics commonly related to communities of chance, such as

traditional demographics of age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or race, were not primary

characteristics on which this study focused.

Participants shared information on their hometown, what U.S. military branch they

served, how many and/or what years they served, in which military instillations they were

stationed, and the career field in which they served. The researcher chose to capture these

particular demographic characteristics, rather than age, sex, ethnicity, religion, etc., to illustrate

the complex makeup of U.S. military veterans despite the collectivist nature of the community.

Tables 4.1 – 4.6 illustrate these categories followed by explanations

Table 4.1 Places of Origin

Hometown	Frequency	Percentage of Total
Arkansas	*1*	*6%*
Fayetteville	1	6%
District of Columbia	*1*	*6%*
Washington	1	6%
Florida	*1*	*6%*
Jacksonville	1	6%
Illinois	*1*	*6%*
Chicago	1	6%
Maryland	*1*	*6%*
Baltimore	1	6%
North Carolina	*1*	*6%*

Fayetteville	1	6%
South Dakota	*2*	*11%*
Alexandria	1	6%
Platte	1	6%
Texas	*10*	*56%*
Corpus Christi	4	22%
Laredo	1	6%
Midland	1	6%
Petronila	1	6%
San Antonio	2	11%
Taft	1	6%

Table 4.2 U.S. Military Branch of Service

Military Branch	Frequency	Percentage of Total
US Army	7	39%
Reserves	1	6%
US Navy	6	33%
US Air Force	0	0%
US Marine Corps	3	17%
US Coast Guard	1	6%

Demographic Characteristics

There were 18 participants – 15 male and 3 female. Participants hailed from 14 different hometowns. Corpus Christi, Texas was the most commonly referenced hometown among this participant group at four times. The most common state of origin mentioned was Texas (10). Four military branches and one military reserves branch were represented. The U.S. Army had the most representation with seven participants – eight, including the Army Reservist. The U.S. Navy had the second-most with six. The only branch with no participants represented before the point of saturation was the U.S. Air Force.

Table 4.3 Number of Years Served

Years	Frequency	Percentage of Total
1-4	4	22%
5-10	8	44%
11-15	1	6%

| 16-20+ | 5 | 28% |

Table 4.4 Years Served (Decades)

Decades	Frequency	Percentage of Total
1941-1950	1	6%
1951-1960	1	6%
1961-1970	2	11%
1971-1980	2	11%
1981-1990	5	28%
1991-2000	9	50%
2001-2010	9	50%
2011-2020	6	33%
No Response Given	1	6%

Years of Service

Interviewees served for varying durations, with five serving for 20 years or more – a traditional length for career retirement. Almost half of the participants committed 5-10 years to military service, the equivalent of roughly two enlistments. Years of military service ranged from as far back as 1947 to as recent as 2017 – a 70-year sample range. Half the interviewees served during the 1990s, while half – some duplicates – also served during the 2000s. One-third were serving as recent as the 2010s. The most represented decades regarding years served ranged from the 1980s through the 2010s, or an estimated 40-year window.

Table 4.5 Locations or Instillations Stationed

Location/Instillation	Frequency	Percentage of Total
Alaska	*2*	*11%*
Anchorage	1	6%
Ketchikan	1	6%
California	*8*	*44%*
Camp Pendleton	2	11%
March ARB, Riverside	1	6%
NAS Alameda	1	6%
Navy TC-San Diego	1	6%
Parris Island-San Diego	1	6%
Twenty-Nine Palms	1	6%
USC-ROTC, Los Angeles	1	6%

Colorado	*2*	*11%*
Lowery AFB	1	6%
USAFA, Colorado Springs	1	6%
Florida	*1*	*6%*
Jacksonville	1	6%
Georgia	*5*	*28%*
Fort Benning	2	11%
Fort Gordon/Augustana	2	11%
Fort Stewart	1	6%
Hawai'i	*1*	*6%*
Schofield Barracks	1	6%
Illinois	*1*	*6%*
GLTC, Chicago	1	6%
Kentucky	*3*	*17%*
Fort Campbell	1	6%
Fort Knox	2	11%
Maryland	*1*	*6%*
Frederick	1	6%
Massachusetts	*1*	*6%*
Fort Devens	1	6%
Mississippi	*3*	*17%*
Navy Station Pascagoula	1	6%
Stennis Space Center	1	6%
Naval Construction Battalion Center, Gulfport	1	6%
New Jersey	*1*	*6%*
Earle	1	6%
New York	*2*	*11%*
Fort Drum	1	6%
West Pt. Military Acad.	1	6%
North Carolina	*4*	*22%*
Camp Geiger	1	6%
Camp June	1	6%
Camp Lejeune	2	11%
Oklahoma	*2*	*11%*
Fort Sill	1	6%
Tinker AFB	1	6%
South Carolina	*5*	*28%*
Fort Jackson	3	17%
North Charleston	1	6%
Parris Island	1	6%
Texas	*9*	*50%*
Fort Sam Houston	1	6%
NAS Corpus Christi	2	11%
Fort Bliss	2	11%

Fort Hood	2	11%
San Antonio	1	6%
NAS Ingleside	1	6%
Virginia	*7*	*39%*
Norfolk	1	6%
Dahlgren	1	6%
Fairfax	1	6%
Fort Lee	2	11%
Fort Eustis/Little Creek	1	6%
NAS Oceana, Virginia Beach	1	6%
Washington	*3*	*17%*
Bremerton	1	6%
Fort Lewis	2	11%
D.C., Washington	*1*	*6%*
Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling AFB	1	6%
Afghanistan	1	6%
Germany	4	22%
Baumholder	1	6%
Giberstadt Air Field	1	6%
USAG Grafenwoehr	2	11%
Iraq	1	6%
Japan	1	6%
Korea	3	17%
Kuwait	1	6%
Panama	1	6%
Philippines	1	6%
Saudi Arabia	1	6%

Locations Stationed

As mentioned earlier, while the military community is a collectivist population, there is plenty of diversity experienced during the time of service. Over half of participants were from the state of Texas. Approximately three-quarters of the veterans interviewed served their country as a soldier or a sailor. Selection of military branch did not homogenize the sample. Despite these characteristic concentrations in the interviewees' pre-service lives – choice of branch service is made prior to enlistment – the veterans were stationed in 19 different U.S. states, one continental U.S. territory, and nine foreign countries. Texas (9), California (8), and Virginia (7)

were the most recurrent states where research participants were stationed. Furthermore,

participants were also stationed among nine foreign countries. Germany (4) and Korea (3) were

the most common countries of assigned duty station.

Table 4.6 Career Field Specialties

Specialty	Frequency	Percentage of Total
Admin Specialist	1	6%
Artillery	1	6%
Cavalry Scout	1	6%
Corpsman	2	11%
Counseling	1	6%
Crew Chief (UH1 Helicopter)	1	6%
Culinary Arts Specialist	1	6%
Documentation Specialist (Photography)	1	6%
Field Radio Operator	1	6%
Infantry	4	22%
Intelligence		
Counter	1	6%
Human	1	6%
Scout	1	6%
Logistics Specialist	2	11%
Machinest's Mate	1	6%
Mechanic (track vehicle)	1	6%
Military Police	1	6%
Operations Specialist	1	6%
Ordinance (Anti-Aircraft Artillery)	1	6%
Quartermaster/Multifunctional	1	6%
Radiology Tech	1	6%
Satellite Communications	1	6%
Water Treatment	1	6%
Yeoman	1	6%

Career Specialties

There were 25 different career fields reported. The only duplications were the

Infantryman (4), Corpsman (2), and Logistics (2) specialties. Although Army Infantry was a

military branch-specific career field represented four times, participants reported Infantry has

multiple sub-specialties within, diversifying the career field further. The combination of numerous station assignments in addition to the various career fields constitutes a myriad of military experiences and an assorted participant sampling.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to identify non-cognitive attributes learned from enlisted military service that can guide student-veterans to success in higher education. The researcher conducted interviews, and using grounded theory, analyzed the responses to answer the following research questions:

RQ1 - What attributes learned through enlisted military experience translate to student success in higher education?

