

Student veteran experiences of transition during an unanticipated period of disruption

by

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B.A., Baldwin Wallace University, 2012

M.B.A., University of Phoenix, 2014

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

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College of Education

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Abstract

Student veterans face a multitude of transitions throughout their life, with the initial transition into the military as a civilian, the possibility of multiple transitions throughout their enlistment, and the transition from military service to readjusting to life as a civilian following discharge. As veterans reintegrate into society, some choose to pursue higher education. While student veterans experience anticipated transition, the unanticipated transitions cause one to question how “student” veterans experience the unexpected.

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to understand how student veterans experienced transition while enrolled in community college courses during an unanticipated period of disruption. The researcher selected Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C) in Cleveland, Ohio, as the study’s host site. The study focused on how student veterans experienced a rapid change in course delivery generated by the COVID-19 pandemic’s disruption to higher education during the 2020 spring semester. Using semi-structured interviews, the researcher aimed to understand how student veterans defined the experience of unanticipated disruption while enrolled in community college classes and the successful strategies used to navigate any decisions made during the transition.

The researcher guided the study using Schlossberg’s (1981) Adult Transition Theory. Schlossberg’s theory was selected because it has a four-step process of defining how adults cope with transition called the 4S System. The researcher aligned the interview questions with the 4S System to understand how student veterans experienced unanticipated transition.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the men and women serving in the United States military. As a veteran I understand your journey and I hope you understand that when that journey ends your transition back into the civilian world can be a successful one. Take advantage of the resources available to you and thank you for your service!

Chapter 1 - Introduction

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2021) reports that as of fall 2019, 5.6 million undergraduate students were enrolled full-time at 2-year institutions in the United States. The Postsecondary National Policy Institute (PNPI, 2020) reports, “in 2018, over 650,000 veterans used military benefits to pursue higher education, 75 percent of student veterans were enrolled as full-time students, 62 percent were first-generation college students, 47 percent were parents, 47 percent were married, and only 15 percent were traditionally aged (ages 18 to 23).” Student veterans comprise an array of characteristics, such as those found in non-traditional students.

The American Council on Education (ACE) identifies student veterans as post-traditional learners. ACE (2021) concludes the following:

Post-traditional learners have been a growing presence in America’s postsecondary education institutions since the late 1970s and now makeup close to 60 percent of enrolled undergraduates. Post-traditional learners are students who frequently must balance life, work, and education. These students are typically aged 25 and older, care for dependents, work full-time while enrolled, and are often connected to the military. (About section)

Student veterans face multiple transitions, including transitioning into the military (enlisting), the varied experiences of enlistment, returning to civilian life (discharge), transitioning to the workforce, and entering higher education. For student veterans, dealing with transitions while enrolled in higher education courses can present additional challenges. Similar to traditional students, student veterans must determine the best action to fulfill their educational goals, even when the unexpected arises.

In an average day, individuals cope with routines recurring from priorities and learned behaviors. However, a routine may become disrupted by the unexpected throughout the day. In the case of an unanticipated event, individuals are faced with examining how their decisions will affect their future. This study sought to understand how student veterans who have never participated in online course instruction experienced the challenge of an unanticipated disruption. For this study, the disruption was transitioning to a fully online learning environment resulting from a national emergency while enrolled in higher education courses at Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C) in Northeast Ohio.

Statement of the Problem

This study addresses how student veterans experienced transition while enrolled in community college courses during a disruption. The study identifies factors and resources student veterans considered when making the decision to continue enrollment during the unanticipated transition. Student veterans are a highly diverse population. Almost all (96%) higher education institutions in the United States enroll veterans (Institute for Veterans and Military Families, 2019). There are “extra challenges confronting student veterans, who are usually older than traditional-aged students and more likely to be juggling college with families, jobs, and service-related disabilities, and who often face significantly more red tape” (Marcus, 2017). Traditional students may also face similar responsibilities as student veterans; however, there are distinct differences between life in the military and higher education institutions, which student veterans are apt to face. For example, Guenzler-Stevens (2017) notes that the military is a culture defined by rules, the hardships of war, and the power of a shared mission, and the university is a culture defined by youth and open possibility, where many (student veterans) feel isolated and disadvantaged by rusty academic skills. The study identifies the internal and

external factors contributing to the student veteran's decision to persist and the coping resources used when faced with an unanticipated transition while enrolled in community college courses.

Background of the Problem

While higher education institutions provide an avenue to a better economic future, for centuries, college students in the United States have been impacted by unanticipated events and disruptions while embarking on a journey to complete an academic credential. As early as 1918, college students were impacted by disruptions such as the Spanish flu, a virus causing more than 50 million deaths globally (Higher Learning Commission, 2020). In 1939, World War II saw faculty and staff leave the campuses to support the war efforts (Higher Learning Commission, 2020), which impacted course offerings at many institutions. According to Klassen (2021), the university's role shifted in two fundamental ways after World War II. First, universities were charged with educating the rapidly growing middle class. Second, the state charged universities with supporting applied research, especially in science, technology, engineering, medicine, and business. As a result, universities increasingly sought and obtained funding from government and private sources for research, knowledge transfer, commercialization, and related activities.