The full list of themes are illustrated in Table 4.7

Table 4.7 Non-cognitive Attribute Themes

Attribute	# of Related Responses	Percentage of Responses
Commitment/Discipline	66	21%
Communication/Self-advocacy	42	13%
Leadership/Team-building/Military Core values	38	12%
Goal setting/ planning	37	12%
Adaptability	35	11%
Responsibility/Accountability	26	8%
Self-awareness	20	6%
Confidence in self, ability	20	6%
Time Management	16	5%
Perspective of risk/consequence	12	4%
Caution	1	0%

As a result of 18 participant interviews, 313 responses were given, and 11 themes emerged, in correlation to Research Question #1. The emergent themes, in order (of number of mentions), were: Commitment/Discipline (66), Communication/Self-Advocacy (42), Leadership/Team-building/Military Core values (38), Goal-setting and Planning (37),

Adaptability (35), Responsibility/Accountability (26), Self-awareness (20), Confidence in

self/ability (20), Time Management (16), Perspective of risk/consequence (12), Caution (1).

Recurring Themes

Figure 4.1 Non-cognitive Attribute Themes

Using grounded theory, the researcher identified eleven recurring themes from analyzed

data that resonated throughout interviews.

Commitment/Discipline

The foremost non-cognitive attribute identified by research participants was

commitment/discipline. This attribute aligned with research that indicated student-veterans

demonstrate a stern commitment to their role and responsibilities as a student (Rumann &

Hamrick, 2010). Variations of this attribute are portrayed in the core values held by each of the

military branches. Participants consistently indicated commitment to a purpose that allowed them

to be undeterred by obstacles. Experience in service-related scenarios provided them a sense of poise under pressure to face challenges. The prevalence of responses that supported disciplined commitment as a predominant, non-cognitive attribute indicate the core value is often carried into the post-military life of student-veterans:

"If there was a problem, I chose not to see it (that way). It may have been a problem. I just didn't. I disregarded it… I didn't pay attention to it. You learn to just succeed and go over that problem, or (think) how can I fix this? I guess I probably didn't see it as a challenge. It was just an obstacle. I need to get from here to there. (Participant 2).

Other participants reflected on Discipline as they applied it to the entire process of their academic journey:

"Discipline. Definitely because most of what I really noticed by going to school is you have to have discipline to do it. You have to do what they asked for you to do. If you don't do it, obviously, you're going to make bad grades. You're not going to make good grades. So you have to be disciplined in order to accomplish what's in front of you, getting the mission done. It's not the same kind of mission, but this is a mission that needs to be done for me in order to be better and be more successful in order to support my family, which is my mother." (Participant 4)

"From the military culture, that didn't have a huge effect on me going into college culture, but it benefited me in building that discipline… I got a taste of what being a somewhat disciplined student was when I was in the military. So the military helped me that way. My military experience benefitted me. My

challenges were all the [goofing] around I'd done throughout high school, and the breaks I had in between my education. So I had to relearn, but I took that military experience with me. And that benefitted me a great deal in the fact that it really gave me some internal discipline to learn the material and focus." (Participant 18)

Communication/Self-advocacy

Research participants consistently described the encouragement from military leaders to ask questions, regardless how simple the question seemed. According to responses, the effectiveness of operations, the safety of service members, and improvement efforts depended upon, among other things, clear communication. It is not considered helpful to turn away questions. Participants generally held an expectation that authority figures were accountable to have or provide answers, and were familiar with utilization of the chain-of-command to get answers.

"What was in the syllabus or requirements were to make sure you paid attention to that. And if you didn't understand, don't be afraid to ask the question. I think the military does a good job of making the statement that any question is not going to be put down. They were there to answer the question." (Participant 17)

One interviewee expressed awareness of context, listening, and clarity of messaging from both a sender and receiver position:

[I've] got to do things like time management, and follow-up, relay orders, and all this other stuff because I deal with a lot of people that have no idea what's going on. So I [have] got to bring them into the conversation, and then I [have] got to lead them to where they need to go. So you know, communication is a big

one, I guess… Clarity is another huge one that I see that is very, very rare in the

civilian world, the clarity of messages. Especially being that we communicate

mostly through things like email, Skype, text, messages, clarity is lost on a lot of

things. You know, not necessarily clarity as well, but also like tone of messages

[is] highly misinterpreted through those kinds of communication devices."

(Participant 1)

Another participant expressed a common sentiment among the sampled group,

regarding the willingness to seek necessary feedback or information:

"I see kids, and they're afraid to go talk to their instructors. They're just

people. To me, I guess I could see how they look at it. It's like me having to go

ask [for] something [from] my RDC (Recruit Division Commander) or

something. Oh, no, you just don't do that. I guess being in the military made it

easier to approach anyone. It didn't matter what uniform you're wearing in the

service. So it didn't matter here in the civilian world, either. They're just people.

They're either going to help me or they're not. And I'm not going to find out until I

actually go talk to them. So I find it really easy to talk to anybody." (Participant 3)

Leadership/Team-building/Military Core Values

Interviewees described a common experience with group work projects during their

college experience. Because their military service was laden with activities and exercises to

facilitate team-building strategies, they found themselves in class projects emphasizing these

skills. Because of their backgrounds, research participants were able to rely on their team

building and leadership experience. Although participants admitted to not being fans of the group

work format, they also confessed to giving accurate feedback to professors if group partners

were participating in the group work effectively. No classmate would be left behind, but they would only get the credit they earned.

"Before the Navy, I was a show-off... After the Navy, [and after] the experience of being torn down and being built up again, I [had a different attitude that said], "We're the same, everybody's the same. We wear the same uniform. We wear the same boots. We wear the same blue shirt." We all wear dress uniforms. The only difference is that some of us have more ribbons than others because they've been in longer, but the uniform is the same. It really reinforced in me that teamwork is the way to go. And so, when I have a chance to be part of a team, whether it be at work, whether it be recreational or whether it be working on a project, I love it. Reinforce the team. The many is better than one." (Participant 15)

Another participant highlighted a foundational principle of leadership. This value dictated a perspective of the instructor-student relationship, and illustrated the respect student-veterans have for college leaders as professionals and authority figures:

"I think one of the biggest experiences for me was accountability, attention to detail, how to be not only a leader, but a good follower. A lot of people in their later years look back at their careers and they say you can train, and you can become a good leader just by listening to and hearing people. The part of that growth as a leader is being a good follower." (Participant 17)

Goal-setting and Planning

Byrd and MacDonald (2005) provided a framework for understanding the non-cognitive attribute of goal setting/planning in the context of student completion. In their framework, goal

setting explained the ability of students to identify both short-term and long-term goals that are key to their academic journey. This attribute was the fourth-highest recurring theme in this study, with 37 references. Participants stated that by setting a goal, and creating a plan for that goal, student-veterans were able to identify key components necessary to advancing in a fluid, unfamiliar environment:

> "So, the biggest lesson I have learned is goal setting, for sure. I still like set goals
> to this day… That's how I've been able to finish school because seriously, if I
> didn't set that goal for myself, I would have just given up on school and not done
> it." (Participant 5)

Adaptability

Thirty-five responses, roughly eleven percent, from participants highlighted the skill of adaptability. Interviewees acknowledged they recognized and felt they were in an unfamiliar environment. Rumann and Hamrick (2010) proposed that if a student-veteran could learn to adapt quicker to the culture of higher education, managing the transition process would be less overwhelming. Almost all research participants consciously tailored their behaviors to provide an advantage. A particular research participant communicated how they adapted levels of empathy, perspective, and correlative interpersonal communication skills to their new academic peers:

> "It was hard. It was weird, I think. Like I mentioned, I just got back from
> after about a 14 month deployment. And I think in some ways, the difficulty was
> more social than anything, because I had a hard time identifying with a lot of my
> peers. I mean, they were already much younger than me at this point, because I
> was 25. And most of these people were somewhere between 17 and 20. So seeing
> what motivated my peers felt very different from what I was interested in. And

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while I had plenty of time to party and all that stuff, I felt like I was much more focused on my studies. Around that same age, I know I wasn't disciplined to do anything, so I kind of understood where they're coming from, but it was hard to adapt to that." (Participant 14)

One participant described how they directly adapted a model of their daily military regimen as a transferable skill:

"For three hours, I would read in the morning, every morning. So, going back on that discipline of the military. Get up, make your rack, go get chow, muster, work until lunchtime, come back after lunch, and finish the job. And when it's done, you go home. No matter if it's five o'clock or 10 o'clock, when the job's done. My job was basically to study and learn, so I can get out." (Participant 15)

Another interviewee provided an example of adapting specific habits learned during enlisted military service as a transferable skill to advance toward completion:

"I'm always writing things down, taking notes. Being organized as far as the notebooks we always carried. You always had to have your notebook in your pocket or something. So just taking notes of dates and trying to keep track of when things were due and when you had to owe somebody something or when you were supposed to meet somebody. So, I found that was a great tool to use. And now I've been using posted notes. I don't carry necessarily a notebook around now, but I kept my book bag." (Participant 6)

Responsibility/Accountability

The non-cognitive attribute of Responsibility/Accountability marked the first attribute outside of participants' predominant responses, at 26 mentions. Interviewees had stories of

adversity. They shared challenging moments. However, each one communicated personal accountability for the results of their actions, and their responsibilities as students:

"The main one is accountability. You go to class on time, you show up, you do your homework. You do your best. In the long run, when you get your grade, you're the only one who's going to be responsible for what you get." (Participant 3)

Self-awareness

Participants experienced a cultural difference between military and civilian contexts. They also experienced a cultural difference transitioning into the higher education culture. To adapt, this study's fifth most common non-cognitive attribute, interviewees needed to be aware of the differences and how they stood in comparison. To adapt well, the non-cognitive attribute of self-awareness was important to participants.

"I can definitely tell you, the ability to correct people or to address people in a certain manner was definitely a negative, at first, but also to the way I treated just certain scenarios. Maybe we're in class, and someone says, 'Oh, it was a long night last night.' I'd sit there go, 'Oh, really. What's a long night for you? I don't care. That's irrelevant.' And I think it was just me being dismissive of it, just assuming that their experiences are invalid, or experiences don't matter because our resumes say military. These individuals don't have those experiences that you do, but you don't have the experience that they have. And like I said, it was something that I think once I got to know some of my peers personally, it really helped tone down some of the preconceived notions about kids in college." (Participant 12)

While it is valuable for student-veterans to be aware of their impact on external relationships and dynamics, this participant voiced the importance for transitioning student-veterans to have an understanding of self for the purpose of self-management and maintenance:

> "You have to figure out what kind of learner you are, and then you have to cater to that. So, if you need a study group, then do a study group. If you need alone time, then you do the alone time. And then you studied beforehand." (Participant 4)

Confidence

Each of the participants shared stories that reflected personal growth through their military experience. Participants identified moments all along their careers, which began at an equal point of introduction in basic training, or boot camp. This personal growth provided research participants with material to understand they were capable of achieving success. This attribute is not interchangeable with Commitment/Discipline, as it was described by interviewees. According to the veterans, discipline maintained on good days and bad days. However, the feeling of confidence was also leaned upon when facing difficult or uncertain times.

> "… I also learned that when I saw officers, and I understood the rank system, that officers have to have a college degree and enlisted don't, I started to understand the significance of an education. And then I put the pieces together, thinking to myself, I said, "There's no difference between myself and lieutenant." And I started thinking I said, I remember thinking clearly that I'm better than this person, than the lieutenant." (Participant 7)

The sentiment of confidence was seconded by this participant:

"I was thoroughly concerned about my ability to pass because I was having a very difficult time. Those first few weeks, especially in the first few weeks early on, I was failing every single test. I thought, 'My God, this has been a waste. I've only got so much GI Bill time.' But once I figured things out, at that point, like I said, resilience, perseverance, the ability to adapt and overcome and the self-belief and confidence in your ability. (Participant 12)

Time Management

Another non-cognitive attribute that correlated with Byrd and MacDonald's (2005) research was time management, where time management was found to be one of the predominant three non-cognitive attributes. For the participants of this research, time management only placed ninth out of the eleven themes. For those that referenced the non-cognitive attribute, time management was a tightly held attribute:

"Before the military, I didn't know anything about time management, and the military taught me about time management. And so, one of the skills that I re-imposed on myself was time management. For example, I have set the clock for an hour. I can do about 30-35 pages in an hour. At the end of the hour, I get up for 10-15 minutes, 20 minutes. Go back, sit down, set the clock for another hour, and read another 30 pages. And then when evolution is done, you're done with whatever page you're on. After that hour, write 'HERE', and then move on to something else. When I went back to that book, I knew exactly where to find it.." (Participant 15)

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The attribute of time management was also supported by the following

participant, who described and reemphasized their adherence to their tried-and-

true attribute:

"Do things early; don't wait to the last minute. So, for example, if

registration is September 15, I needed to have all my ducks in a row a month in

advance. Don't wait until September 15 to start getting papers ready and pulling

other resources that you have. I was taught to do things early. If you know what

date is coming, get ready for it. Don't let it run up on you, and you're not prepared

because now you don't want to be shuffling around and scurrying around to get

things done, and it just does not look good. Yeah, do things early. And I guess

that kind of goes into the schoolwork. That kind of rides into the schoolwork too.

So, the professor gives you a date. You need to be ready about two weeks before."