In 2005, natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina left campuses "devastated and desolate" (Bonds & Njoku, 2020), forcing students to visit host colleges to complete their studies. In 2007, the Great Recession "marked the greatest economic downturn in recent memory" (Schmidt, 2018). Many may not know how markedly college enrollment fluctuated during the recession and economic recovery period. Barshay (2020) posits that "one of the peculiar things about higher education is that it runs in the opposite direction of the economy." The longer-term effects of the recession have been more profound and less noticeable. They have altered campus revenue streams, influenced students' choice of major, reshuffled the

composition of the academic workforce, and prodded colleges to emphasize their role as economic engines (Ellis, 2018). Friga (2020) states that the stock market lost approximately 50 percent of its value during the Great Recession, unemployment rose from 4.9 percent to more than 10 percent, and American households lost an estimated \$16 trillion in net worth. One-quarter of households lost at least 75 percent of their net worth, and more than half lost at least 25 percent. College students are no strangers to transitions or the challenges attending brings.

Barshay (2020) notes, “the number of students who enrolled in college jumped by almost 2.5 million, or nearly 16 percent, from 15.6 million undergraduate students in the fall of 2007 to a peak of 18.1 million students in the fall of 2010.” College and university revenue sources changed quickly too. By the 2017 fiscal year, most states drew more revenue from tuition dollars than educational appropriations (Ellis, 2018). According to Friga (2020):

Increasing tuition will no longer be an option for higher education in dealing with the current economic meltdown — primarily because families cannot afford to handle the burden. Tuition for all institutions jumped nearly 30 percent between 2007-8 and 2014-15, while real median income fell roughly 6.5 percent over the same period (para. 13).

Americans were encouraged through federal policy to go to school during the Great Recession. Barshay (2020) notes that the 2009 Recovery Act increased the amount of Pell Grants to low-income students to more than \$5,000 per year and expanded the number of eligible students. However, Friga (2020) notes that student debt increased to more than \$1.6 trillion in 2020. Additionally, the increases in college costs and tuition have far outgrown corresponding increases in family incomes. As a result, institutions have had to prove their worth to prospective students and skeptical state governments, many of which have reduced appropriations. Once prized as significant societal investments, campuses often have had to fend for themselves (Ellis,

2018). As the economy created jobs, many students returned to work without degrees. Completion rates declined for students who enrolled in college during 2008, 2009, and 2010. According to Barshay (2020, para. 8), “only 39 percent of the students who enrolled in a two-year institution in 2008 had a degree six years later.”

The most recent disruption experienced globally was the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic, which presented in the United States in December 2019. COVID-19 came from the virus severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), a virus in humans causing respiratory illness, which can be spread from person to person (Center for Disease Control, 2020, Emergence section). On the website, the Center for Disease Control provides the following information regarding the transmission of the COVID-19 virus:

COVID-19 is primarily transmitted from person to person through respiratory droplets. These droplets are released when someone with COVID-19 sneezes, coughs, or talks. Infectious droplets can land in the mouths or noses of nearby individuals or possibly inhaled into the lungs. A physical distance of at least 1 meter (3 ft) between persons is suggested by the World Health Organization (WHO) to avoid infection, although some WHO member states have recommended maintaining greater distances whenever possible (Transmission section).

Friga (2020) posits that the coronavirus crisis (COVID-19) has the potential to change higher education more than any recession in the past, including the Great Recession, which dealt a tremendous blow to our economy and higher education. Moreover, during COVID-19, student enrollment and retention significantly impacted higher education institution success. Phillippe (2020) informs:

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) collected data on the early financial impacts of the pandemic. More than half (54 percent) of colleges reported changes in state and local appropriations would significantly affect their budgets. At the same time, approximately one-third said their budgets would take a big hit due to changes in revenues from tuition and fees, auxiliary enterprises, and noncredit activities resulting from the pandemic (Financial Impact section).

As a result of the pandemic, businesses and colleges were faced with transformative decisions to continue operations while keeping individuals safe from the virus's contraction. Many businesses closed, and many were able to transform. Phillippe (2020) states, "the COVID-19 pandemic has required community colleges to shift from in-person to online and virtual instruction for most classes. Colleges were forced to make this transition in just a few days" (para. 1). Bonds and Njoku (2020) state, "this pandemic has led all schools to move a majority, if not all, of their courses to remote access, a move that is uncovering several logistical issues" (para. 5). The transition caused higher education institutions to redesign systems that transition support services online, support faculty unfamiliar with teaching online, and support students unfamiliar with learning online.

According to Baldwin (2021), the switch to online classes meant some institutions refunded tuition, at least partially. However, enrollments dropped, and unexpected expenses grew as resources waned — especially those related to health and safety protocols such as COVID testing, increased sanitization efforts, and campus security. Mullin (2017) states, "community colleges develop plans informed by enrollment projections, but plans are not always able to materialize when shifts in communities occur" (p. 6).

Higher education institutions worked diligently to concern themselves with the realities brought on by the pandemic and its impact on currently enrolled students. Student veterans are a unique population with experiences not often shared with traditional students in higher education. Taylor et al. (2016) notes, “veterans, by definition, are non-traditional students who do not fit neatly into the typical high school to college transition model” (p. 49). The U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (2020) reports that compared with traditional undergraduate students, student veterans are older, are twice as likely to have a job off-campus and have a considerable amount of life experience before starting postsecondary school. Student veterans also are more likely to be married and to have at least one dependent. Olenick et al. (2015) suggest, “United States veterans are multifaceted and may be considered a population, a culture, and a subculture” (p. 635). Richman (2017) notes, “the college experience presents challenges for veterans unlike those facing traditional students” (para. 2). Taylor et al. (2016) suggest:

With potentially one in five veterans returning from service with symptoms of PTSD and with many of these veterans using their Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits to attend college, it is important to consider whether student veterans are more likely than other students to face challenges during their college careers (p. 48).

Researchers have found higher rates of health-risk behaviors, such as substance abuse and psychological disorders, such as PTSD, among veterans in college compared with their peers without military experience. Studies have also cited problems for veterans in adjusting to campus life and interacting with students. However, Lighthall (2012) notes, “there are no generalizations that are remotely accurate about this group, other than their common hope that more education will make their lives and their families’ lives better” (p. 81-82).

Cuyahoga Community College (2021), identified as the site of this research study, has been committed to serving student veterans for over 50 years by connecting student veterans to individuals experienced in providing veterans with the wrap-around transition services found in community colleges. While serving in the military brings about its challenges, student veterans often find the college environment overwhelming. “Veterans often report difficulty connecting socially with traditional students, who are less likely to have firmly established vocational, social, and family roles” (Richman, 2017, Non-veteran students lack knowledge of history section).

According to the Institute of Military Veterans and Families (2019), “student veterans are uniquely positioned for academic achievement and success due to their military training, personal characteristics, work ethic, and steadfast commitment” (p. 2). Unfortunately, when Tri-C transitioned to the fully online learning environment, resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, in the middle of the 2020 spring semester, not every student, including student veterans enrolled in courses continued. Like many dealing with the new realities, student veterans were faced with attending classes in an unfamiliar online classroom environment, resulting in another disruption towards achieving their higher education goals.

Following the analysis of literature documented in Chapter 2, the researcher identified a gap as the voices of student veterans experiencing the unanticipated transition. The gap included how the student veteran identified the experience of transitioning to a fully online class environment while attending community college classes and deciding whether to continue or withdraw from their degree program due to the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand how student veterans experienced transition while enrolled in community college courses during an unanticipated period of disruption. The study focused on how student veterans experienced a rapid change in course delivery generated by the COVID-19 pandemic's disruption to higher education during the 2020 spring semester. The researcher aimed to understand the strategies and resources student veterans used to navigate and cope with the unanticipated transition through the lens of Schlossberg's (1981) Adult Transition Theory.

Research Questions

The following research questions (RQs) were used to guide the study of student veteran experiences of an unanticipated transition while enrolled in community college courses:

RQ1. What were the lived experiences of student veterans enrolled in community college courses during a period of unanticipated transition?

RQ2. What resources did student veterans identify as needing while experiencing an unanticipated transition?

Theoretical Framework

According to Lochmiller and Lester (2017), a theoretical framework serves as the research study's foundation. Also, theoretical perspectives help researchers explain how they make sense of the world and inform interpretations. This study aimed to understand how student veterans navigated and coped with a transition during a specific period of disruption while enrolled in college courses. The researcher has selected Nancy Schlossberg's Adult Transitions Theory to inform the research. Schlossberg's theory explains how an individual navigates through transition using variables referred to as the "4S System" at their disposal during the

transition (Piland, 2017). The variables in Schlossberg's "4S System" are situation, self, support, and strategies. In addition, Piland (2017) notes that Schlossberg's theory suggests that individuals' best coping strategy is to remain flexible and utilize all variables when dealing with transition. Thus, Schlossberg's theory provides a relevant model for this phenomenological research study in that it utilizes the "4S System," requiring participants to reflect on the four stages of coping with transitions. Due to the intricate use of the "4S System" found within Schlossberg's theory, the researcher opted against a conceptual framework.

Methodology

The research study followed a phenomenological approach to understand the student veteran's lived human experiences of navigating and coping with unanticipated transitions during a period of disruption. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews to gather information from current and former student veterans enrolled at Tri-C during the 2020 spring semester when the College faced transitioning to a fully online learning environment. In addition, the researcher interviewed student veterans who continued with their enrollment following the transition to a fully online learning environment and student veterans who withdrew from enrollment during the same transition period.

Lochmiller and Lester (2017) define phenomenology as "a qualitative methodology that applies a philosophical perspective to the study of the human experience" (p. 110). Regoli (2017) defines phenomenological research as:

Researching how an individual perceives an event's meaning instead of how the event exists beyond people's perception. This form of research endeavors to understand what a group of people felt during a phenomenon. Perceptions, perspectives, and understandings

are all going to be analyzed and then used to create an understanding of what it's like to experience an event (para. 1).

The researcher used this qualitative methodology to provide a study that travels through a period of unanticipated transition for student veterans who decided to remain enrolled or withdraw from college courses. The journey uncovers challenges and opportunities student veterans faced when deciding to continue with enrollment, withdraw from enrollment, or return to enrollment following an unanticipated disruption at the institution.

Delimitations and Assumptions

Delimitations are identified as the boundaries of a research study. There were a few delimitations in this study. First, the research focus resulted from a specific unanticipated event. Therefore, the study is delimited by the 2020 spring semester, in which the unanticipated event occurred. Another delimitation is the study's location, as the study setting is Tri-C, one of three community colleges in Northeast Ohio. The study is also delimited by the participation selection criteria of student veterans only. The researcher acknowledges that most students enrolled during the specified period could offer insight into the experience of navigating unanticipated transitions while enrolled in courses.

There were several assumptions considered in this study. One assumption was that study participants would answer all the interview questions honestly and without reservation. Another assumption was that the institution's sample population accurately reflected the target population and included accurate contact information. Finally, the researcher assumed that student veterans no longer with the institution would participate in the study.