(Participant 2)

Perspective of Risk/Consequence

The research by Basham (2008) highlighted that military veterans face a variety of

dangerous, sometimes life-threatening, circumstances. These circumstances may occur with

much more frequency, depending on what career specialty the veteran held. The experience of

exposure to such dangers provided veterans a unique reference point from which to juxtapose the

stresses of being student-veteran. By comparing their challenges of being a student to the

challenges of being an enlisted service member, student-veterans were able to see school

challenges as less formidable. The failure of an assignment in school was bad, but it did not carry

the same weight as a failed assignment in the military, where the consequences may be paid with

someone's life:

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"The stakes [in school] aren't as high. So, when the stakes are high, when you have a lot more [on the line], you're just more willing to take on more chance. Not to say I don't really think you take chances the military… the military for me really helped channel energy, fusion or whatever fusion are. It helped put everything in the right perspective, also the right direction, where the other paths are successful." (Participant 12)

One participant reflected on their early days in military service. The rite-of-passage process integrating into the military culture began at basic military training, or boot camp, where the first trainings to endure higher levels of stress began:

"You know, it was just kind of what you expected. It was all in your face and everything was just "dress, right, dress" (military marching formation). There's a specific time to be somewhere and you had five minutes to be there and have 100 things to get done. You had to have it done and be there in five minutes. You better be there (or there'll be) a lot of push-ups. Just a lot of that until you actually got to where you did that initial soldiering skills and it kind of started to relax a little bit once you got into AIT (Advanced Individual Training, or A-school), a little bit of MOS-specific (training) as far as shooting and maneuvering and moving as a squad, things like that. Obviously, it slowly relaxes. It all makes sense to me why you have to do that. They have to pick you up, throw you down and then slap you around a little bit and let you know "Hey, this is how it's going to be. If you comply, everything is gravy. If not it can be rough." (Participant 8)

Caution

The researcher made it a point to ask what type of, if any, advice or guidance was passed to interviewees regarding the transition from their role as an enlisted military service member to that of a civilian college student. The overwhelming majority did not receive, or did not recall receiving, any kind of guidance or advice. Most mentioned a formal out-processing protocol. Of those who gave a description, almost all labeled the process as inconsistent. Even when out-processing veterans received some level of informative session for leaving the military, veterans could still get feedback from mentors:

> "Well, I was told by plenty of master chiefs, 'Don't become friends with civilians. It's a dog-eat-dog world. It's different for military. So, you do your job. Do it well, and you're not there to make friends.' That's what I was told. And I kind of learned the hard way because I [thought], 'Oh, what do they know? They're old.' But yes, my first job in the civilian sector, that point was proven to be true." (Participant 3)

RQ2 - What attributes learned through enlisted military experience correlate with the non-cognitive skills exhibited by non-traditional students that lead to success in higher education?

Three primary, non-cognitive attributes surfaced from Byrd and MacDonald's (2005) research. These attributes were: a) Time management, b) Self-advocacy, and c) Goal setting and commitment. These three attributes also appeared among the 11 attribute themes offered by participants in this study. However, the three were not, far and away, the predominant attributes to emerge, as in Byrd and MacDonald's (2005) study. Of the 11 attribute themes, Goal-setting and Planning, Self-advocacy, and Time management received 37, 42, and 16 mentions, respectively. Goal-setting and Planning ranked 2nd; Self-advocacy ranked 4th; and Time

management ranked 9th out of the 11 attributes. In this particular study, Commitment/Discipline rated the highest by participants, at 21%. A set of five non-cognitive attributes distanced themselves, relative to the other six attributes: Commitment/Discipline (21%), Communication/Self-advocacy (13%), Leadership/Team-building/Military Core values (12%), Goal setting/ planning (12%), and Adaptability (11%). This thematic grouping is slightly larger than the three predominant non-cognitive attributes revealed by Byrd and MacDonald (2005). This research shares two attributes with the list provided by Byrd and MacDonald (2005). These are Self-advocacy and Goal-setting, although this research identified a blend of Communication and Self-advocacy, and Goal-setting and Planning, respectively. The third attribute from Byrd and MacDonald's (2005) predominant trifecta of attributes was Time management. This attribute showed up in this research, but participants only acknowledged use of it in five percent of their responses leaving it sitting at ninth out of the eleven themes.

RQ3 - How can student-veterans effectively apply their enlisted military experience as it relates to their student experience in higher education?

By reflecting on their own experiences, participants offered insight how student-veterans can effectively apply their enlisted military experience as it relates to their student experience in higher education. Of 18 participant interviews, 61 responses were given, and seven themes emerged, in correlation to Research Question #3. The 7 themes, in order of (number of mentions), were: Identify scenarios which military attributes are appropriate, applicable (16), Network/Seek guidance (12), Establish personal habits/routines (10), Plan/prepare for transition before separation (8), Adapt rather than impose (7), Exercise cultural awareness/understanding (5), and Identify parallel structures that exist in both military and higher education worlds (2).

Table 4.8 Opportunities to Apply Attributes

Opportunities	Frequency	Percentage of Total
Identify scenarios to apply military attributes	16	26%
Network/Seek guidance	12	20%
Establish personal habits/routines	10	16%
Plan/Prepare for transition before separation	8	13%
Adapt rather than impose	7	12%
Exercise cultural awareness/ understanding	5	8%
Identify parallel structures in military and higher ed	2	3%

Identify Scenarios to Apply Military Attributes

The most recommended activity by research participants to effectively apply what they learned as enlisted military service members was to proactively look for scenarios where the non-cognitive attributes were appropriate applied. They did not once recommend for fellow veterans to stop thinking like a veteran or omit any aspects of their military identities. Each encouraged the idea that being a veteran was an advantage. Student-veterans just had to figure out how:

"So, I did briefings for the staff, like chief of staff, for the heavy hitters and also did instructor duty. So, instructor duty is exactly what it sounds like. It is arduous duty, but I had to teach war problems and warfighting tactics to naval officers. For four years I did it, and you go to a school beforehand to teach you how to be an instructor. And so basically the school is nothing but public speaking." (Participant 2)

The opportunities to find appropriate scenarios to apply non-cognitive attributes do not always need to be sought. Student-veterans are sometimes provided the chance by a familiar process, described in the military as, "volun-told":

"We have these teams, the teams with these other people who turn and look to me, and say, "Oh, well, you're a veteran. You're going to be in charge. You know how to be in charge of things." So, I just took those opportunities and ran it so I can run these teams the way I wanted to run them. I didn't have to deal with anyone else." (Participant 6)

Network/Seek Guidance

Research participants advised that student-veterans network and seek guidance to aid their transition into the culture of higher education. The advice utilizes the second most referenced, non-cognitive attribute - communication/self-advocacy. This guidance aligned with research that observed student-veterans experience a dissonance when transitioning their roles, from military service member to student (Bauman, 2013). Rumann and Hamrick (2010) proposed student-veterans find a way to speed up their adaptability acclimation process to reduce the dissonance. Research participants admitted not have supporting mentorship to guide their transition post-military service:

"There was no discussions about after. After the Cuban Missile Crisis, we immediately, well maybe a couple of months later, we were on board ship and then doing the Southeast Asia and that's when we kind of stopped in Vietnam. And then upon return, and that was the end of the tour of the last six months or so was just doing administrative work at the battalion. So, I don't recall receiving any discussions about what to do after the military." (Participant 13)

Another participant had a similar experience. Although the offered sentiment from their military colleague evolved from confusion to acceptance, they received no valuable feedback on how to best transition back to a civilian society:

"I didn't really get any advice to be honest with you. From my military colleagues, let me put it like this: 'You're getting out? Why?' And the other one was, 'I get it. I don't blame you. If I was young, I might take the chance to get out.' So as far as advice with assimilating, not, I would say none." (Participant 12)

Establish Personal Habits/Routines

Interviewees advised student-veterans to establish personal habits or routines. Similar to the recommendation for student-veterans to network and advocate for themselves, there is a supporting non-cognitive attribute that may directly provide an appropriate application. The researcher realized the attribute of Goal-setting and Planning provided a skillset for student-veterans to plan their routines and transfer the habits which made them successful in the military to their new identity role of college student:

"I had a purpose, and I had a plan of the day. The plan of the day was go to class, write your papers, read your books, pass your test, and get out because you're already older, and I got out of college 32, where most of my friends have been out since they were 24. But most of my friends had dropped out of college and joined the Navy." (Participant 15)

Plan/Prepare for Transition Before Separation

Research participants endorsed, with 13% of responses, preparation for the transitioning process from veteran to student before they separate from the military. Participants

communicated that it was a detriment if a student-veteran waited to learn about opportunities, affecting their ability to fully acclimate.