Significance of the Study

According to the Institute for Veterans and Military Families & Student Veterans of America (2019), with the implementation of the GI Bill along with a global workforce that requires, at minimum, a bachelor's degree for marketplace entry, more and more veterans are aspiring for higher degrees to launch the next chapter of their lives. This study addresses how student veterans experienced transition while enrolled in community college courses during a time of disruption. In addition, the researcher collected data through the lens of the student veteran perspective to provide implications and recommendations that can inform community colleges in assisting student veterans through periods of transition. Finally, the researcher hoped the study would provide insight and information to higher education practitioners serving student veterans through transition periods and students who experience unanticipated transitions while enrolled in college courses. The potential benefactors of the study include student support professionals charged with serving student veterans at community colleges, including faculty, support staff, and college administrators. Equally essential benefactors of the study include current or potential students, including student veterans, seeking insight into how peers navigate transitions while enrolled in community college courses.

Definition of Terms

The researcher acknowledges that some terms can often be misunderstood or taken out of the context intended by the researcher. For this study, the following definitions were implied:

Civilian. One not on active duty in the armed services or not on a police or firefighting force (Merriam-webster, n.d.).

HEERF. (Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund) Coronavirus emergency grants for postsecondary education (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

Pandemic. A disease occurring over a wide geographic area and typically affecting a significant proportion of the population (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Persistence. A student's continued enrollment in the postsecondary system may be at single or multiple institutions (Schuh et al., 2017, p. 254).

Post 9/11 GI Bill. An education benefit for veterans or dependents of veterans who served at least 90 days on active duty on or after September 11, 2001 (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2022).

PTSD. (Post-traumatic stress disorder) a psychological reaction occurring after experiencing a highly stressful event (such as wartime combat, physical violence, or a natural disaster) that is usually characterized by depression, anxiety, flashbacks, recurrent nightmares, and avoidance of reminders of the event (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Sequelae. An aftereffect of a disease, condition, or injury (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Stop Outs. Students who temporarily withdraw from an institution (Tinto, 1993, p.8).

Transition. A change or shift from one state, subject, place, etc., to another (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

VEAP. (Veterans Education Access Program) provides free comprehensive support services to eligible U.S. veterans, and their dependents, interested in pursuing their first college degree. (Cuyahoga Community College, n.d.)

Veteran. Title 38 of the Code of Federal Regulations defines a veteran as “a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable” (VA.org, n.d.).

Voc Rehab. (Vocational Rehabilitation) If you have a service-connected disability that limits your ability to work or prevents you from working, Veteran Readiness and Employment (formerly called Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment) can help. This program—also known as Chapter 31 or VR&E—helps you explore employment options and address education or training needs. (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2022).

Summary

Chapter One of the study identifies the problem of understanding how student veterans experienced transition while enrolled in community college courses during a disruption, including the background to support the problem and the need for research. The chapter also identifies the study's purpose to hear from student veterans about their experiences navigating and coping with an unanticipated transition while enrolled in courses. Two research questions informed the study: (RQ1) What were the lived experiences of student veterans enrolled in community college courses during a period of unanticipated transition? and (RQ2) What resources did student veterans identify as needing while experiencing an unanticipated transition?

The researcher utilized Schlossberg's Adult Transition Theory as the theoretical framework to guide interview questions and data analysis throughout the study. In addition, the researcher conducted a phenomenological study using data collected through interviews with currently enrolled and stop-out student veterans who have lived through and thereby experienced the College's unanticipated transition to a fully online learning environment during the 2020 spring semester.

Organization of the Study

Chapter One of the study presents an overview of the research study, a statement of the problem, the background of the problem, the purpose and significance of the study, the definition of terms, and the organization of the study. Chapter Two reviews the literature significant to this research and the theoretical framework used to guide the research. Chapter Three discusses the research design and methodology, including the study setting and participants. The chapter also details how the data was collected and analyzed, along with ethical considerations, the researcher's statement of positionality, and limitations. Chapter Four details the research findings, analyzes the data, and provides themes found within the data analysis. Finally, the study concludes with Chapter Five, in which the researcher summarizes the study and discusses the implications of the research findings, provides a list of best practices for college administration, faculty, staff, and students, and concludes with recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Community colleges open the door to opportunity, providing access to a rewarding career and economic stability for those who dare venture inside. Community colleges now provide an access point for nearly half of all students entering the American higher education system and serve individuals who reflect rich diversity across race, socioeconomic status, age, employment, gender, and family structure (AACC, 2017). The history of community colleges dates back to 1901 when the efforts of William Rainey Harper, President of the University of Chicago, and other university presidents recognized the first two years within the university four-year structure provided students with the same general education (Drury, 2003; Mellow, 2000). The outcome provided an avenue to advanced learning for those unprepared or underprepared for higher education in a university setting. Today, community colleges serve a diverse group of students including 1st generation students, non-traditional students, youth aged out of foster care, international students, and veterans.

The purpose of this study was to understand how student veterans experienced the phenomenon of transition while enrolled in community college courses during an unanticipated period of disruption through the lens of Schlossberg's Transition Theory. The following literature review was designed to provide context and background for the reader regarding the study. First, the researcher explored the published information relating to transitions, disruptions, Schlossberg's transition theory, and the student veteran experiences with transition. The researcher used publications, dissertations, scholarly articles, and online databases to conduct the review. In addition, the chapter used a thematic review to provide an analysis of the literature, including the following themes: understanding transition, examples of unanticipated disruption over the years, theoretical framework, and veterans in higher education. The chapter is separated

into four sections using these themes. Finally, the chapter concludes by defining gaps in the literature supporting the need for the study.