"[Begin] utilizing the resources and benefits that our personnel are eligible for during their transition, [such as] educational benefits or VA loans, depending on what you're looking to accomplish [and] utilizing those resources that are afforded to you." (Participant 10)

One participant identified a gap in language, when schools do not have culturally competent employees on staff to help student-veterans verbalize concerns. The interviewee mentioned some student-veterans lose effectiveness of the second-rated non-cognitive attribute of this research – communication:

"We need to get the attention of those that are in transition and have people on staff and faculty that could help with the transition, completely. And I think that, at the college level, even the Veteran Service Officers, too often they really don't understand where the veterans are coming from, what their problems were and what their needs are and where they need the help, and the veterans don't know how to express what they need either." (Participant 9)

Adapt Rather than Impose

Research participants suggested student-veterans escape the instinct to impose the structure of the culture they were used to onto the culture they now inhabited. The interviewees validated the idea that the high structure world of military service provided a sense of security. When faced with the relatively unstructured, flexible culture of higher education, student-veterans can become impacted negatively according to previous research (Ackerman et al.,

2009). The non-cognitive attribute of adaptability was identified as a predominant attribute by research participants. They encouraged student-veterans to utilize it:

"When you're deployed, you're always reacting, but the conditions, the parameters of what life is, don't really change that much. You know you're going to have to go to the dining facility at one some point. Your schedule is pretty much cemented. It's not very fluid, except for every once in a while, and then when things pick up, when you have to readjust. In the civilian world, it took a bit to realize that I have freedom to do this and that, when I wanted to do it. It felt like getting out of high school and being on my own again." (Participant 14)

This participant illustrated through their explanation that all veterans are not the same and acclimate through different means and speeds. As much as it is advised from interviewees not to impose expectations onto their new environment, campus leaders should be aware of expectations institutions impose on individual veterans:

"I was retired after 21 years, but I wasn't so military that, you know, I didn't know life outside of a military base. So, I was able to, I think transition pretty easily compared to some others that maybe are just so (rigid). They don't see left or right, except what's in front of them and I was always pretty open and tried to make the best of every situation." (Participant 8)

Exercise Cultural Awareness/Understanding

Interviewees encouraged taking the time to be understanding with characters in the new surroundings of higher education. Although the dissonance generated negative, sometimes confrontational, behaviors, the participating subjects reflected that understanding is a two-way street. One participant remembered a time when their expectations of classmates almost deterred

an opportunity to be open and at ease. Exercising vulnerability and understanding resulted in a comforting realization:

> "So, at first I was a little apprehensive, and the only reason was because here I was at 52 years old, going back to school with a bunch of very young individuals that are fresh out of high school or in high school because they have a high school college program. But to my surprise, I quickly relaxed myself seeing that there were people of all ages. All people coming back to school to get educated in a different field where they could go and improve on their skill sets or get higher opportunities for advancement and whatnot." (Participant 11)

Identify Parallel Structures in Military and Higher Education

The opportunity to seek parallel structures between academia and the military unit seemed to run contrary to the previous advice to adapt rather than impose cultural structure onto the college environment. An institution of higher education is an organization with chains-of-command, systematic operations, and reporting structures. These mechanisms were hard for some interviewees to see, at first. As they took the time to understand the systems and culture of their institution, they started to see the parallel structures of the organization. According to participant responses, understanding the parallels helped with learning to navigate their school's system:

> "When I was in the military, I dealt a lot with instrumentation on all the mechanical equipment. They all have stations, gauges, controls. So, everything is a process. From the minute that you start a class, you know there's an introduction. There's the expectations of you knowing the subject matter. Not just knowing it but spreading it. In other words, being interactive with the instructors

and other students. So, when I started taking the courses in non-destructive

testing, there were gauges and there were instruments that were testing

instruments and dealt with a lot of math, dealt with a lot of complicated formulas.

And so, taking from what I had learned in the military, when I started doing labs

in non-destructive testing, it allowed me to be very familiar and at ease with the

equipment and instrumentation that we were using at the time." (Participant 11)

Additionally, this participant emphasized the efforts invested towards

developing relationships. As a resource, the development and maintenance of

relationships was critical in the military, and the value was not diminished in the

new context:

"I think just building relationships, getting to know as informal channels

on way things get done in the military. You have the bureaucratic way, and then

you have the interrelationship way of doing things. And I mean, part of that is

knowing who not to piss off and knowing who is going to be on your side. And

part of that has to do with the jobs. You don't mess with the people who are in

supply, or the cooks, or the payroll guys. Those informal institutions, I find still,

exist elsewhere." (Participant 14)

Summary

Student-veterans are a specific subset of the non-traditional student population who face a

unique set of challenges which threaten their academic success and completion (Schiavone &

Gentry, 2014). Although the quantity of research on student-veterans is both valued and scant,

the abundance of current research primarily focuses on challenges and traumas rather than keys

to success, advantages, or strengths (Williams-Klotz & Gansemer-Topf, 2017). The experience

of the transition out of military culture and into that of higher education or academic culture leaves many student-veterans experiencing dissonance (Schlossberg, 2011; Resnik et al., 2012), and disconnected from their community college, setting the stage for failure (Bauman, 2009). The state of Texas has already identified a lack of student completion and success as a significant problem in higher education, not to exclude community colleges (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, n.d.)

Despite being considered academically unprepared - as a subset of the non-traditional student population - by higher education (DiRamio et al., 2008), Amey & Long (1998), Ley & Young (1998), Ochroch & Dugan (1986), and Valadez (1993) recognized underprepared students leverage a different, specific type of attribute to gain student success – non-cognitive attributes. By identifying and understanding attributes gained during enlisted military service, and empowering student-veterans to positively and intentionally incorporate their trusted, deeply embedded military training (Wilson et al., 2013), community colleges and student-veterans can be better prepared to utilize these non-cognitive attributes as bridges to academic success and completion, rather than feeling invalidated, disconnected from, or disrespected by higher education.

The non-cognitive attributes participants primarily identified as ones used to achieve student success in higher education were, in order: Commitment/Discipline, Communication/Self-Advocacy, Leadership/Team-building/Military Core values, Goal-setting and Planning, Adaptability, Responsibility/Accountability, Self-awareness, Confidence in self/ability, Time Management, Perspective of risk/consequence, and Caution. Similar to Byrd and MacDonald's (2005) study of the larger non-traditional student population, Self-advocacy, Goal-setting and Planning, and Time management were non-cognitive attributes identified by the

veteran participants. The ways in which these non-cognitive attributes obtained through enlisted military service could be leveraged toward student success were to: Identify scenarios which military attributes are appropriate and applicable, seek guidance from those with more experience, establish good personal habits/routines, adapt to the environment rather than impose their beliefs and perceptions, plan or prepare for one's transition before separation, utilize and apply military attributes, exercise cultural awareness/understanding, be aware of and understand one's military benefits, identify parallel structures that exist in both military and higher education worlds, and network and build community connections.