The first section defines transition, discusses how transitions are experienced in higher education, and briefly provides a review of the student veteran transition experience. The second section analyzes the literature that discusses the history of disruption in the United States and its effects on higher education students, the current state of disruption, and how this disruption has also impacted higher education.

The third section discusses Schlossberg's Adult Transitions Theory, the selected theoretical framework guiding this research study. This literature review section also analyzes Schlossberg's 4S System of Coping with Transition. The System includes four variables influencing an individual's ability to cope with transitions – situation, self, support, and strategies. Schlossberg's "4S System" will guide the research questions developed by the researcher in conducting the phenomenological study.

The fourth section of the chapter focuses on the literature surrounding veterans in higher education. The researcher used this section to discuss the student veteran identity, transition experience, and support for student veterans. Finally, the chapter concludes with a statement on the apparent gaps in the literature and how these gaps support the need for conducting this research.

Understanding Transitions

According to the literature, there are multiple types of transitions. Broadly, a transition is any event or non-event that alters a person's roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions (Goodman et al., 2006; Schlossberg, 2008). Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defines

transition as a change from one state or condition to another. In *A Model for Analyzing Human Adaptation to Transition*, Schlossberg (1981) informs:

A model is presented that represents a framework in which transitions of all kinds—positive and negative, dramatic, and ordinary—can be analyzed and possible interventions formulated. The model views adaptation to transition as a dynamic process, a movement through the various stages of a particular transition. Three sets of factors influence adaptation to transition: (1) the characteristics of the transition itself; (2) the characteristics of the pre-and post-transition supports and physical setting; and (3) the characteristics of the individual (p. 4).

Zolfagharian et al. (2019) posit that a transition involves far-reaching structural changes in socio-technical systems that enable desirable societal functions – in this respect, transitions are multi-dimensional processes that often include technological, material, organizational, institutional, political, economic, and socio-cultural changes (para. 1). There are many ways to view transition and how it impacts life and environments. Schlossberg (2011, p. 159) provides the following to define three types of transition: anticipated, unanticipated, and non-event:

- *Anticipated transitions* are major life events we usually expect, such as graduating from high school or college, marrying, becoming a parent, starting a first job, changing careers, or retiring.
- *Unanticipated transitions* include the often-disruptive events that occur unexpectedly, such as major surgery, a serious car accident or illness, or a surprise promotion or factory closing.
- *Non-event transitions* are the scheduled events that fail to occur, such as not getting married, not receiving the promotion one expected, not being able to afford to retire.

Transitions in Higher Education

When considering transitions in higher education, the process extends from the first moment one contemplates returning to school to the moment when the experience is complete and integrated into one's life (Schlossberg et al., 1989). Another higher education transition occurs when students experience disruption while enrolled in college courses. No one is immune to transition. Schlossberg et al. (1989) posit that the only certainty in the transition process is that people's reactions to an event or non-event will change over time, for better or worse.

Additionally, Schlossberg et al. (1989) suggest that to understand adult learners' transition process, it must be broken down into three main parts: moving into the learning environment, moving through it, and preparing to leave or moving on. The first stage of any transition is moving in. According to Schlossberg et al. (1989), people who move into a new situation have common agendas and needs. They must familiarize themselves with the new system's rules, regulations, norms, and expectations. Schlossberg et al. (1989) note that adult learners confront such issues as balancing their academic activities with other parts of their lives and how to feel supported and challenged during their learning journey. LeBlanc & Marques (2019) postulate that the sharpest increase in anxiety occurs during the initial transition to college. Conley et al. (2018) found in a recent study that psychological distress among college students — that is, their levels of anxiety, depression, and stress — rises steadily during the first semester of college and remains elevated throughout the second semester.

The previous is a function of the “moving through” phase of transition. The moving through phase begins once learners know the ropes (Schlossberg et al., 1989). The final phase of transition is identified as the moving on or moving out period. Thus, Schlossberg et al. (1989) note that learners moving out can be seen as ending one series of transactions and beginning to

ask what comes next. Grieving can be used as a model to explain this phase in the structured learning process (Schlossberg et al., 1989). For example, changing jobs, moving, or returning to school are transitions in which adults mourn the loss of goals, friends, and structure (Schlossberg et al., 1989). Transitions are fluid, occurring in stages rather than sequential steps; as such, they provide context for an individual's growth and development while also challenging the individual to make meaning of a change (Anderson et al., 2012).

Student Veteran Transition Experience

Parker et al. (2019) report that the transition from military to civilian life can be challenging for some veterans. While most say readjusting to civilian life was very or somewhat easy, roughly one in four say it was at least somewhat difficult. In conducting this study, the researcher hoped to provide an opportunity to hear from student veterans experiencing the same phenomenon – an unanticipated transition resulting from disruption while enrolled in community college courses. The research study was not designed to focus heavily on the disruptive event referenced throughout but on how the student veterans experienced and continue to experience the event, identified as the moving through stage of transition. Sharing student veterans' lived experiences and transitions – from the voices of students, can benefit community colleges and other higher education institutions by providing insight into the need for innovative programming and services focused on student veteran integration and success. Additionally, student veterans may benefit from knowing the outcomes of peers who have shared a lived experience of attending college during a period of disruption.