Chapter V - Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify non-cognitive attributes learned from enlisted military service that can guide student-veterans to success in higher education. Bringing these attributes to the forefront of institutional leaders' awareness can support the student-veteran transition to the community college, an experience that can complicate or even destroy a veteran's ability to reintegrate into civilian society if done improperly, by nurturing advantageous characteristics engrained during enlisted military service and embedded in the military identity (Bauman, 2009). The benefit is reciprocal, since improved supports can result in increased student-veteran completion and success rates which reflect on the performance of community colleges. The final chapter reviews the guiding research questions and identifies implications and recommendations for future research.

Research Questions

The following research questions served as a basis for this study.

1. What attributes learned through enlisted military experience translate to student success in higher education?

Participant responses generated from this question provided the researcher insight towards understanding what types of non-cognitive attributes - gained from their enlisted military experience – that student-veterans utilized to succeed in higher education. The researcher sought attributes identified first-hand by student-veterans, rather than those prescribed or noted through observation. The responses collected were necessary to learn how student-veterans made deliberate use of life skills learned through enlisted military service to acclimate to the higher education environment.

2. What attributes learned through enlisted military experience correlate with the non-cognitive skills exhibited by non-traditional students that lead to success in higher education?

Student-veterans are an exclusive portion of the larger non-traditional student body. However, their military experience provided them with unique life experiences and skills. The researcher sought to find how these non-cognitive attributes - obtained through enlisted military service and used by student-veterans to achieve success in higher education - compared to the predominant non-cognitive attributes, identified by Byrd and McDonald (2007), typical of non-traditional students in their pursuit of academic success in higher education.

3. How can student-veterans effectively apply their enlisted military experience as it relates to their student experience in higher education?

Participants achieved success from their academic journey in higher education. This question guided the researcher to understand ways student-veterans applied their non-cognitive attributes to bring about this success in higher education. These were moments or opportunities student-veterans realized the non-cognitive attributes learned in enlisted military service were used to positively impact their higher educational experience.

Summary of Interviews

This qualitative research was designed to obtain information, via interview from student-veterans, which provided insight regarding the use of non-cognitive, learned attributes gained from enlisted military service and used to accomplish success in higher education. The use of Schlossberg's (2011) Transition model, as a guide, helped to augment the validity of this research. The model provided a tested structure from which to identify internal attributes student-veterans used to adapt to an unfamiliar, fluid context or environment – higher education. Data regarding the application of these attributes further reinforced findings. Responses from

interview questions were categorized as: participant demographics, non-cognitive attribute themes, and opportunities to apply themes.

Implications

The following implications reveal student-veterans rely on non-cognitive attributes gained from enlisted military service when culturally transitioning from their military experience into a successful experience with higher education. These prominent implications surfaced from recurring themes within the stories and reflections of the participants interviewed for this research.

Identifying the Non-Cognitive Attributes

Student-veterans are applying the non-cognitive attributes learned from their enlisted military service to achieve academic success in higher education. Research participants transitioned from a unique culture that contributed a tremendous amount of characteristics to their identity. The experience equipped them with both cognitive and non-cognitive attributes, or skills, that prepared them to face challenges, adapt to new situations, and plan for and achieve success. The researcher identified 11 non-cognitive attributes from participant interviews, in which the participants were asked to describe these attributes. Using the frequency of mentions as a quantitative gauge, there were five predominant non-cognitive attributes: 1) Commitment/Discipline, 2) Communication/Self-Advocacy, 3) Leadership/Team-building/Military Core values, 4) Goal-setting and Planning, and 5) Adaptability. The researcher found that Byrd and MacDonald's (2005) collection of three predominant non-cognitive attributes found in non-traditional students' academic success were also prevalent for student-veterans. Only two non-cognitive attributes, communication/self-advocacy and Goal-setting and Planning, were shared in both lists of predominant attributes. Since research shows the

standardized tests used as predictors for success in higher education are poor predictors, and

student-veterans are leveraging non-cognitive attributes to achieve academic success in higher

education, conversations regarding college-readiness need to have a paradigm shift away from

being academically prepared and towards being college prepared. This shift in language and

perception of readiness could have profound effects on how student-veterans see themselves

acclimating to the culture of higher education.

Cultural Competency

The identification of the non-cognitive attributes student-veterans apply provides higher

education an opportunity to build a bridge. As referenced in Chapter IV - Findings, institutions

of higher education need to adopt a paradigm shift away from assessing whether students are

academically ready and consider what determines if students are college ready. As much as

demographic markers, such as age, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, provide institutions of

higher education information about how to serve their students, understanding the veteran status

of a student can offer insight regarding how to serve student-veterans beyond counseling or

disabilities. This type of cultural competency can highlight to campus leaders a variety of tools to

build a bridge for student-veterans to transition into higher education culture quicker and easier.

For example, higher education leaders need to understand the cultural transition from a highly

structured, familiar space to an unfamiliar, fluid space and ensure they are communicating with

contextual clarity. Rather than funding a campus facility space designated only for student-

veterans, which has the potential to exacerbate feelings of detachment by student-veterans and

stunt efforts to integrate to the larger student body, leaders of higher educational institutions

should support an environment that allows student-veterans access to employees that are also

veterans, or employees with training in cultural competencies emphasizing enlisted military

culture. These relationships allow student-veterans to be seen beyond the negative stereotypes that often accompany military veterans into the civilian world.

Building Bridges

This study provided evidence that student-veterans knowingly utilize communication/ self-advocacy as a predominant non-cognitive attribute. Further, participants advised that student-veterans should seek out mentors to help liaison their cultural transition. Research participants also divulged that, coming from the enlisted military culture, they were highly encouraged to ask questions. Empower student-veterans to seek mentorship, not just the administrative-type service Veterans' Services Offices provide. For example, developing opportunities in which employees and alumni, who are also veterans, present to incoming students at a student-veteran targeted orientation. Providing tailored messages guiding the familiarization of the higher education system and culture illuminates the pathways towards academic advancement, fostering the use of two other student-veteran non-cognitive attributes – Goal-setting and Planning and Adaptability. Adaptability becomes easier when one has parameters and expectations defined. Goal-setting and Planning is of greater benefit to the planner if more variables are stable or predictable. Understanding the culture, processes, and expectations of a new environment tremendously helps predict the stability of these variables, as well as the likelihood of success of the plan. A critical additional resource could be use of a career translator that turns military experience into academic currency, that being earned semester credit hours. Military experience can be materialized from both career specialty training and professional development academies, among other training opportunities. These supports nurture an equitable acclimation process and alleviate feelings of dissonance that student-

veterans experience when they attempt to omit pieces of their hard-earned identity to be accepted

while adapting to their new environment and role.

Increased Completion Rates

The focused efforts are not strictly for the comfort and well-being of student-veterans.

Community Colleges are experiencing completion rates that are detrimental to their case for

improved funding, which is largely based on these completion rates. In the state of Texas,

completion rates fell for cohorts with shorter years to completion terms. For example, students

that students enrolled for six years experienced a 34% completion rate, while students enrolled

for three years only championed a 22% graduation rate. Cohorts of students enrolled for six years

were more likely to graduate than those enrolled for only three years. As recently as 2017, those

that graduated only made up one third or less of the student population. If post-secondary

institutions identified the non-cognitive attributes of student-veterans, a growing population on

campuses, institutional leaders would better understand how to serve student-veterans and

nurture an environment that advocated more than the academic knowledge capacities of all

students in the pursuit of post-secondary credentials. That may even include a slight restructure

in degree plans to model the professional growth of enlisted careers. Campus leaders would

amplify the learning experience by using realistic contexts to reinforce critical thinking, which

positively impacts academic success and completion.

Identity Validation

Research indicated a significant factor contributing to the dissonance of student-veterans

as they attempt to integrate into higher education is the multitude of negative stereotypes that

follow military veterans into the civilian world. Contrary to what the sheer volume of current

research regarding post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), and

veterans might suggest, the majority of veterans do not actually suffer from debilitating cases of either. Research does explain that a significant amount of stress experienced by student-veterans is derived from the process of attempting to adapt and integrate into the student body while acclimating to the unfamiliar processes of college. Developing a campus that is both culturally competent in embracing and orienting student-veterans, and that empowers student-veterans to keep their whole identity while capitalizing on their non-cognitive attributes gained from enlisted military service, can offer student-veterans a remarkable act of gratitude. Understanding how the enlisted military career translates to higher education creates value and endorses the skills gained during service. The institution validates the service and sacrifice of its student-veterans while welcoming them into the next phase of their life.

Recommendations for Further Research:

Expanded Research to Identify Non-Cognitive Attributes

As of this study, the amount of research that was not focused on veterans and issues of PTSD or TBI was meager. Additionally, the researcher found extraordinarily little research on the positive student-veteran experience. This was also one of the few, if not only, times a study combined the framework of Schlossberg's Transition model and Byrd and MacDonald's research as a guide to extrapolate the types of non-cognitive attributes student-veterans were leveraging to achieve academic success. Although participants represented a diverse sampling of qualifying candidates, the researcher recommends duplicating the study to verify if the same non-cognitive attributes surface and are referenced the same or similar frequencies. Ultimately, this study serves as a starting point. It is meant to act as an entry to further study, as enlisted military service members and its veterans are not a monolith. Any consequent research can lead in a variety of directions. Continued efforts to replicate the research is advised.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to identify non-cognitive attributes learned from enlisted military service that can guide student-veterans to success in higher education. The global focus was initiated when the researcher realized academic journeys, too often, end without an earned credential. Less than four of ten college students graduate within six years, and there are millions of students that exemplify the incomplete efforts (Bailey et al., 2015). Although various factors contribute to a student's chances of completion, the institution carries a level of accountability which is represented, not solely, through state funding.

Understanding that obtaining a post-secondary credential is increasingly tantamount to both personal and socioeconomic upward mobility, the scholar conducting this research determined institutions of higher education should look at which predictors of completion were viable (Johnson, 2008). Traditional predictors of student success and completion, such as high school GPA or ACT and SAT scores, perform this function poorly (King et al., 1994; Armstrong, 1999). Therefore, higher education benefits from identifying which alternate determinant drives student success and completion.

Despite facing a series of disadvantages, such as poor foundational skills and lack of academic preparedness, non-traditional students persevere to the point of success and completion (MacKinnon & Floyd, 2016). If non-traditional students were persisting to completion, despite being academically unprepared and lacking cultural knowledge to navigate an institution of higher education, they must be leveraging other attributes (Ley & Young, 1998; Ochroch & Dugan, 1986; Valadez, 1993). Research identified three predominant, non-cognitive attributes among the non-traditional student population employed to achieve completion and success (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005).

As a niche fraction of the non-traditional student population produced from an exclusive subculture within the American society, students who were enlisted military service members, or student-veterans, are a growing demographic on college campuses (Jones, 2013). Along with a variety of unique experiences gained from enlisted military service come unfortunate stereotypes regarding post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injuries (TBI). As they started their academic career facing first-year dropout rates of 88%, with only 3% graduating from academia and 51% completing a vocational program, student-veterans began hiding their veteran status to avoid the extra baggage that comes with the negative stereotypes and expectations of veterans (Briggs, 2012; Wood, 2012; Cate, 2014). Norelli (2016) asserted this distinctive subgroup of non-traditional students was leaning heavily on the specialized training received during their military service.

The non-cognitive attributes driving the larger non-traditional student body are identified as time management, goal setting and self-advocacy (Byrd and MacDonald, 2005). This study's researcher surmised that student-veterans were abundantly applying their military experience and training to their academic journey, thus an investigation into what cognitive attributes student-veterans were applying to achieve academic success and completion was warranted (Wilson et al., 2013). To facilitate the study, the researcher employed Schlossberg's Transition Model (1989), which factors a 4S system - situation, self, support, and strategies. For the purposes of this study, interview questions focused on the S factors of self and strategies, as only these factors were under the direct control of the student-veteran during transition. The student-veteran research participants of this study were molded into enlisted military service members through an intensive integration process known as basic military training, or boot camp. This group hailed from 14 different American cities, served in five different military branches, including one

reserves branch, provided Americans defense service spanning eight decades, stationed at 61 different military instillations, and performed 25 different career specialties, or military occupation specialties (MOS).

The analysis of responses uncovered eleven themes of non-cognitive attributes obtained from enlisted military service of which the research participants leveraged towards academic success and completion. Of the five predominant non-cognitive attributes - Commitment/Discipline, Communication/Self-Advocacy, Leadership/Team-building/Military Core Values, Goal-setting and Planning, and Adaptability – two were shared, as predominant themes, with the Byrd and MacDonald research. The mutual non-cognitive attributes were Self-Advocacy and Goal-Setting. The non-cognitive attribute of Time Management revealed itself in this study, however it was not part of the predominant group.

The value of identified non-cognitive attributes gained by student-veterans during their enlisted military service compounds. For student-veterans, these attributes provided a set of qualities to achieve their goals. They provide a bridge towards acclimating into a new, unfamiliar culture in higher education. Leaders in institutions of higher education can use the knowledge of the non-cognitive attributes to better understand the needs of student-veterans, and strategically allocate appropriate resources that empower student-veterans' use of their military experience and identity in their academic journey. The resulting support will improve completion rates at campuses, ease an overwhelming process of acculturation for student-veterans, and validate the experiences and identities of those who chose to make the sacrifice of protecting America's people.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 IRB Approval

1.1 IRB Approval

KANSAS STATE
U N I V E R S I T Y | University Research Compliance Office

TO: Dr. Margaretta Mathis   Proposal Number: 9875
             Adult Learning and Leadership
             363 Bluemont Hall

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair
             Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 09/23/2019

RE: Approval of Proposal Entitled, "Improvise. Adapt. Overcome: Identifying Military-Acquired, Non-Cognitive Attributes Guiding Student-Veteran Success In Community Colleges."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects has reviewed your proposal and has granted full approval. This proposal is **approved for <u>three years</u> from the date of this correspondence.**

APPROVAL DATE: 09/23/2019

EXPIRATION DATE: 09/23/2022

In giving its approval, the Committee has determined that:

         ☒   There is no more than minimal risk to the subjects.
         ☐   There is greater than minimal risk to the subjects.

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file as written. Any change or modification affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. All approved proposals are subject to continuing review, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced post-approval monitoring may be performed during the course of this approval period by URCO staff. Injuries, unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB and / or the URCO.