This research study focused on the transition experience of student veterans enrolled in community college courses when the college temporarily transitioned from a face-to-face learning environment to a fully online learning environment resulting from the COVID-19

pandemic. Community colleges are masters of a transition designed to “respond quickly to social and economic needs of the students, parents, and communities they serve” (Mellow, 2000, p. 6). However, while colleges are masters of transition, it is unclear whether they adequately prepare students for rapid change. This transition mastery may have come from the many disruptions experienced in higher education's history. The following section was designed to review the literature surrounding some of those disruptions.

Disruption Over the Years

Charles Darwin said it best when he stated, “It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.” Disruptions are a common occurrence that no one can escape. In an article titled, *The 50 Biggest Changes in the Last 50 Years*, Gordon (2004) provides the following as an example of how disruption has changed things over the years:

Looking at a photograph of a typical office from the mid-fifties and one from 2004, you find every desk in the 2004 photo has a computer on it. In 1950, about a million overseas phone calls originated in the United States, and in 2001 the number was at 6.27 billion. In 1954, most Americans still handled their financial affairs largely in cash. In 1954, the typical American woman was a housewife, and now more than 60 percent of American women are in the workforce (para. 4).

Each of these disruptions changed the way we view the world today. However, not all disruptions arrive as goods and services; some appear as natural disasters. According to Bates (2013), “Universities and colleges have been developing institutional continuity plans to protect their ability to function within an environment of increasing uncertainties caused by natural and man-made disasters and events” (p. 1). Historically, higher education institutions have been met

with large disasters that impact the enrollment and retention of students. For this study, the researcher has reviewed the literature surrounding disasters and disruptions over the last 20 years and the impact of these disasters on higher education institutions.

Impacts of Disruption on Higher Education

Each of the following disruptive events briefly describes the event and how the event impacted higher education institutions through preparation, teaching, and learning.

The Attacks on 9/11 (2001)

Disruption: On September 11, 2001, 19 militants associated with the Islamic extremist group al Qaeda hijacked four airplanes and carried out suicide attacks against targets in the United States (CNN, 2021). Two of the planes were flown into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, New York. A third plane hit the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, just outside Washington, D.C.; the fourth plane crashed in a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania (Intelligencer, 2011). Almost 3,000 people were killed during the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which triggered major U.S. initiatives to combat terrorism and defined the presidency of George W. Bush (Durkin, 2018 and Polgreen, 2004).

Impact: Immediately after 9/11, many students chose to attend college closer to home, a factor important for U.S. institutions to consider (Peng & Kotak, 2020; Binkley, 2020; Litow, 2020). In an article titled, *Twenty Years Later, Remembering and Teaching 9/11 on Campuses*, Feldstein wrote:

Immediately after 9/11, students began to “talk about the sort of groundswell of patriotism that characterized the news coverage — the network tv anchors wearing flag lapels, unquestioning acceptance of all of the steps that the Bush administration was taking, including invading Iraq — using “us” — that mattered a lot. Now I am teaching

students who were born after 9/11, so it is not as salient.” “It is just not at the forefront of public consciousness anymore, and I think that is unfortunate,” he said. “Because what is important is not just what happened to those on 9/11, to the victims and the families, but what happened to this country since 9/11, this sort of permanent national security state, the domestic surveillance, the infringement on civil liberties. As a country, we have not fully come to terms with the legacy of 9/11 and how that changed us” (para. 19).

Hurricanes Katrina/Rita (2005)

Disruption: Pruitt (2020) notes that Hurricane Katrina, the tropical cyclone that struck the Gulf Coast in August 2005, was the third-strongest hurricane to hit the United States in its history at the time. With maximum sustained winds of 175 mph, the storm killed 1,833 people and left millions homeless in New Orleans and along the Gulf Coast of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. According to an article on ScienceStruck.com (n.d.), Hurricane Rita was the fourth-most intense hurricane ever recorded in the Atlantic and the ninth costliest to affect the U.S. Less than a month after Hurricane Katrina, the news of Hurricane Rita triggered a massive evacuation in Texas and Louisiana. In addition, approximately 30 higher education institutions and over 100,000 postsecondary students experienced extensive losses and disruption of their educational programs due to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita (Mercer et al., 2005).

Impact: According to Bates (2013), though most major institutions have developed crisis management strategies, the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina provided the impetus for institutional continuity planning in higher education. Institutional continuity is a complex combination of strategies and activities. Business continuity plans detail the organizational patterns of adjustment and accommodations necessary to sustain all areas of a college or university in a disaster and post-disaster environment. Student life, facilities, financial activities, security,

infrastructure, and the academic mission are addressed. DiMenna (2021) informs that many higher education institutions reported greater mental health challenges among students, low-income families were disproportionately displaced, and college students experienced high levels of learning loss.

The Great Recession (2007-2009)

Disruption: Rich (2013) informs that the Great Recession was a global economic downturn that devastated world financial markets and the banking and real estate industries. The crisis led to increases in home mortgage foreclosures worldwide and caused millions of people to lose their life savings, jobs, and homes. It is generally considered the longest period of economic decline since the Great Depression in the 1930s.

Impact: According to Long (2014), The Great Recession had far-reaching effects on higher education's supply and demand sides. On the supply side, postsecondary institutions experienced cuts to multiple revenue sources, including charitable giving and endowment returns. In addition, the level of government support was also impacted, especially in the form of state appropriations, which affect tuition prices. Regarding families, or the demand side of higher education, the economy's downturn affected incomes and unemployment rates, thereby reducing economic well-being and stability. Moreover, homeownership and home equity levels declined, reducing a significant source of wealth and capital for many families. These changes likely impacted the probability of college enrollment and what a family can afford and are willing to pay for school.