Appendix 2: Consent form and Contact Protocol

2.1 Consent Form

PROJECT TITLE: Improvise. Adapt. Overcome: Identifying Military-Acquired, Non-Cognitive Attributes Guiding Student-Veteran Success in Community College

PROJECT APPROVAL DATE:

PROJECT EXPIRATION DATE: 01JUN2020

LENGTH OF STUDY: Five months

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr. Margaretta Mathis
CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Dr. Steven Gonzales; Carlos Garanzuay
CONTACT DETAILS FOR PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS: Dr. Margaretta Mathis, E-mail: mbmathis1@k-state.edu, Office phone#: (785) 532-5535, Cell phone#: 602-743-9258; Carlos Garanzuay, Email: cgaranzuay2019@ksu.edu; Cell phone#: 361-834-1469

IRB CHAIR CONTACT INFO: *Rick Scheidt*, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224; *Cheryl Doerr*, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

PROJECT SPONSOR: Carlos Garanzuay

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH: The purpose of this study is to identify non-cognitive, learned attributes from enlisted military service that can guide student-veterans to success in higher education. By identifying these non-cognitive attributes, the higher education community can facilitate an assimilation process that does not alienate student-veterans. In doing so, higher education professionals mitigate student-veteran dissonance towards reintegration into civilian society while supporting student-veteran success.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED: Participants will be recruited through their campus Veterans Services Office. If they meet the set qualifications and choose to participate in the study, arrangements for an interview will be coordinated after participants provide a completed consent form. The interview will be recorded, whether in person or video conference, strictly for data gathering purposes. Participants are free to withdraw from the interview at any time.

BIOLOGICAL SAMPLES COLLECTED (Describe procedure, storage, etc.): N/A

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES OR TREATMENT, IF ANY, THAT MIGHT BE ADVANTAGEOUS TO SUBJECT: N/A

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED: Interview questions will ask you to recall experiences originating from military service. This may cause feelings of discomfort.

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED: This research will provide student-veterans a framework that cultivates a bridge from their military experience to academic success. By learning how to apply these military-based attributes toward student success, transitioning between the two cultures becomes less problematic and traumatic. Moreover, community colleges will have a clearer understanding of developing programs and strategies to support student-veteran success, especially if the research finds that student-veterans are already equipped - through enlisted military experience - with the non-cognitive attributes necessary for student success and completion.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY: All files and consent forms will be stored on an external hard drive and will be encrypted for security purposes. An external hard drive is a small independent memory unit used for storing data accessible by a computer and other electronic devices. To maintain anonymity, participants will be assigned random call-signs, or codenames, issued by the researcher. **Your information may be used in the future studies, but your personal identifying information will remain anonymous.**

Terms of participation: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

(Remember that it is a requirement for the P.I. to maintain a signed and dated copy of the same consent form signed and kept by the participant).

PARTICIPANT NAME: _____

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE: _____
DATE: _____

WITNESS TO SIGNATURE: _____
DATE: _____

2.2 Contact Protocol

Participants will be recruited via email, and provided information to contact me if they are interested in the study. Upon receiving communication of interest in participating in the study, the following email will be sent to potential participants informing them of the purpose of the research and what to expect:

Hello, my name is Carlos Garanzuay. First, thank you for your interest in participating in this study. I am currently collecting data via interview, and we are glad that you would like to be a participant.

The purpose of this study is to identify non-cognitive, learned attributes from enlisted military service that can guide student-veterans to success in higher education.

There are criteria to be considered eligible for this study. You must have: a) served in the United States military as an enlisted service member prior to having experience in a community college post-secondary education, as a student, and b) at least a 2.0 grade point average (GPA) upon completing your program and earning your academic credential. In the instance you have not yet earned your academic credential, your participation will be accepted if you are in good academic standing represented by having a 2.0 GPA as of your last completed semester.

We will be asking you about both your military and post-secondary education experiences. It may help the interview process if you would give this some thought before the interview. Interviews are expected to last between 30-60 minutes.

What is a non-cognitive, learned attribute?

By a "non-cognitive, learned attribute", I am referring to those skills or abilities that are not necessarily rooted in academic preparedness, such math skill, critical thinking abilities, etc., but that are key to succeeding in a college atmosphere. They might commonly be referred to as life skills.

Why enlisted military service veterans?

Research indicates that the cultural and identity transition from being an enlisted military service member to being a veteran in a largely civilian world comes with overwhelming challenges. Student-veterans have reported these challenges often extend into an inability to assimilate, feel a part of, or find success in a college community.

Despite being largely categorized as academically unprepared by themselves and post-secondary education institutions, this population of non-traditional students has been trained and equipped with a multitude of attributes that can be used to adapt and overcome challenges, especially in environments that are unfamiliar or new.

Additionally, the numbers of veterans enrolling in post-secondary education is increasing. In turn, support for them in their academic journey is increasing. It would largely benefit both the student-veteran and their institution to have those support strategies be guided by a more

comprehensive understanding of the student-veteran. As an added benefit, student-veterans may experience less internal conflict by learning to use these non-cognitive, learned attributes from their military service.

Finally, attached is the informed consent. Should you be meet the aforementioned criteria and agree to participate, please sign and return the consent form. Please be aware that you must provide consent prior to participating in the study.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

An appointment to interview the participant will be established. The researcher will send a courtesy email one week prior to the appointment to remind them of their interview. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher will remind the participant of the purpose for the study, their right to withdraw from the study at their discretion, and will summarize the recruitment email. At the end of each interview, the researcher will thank the participant for both their service and their participation, and allow for any question from the participant.

Below is a list of semi-structured interview questions to be asked in the interview:

1. What military branch(es) did you serve while enlisted in the military?

2. What was your military occupation specialty (MOS)?

3. How long and what years did you serve as an enlisted military service member?

4. Please describe your enlistment process.

5. Please describe the messages, skills, or lessons learned during your military enlisted career that you utilize in your post-military life.

6. What advice did you receive from military colleagues, family, friends, etc. about assimilating into non-military life?

7. What advice did you receive from college administrators/faculty, non-military family or friends about assimilating to your non-military life?

8. Please describe your experience assimilating to a college culture from a military culture.

9. Please describe the challenges you faced assimilating to a college culture.

10. What attributes, skills, or lessons learned during your military enlisted career did you find useful for your transition into college?

11. What attributes, skills, or lessons learned during your military enlisted career did you use to guide yourself toward academic success?

12. What situations did you find the attributes, skills, or lessons learned during your military enlisted career best supported your college experience?

13. What situations did you find the attributes, skills, or lessons learned during your military enlisted career negatively impacted your college experience?

14. What would you like for college administrators, faculty, and staff to understand about your experience transitioning out of the military culture and into the college culture?

Appendix 3: Interview Questions

Interview Questions
Improvise. Adapt. Overcome: Identifying military-acquired, non-cognitive attributes guiding student-veteran success in community college

1. What military branch(es) did you serve while enlisted in the military?

2. What was your military occupation specialty (MOS)?

3. How long and what years did you serve as an enlisted military service member?

4. Please describe your enlistment process.

5. Please describe the messages, skills, or lessons learned during your military enlisted career that you utilize in your post-military life.

6. What advice did you receive from military colleagues, family, friends, etc. about assimilating into non-military life?

7. What advice did you receive from college administrators/faculty, non-military family or friends about assimilating to your non-military life?

8. Please describe your experience assimilating to a college culture from a military culture.

9. Please describe the challenges you faced assimilating to a college culture.

10. What attributes, skills, or lessons learned during your military enlisted career did you find useful for your transition into college?

11. What attributes, skills, or lessons learned during your military enlisted career did you use to guide yourself toward academic success?

12. What situations did you find the attributes, skills, or lessons learned during your military enlisted career best supported your college experience?

13. What situations did you find the attributes, skills, or lessons learned during your military enlisted career negatively impacted your college experience?

14. What would you like for college administrators, faculty, and staff to understand about your experience transitioning out of the military culture and into the college culture?