COVID-19 Pandemic (2019)

Disruption: On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization announced that the COVID-19 virus was officially a pandemic after barreling through 114 countries in three months

and infecting over 118,000 people (World Health Organization, 2020). Moreover, the spread was not nearly finished at the time of this study. According to the Centers for Disease Control (2020), COVID-19 is caused by a novel coronavirus—a new coronavirus strain that has not been previously found in people. Symptoms include respiratory problems, fever, and cough, and can lead to pneumonia and death. Wong (2020) posits that the coronavirus has upended much of modern life, and higher education has not been spared. Campuses closed, courses moved online, and commencements were canceled.

Impact: Aoun (2020) informs that, as with most disruptive events, this one brings opportunity. The institutions that will thrive in the future will be the ones that embrace online platforms, not just a hastily assembled, short-term replacement for classes but long-term expansions of classroom instruction, campus life, and off-campus learning. According to Lokken (2021), before the pandemic, the average community college offered at least 25% of its instruction online, causing an easier transition in the sudden migration to virtual learning. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, higher education intuitions the world over are shifting to online learning or distance education programs (Toquero, 2020). Online learning has been around long before the COVID-19 pandemic. However, one study found that students who engage in online learning often face periods of isolation (Gillett-Swan, 2017). Some of the issues experienced can be personal such as anxiety associated with using technology; being out of one's comfort zone; (perception of) inequity in assessment, particularly in "group" assignments; and the (perceived) inability or difficulty in peer interaction, particularly in presentations (Gillett-Swan, 2017). In addition, despite student acknowledgment of the benefits in supporting their learning through the technology, another difficulty arises through the limits around the software's technical capability, particularly in terms of its functionality (Gallagher & Palmer, 2020; Gillett-Swan,

2017). Starr-Glass (2013) alternately reports in his study that engaging in online learning environments with military learners poses challenges but predominantly poses opportunities. He goes on to say:

Military learners are often labeled as different, which challenges instructors to examine their reactions to difference, providing an opportunity to explore personal, educational, and learning approaches to the unfamiliar. In addition, it compels an examination of attitudes towards otherness. It matters little if the difference turns out not to be so great or the otherness not so alien. What does matter is that instructors are prompted to approach new learners in new ways, in more considered ways, and perhaps more mindful ways. In that regard, first-time engagement with military learners is not different from encountering any new group of students because mindful practice resides in the instructor and is not restricted to any specific group (p. 360).

Mustapha et al. (2021) conducted a research study of 118 undergraduate students impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the university's transition to online learning. The outcomes showed challenges with internet coverage, learning device compatibility, an increased need to share devices with family members, social isolation experienced by students, environmental disturbances causing distraction, pedagogical challenges, lack of motivation, and mental fatigue. Kelly and Columbus (2020) posit from their study that digital learning will become more ubiquitous out of necessity but will likely not become the preferred option of most undergraduate students. To strengthen remote learning, the authors contend, institutions must provide robust student support virtually, requiring creative thinking and reallocating resources and staff.

As mentioned, while the study was designed to capture the experiences of student veterans enrolled in community college courses during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher's goal was not to focus on the event itself but on how the student veterans experienced the event. Therefore, the next section of the literature review discussed the theoretical framework selected by the researcher to guide the study.

Theoretical Framework

Schlossberg's (1981) Adult Transitions Theory is the theoretical framework guiding this phenomenological research study. Schlossberg's theory focuses on how adults cope with the transitions they experience throughout life and is deeply rooted in psychology and counseling traditions (Jenner, 2017). The framework is designed to depict the extraordinarily complex reality that accompanies and defines the human capacity to cope with change (Goodman et al., 2006). The framework examines how adults perceive change relating to relationships, assumptions, roles, and routines and how those same individuals cope with the changes they experience. While this theory is generally thought of as an adult transition theory, it also applies to traditional college-age students, which is why it is often used for studies dealing with higher education and student affairs (Anderson & Goodman, 2014).

Schlossberg's 4S System of Coping with Transition

Schlossberg's theory consists of a defined set of variables that influence an individual's ability to cope through transition: situation, self, support, and strategies – also known as the 4S System of Coping with Transition. Schlossberg's theory suggests that having access to the four variables can help individuals during times of transition. Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) and Schlossberg et al. (1989) further define the variables as the following resources: having a sense of control over what is happening (situation); the internal skills an individual has that can help

with coping (self); receipt of caring and affirmation (support); and enacting behaviors that shift how problems are seen (strategies). The following section reviewed the literature focusing on each variable and how each relates to this research study.

Situation. Schlossberg (1981) defines the *situation* variable as what is happening. This variable of coping with transition is when the individual identifies the transition or the situation taking place. As mentioned previously, transitions can be anticipated, unanticipated, or considered a non-event. As one experiences transition, it is either expected the event will occur, and it does; the event will come as a surprise; or the event is expected to occur; and it never does. Goodman et al. (2006, Situation section) inform that every individual's situation varies according to the following factors:

- Trigger – What sets off the transition?
- Timing – How does the transition relate to one's social clock?
- Control – What aspects of the transition can one control?
- Role Change – Does the transition involve role change?
- Duration – Is the transition seen as permanent or temporary?
- Previous experience with a similar transition – How has the individual met similar transitions?
- Concurrent stress – What and how great are the stresses facing the individual now, if any?
- Assessment – Does the individual view the situation positively, negatively, or as benign?

Schlossberg et al. (1989, p. 17) ask if the individual sees the transition as positive, negative, expected, unexpected, desired, or dreaded. Did the transition come at the worst possible time? Is it surrounded by other stresses? Is it voluntary or imposed? At what point is the transition – beginning, middle, or near the end? Is this a personal transition or a reaction to

someone else's? One must consider multiple variables when seeking to identify the situation or transition being experienced.

Self. According to Schlossberg, the *Self* variable defines to whom the transition is happening. This variable of coping with transition identifies individual personal characteristics the transition is affecting and defines the aptitude in which the individual measures the transition. This variable is where two or more individuals can face the same situation and navigate it differently based on their challenges and strengths. Goodman et al. (2006, Self section) identifies the following characteristics relevant for individuals as they cope with change:

- Personal and demographic characteristics
- Socioeconomic status
- Gender
- Age and stage of life
- State of health
- Ethnicity/culture
- Psychological resources
- Ego development
- Outlook – optimism and self-efficacy
- Commitment and values
- Spirituality and resiliency

Schlossberg et al. (1989, p. 17) ask, what is the individual's previous experience in making a similar transition? Does the person believe there are options? Is the person optimistic and able to deal with ambiguity? If so, they will bring to the transition the greatest resource of all: a strong sense of self.

Support. According to Schlossberg, the *Support* variable defines what help is available. This variable of coping with transition allows the individual to identify and discover the support available while navigating the transition. This variable can include support such as personal and

professional relationships and organizations that aid individuals navigating a transition.

Goodman et al. (2006) identify this section as social support, which includes intimate relations, family units, networks of friends, and the institutions or communities in which an individual belongs.

Schlossberg et al. (1989, p. 18) suggest that external supports and options include financial assets and potential emotional support from family, close friends, and co-workers; and that successfully dealing with transitions requires those close to us to offer more support than sabotage.

Strategies. According to Schlossberg, the *Strategies* variable defines how the individual copes. This variable of coping with transition identifies the methods an individual uses to cope with the transition. Schlossberg et al. (1989, p. 18) suggest that understanding the nature of transitions can help them find ways to cope with the transition. Goodman et al. (2006) identify four coping modes: information seeking, direct action, inhibition of action, and intrapsychic behavior:

Information seekers look for answers to the unknown, seeking solutions to alleviate a stressful situation. Taking direct action is where an individual identifies the stressor and addresses it. Inhibition of action places individuals in a state of inaction, leaving them in a low coping position. Intrapsychic behavior refers to the mindset individuals use to resolve problems that arise (p.81).

After identifying the stressor, individuals formulate flexible or inflexible coping strategies across their stressful situations. Some people vary as they face different situations and others use the same strategies regardless of the situation (Goodman et al., 2006).

The nature of transition shows that individuals can navigate similar situations differently, depending on how one identifies with the situation. Whether an individual considers the transition as anticipated or unanticipated determines how they will cope with the transition. Individuals' experiences and identities may provide a different roadmap in navigating the same transition as another. In navigating transition, an individual may need to identify options for support. Options for support may already exist in the individual's life, providing a smoother transition than for someone who must seek support. Finally, after navigating the first three variables, the individual can design coping strategies to process the transition's effects.

The following section of the literature review discussed veterans in higher education. The goal was to provide information through the literature review about the history behind student veterans, the current literature that speaks to how student veterans experience transition, and the currently documented supports for student veterans.

Veterans in Higher Education

Veterans transitioned into higher education due to the GI Bill of Rights in 1944. Heralded as one of the most significant pieces of legislation ever produced by the Federal government, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the GI Bill of Rights, was developed to provide World War II veterans with access to education, home, and business loans, and unemployment pay (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013). Before the war, college and homeownership were, for the most part, unreachable dreams for the average American. However, thanks to the GI Bill, millions who would have flooded the job market instead opted for education. In the peak year of 1947, veterans accounted for 49 percent of college admissions. When the original GI Bill ended on July 25, 1956, 7.8 million of 16 million World War II Veterans had participated in an education or training program (U.S. Department of Veterans

Affairs, 2013). Student veterans are no strangers to transition, beginning with the transition from civilian life when enlisting into the armed services, continuing with the many transitions occurring during enlisted service, and continuing with the transition experiences following discharge from life in the military.

Student Veteran Identity

Community colleges are rich in student diversity. Veteran status is, of course, only one facet of a student's identity (Jones, 2013). A student veteran is anyone on active duty, in reserve or National Guard status, retired from the military, or has completed military service and participates in postsecondary education (Brown & Gross, 2011; Kirchner, 2015). In addition, they are often parents, co-workers, employees, and members of a religious organization and have the same racial and sexual orientation issues as any other student. Veterans are, by definition, non-traditional students; they are typically older, and many are technically considered transfer students because they often bring with them credit earned through college courses they completed while in the military (O'Herrin, 2011). In addition, many contemporary veterans belong to demographic groups that higher education institutions have historically underserved: first-generation and "non-traditional" students, low-income students, and students of color (Jenner, 2017). Finally, similar to traditional college students, many student veterans face barriers to higher education, such as the need for remediation, financial issues, and the challenges of balancing school with other aspects of life (Jenner, 2017).

Student veterans also experience a variety of unique barriers to higher education, including mental health issues (PTSD, T.B.I., etc.), lack of information about G.I. Bill benefits upon discharge from military service, and the added challenge of transitioning from military life to civilian life (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Radford, 2009; Schiavone & Gentry, 2014).

Student Veteran Transition Experiences

While some veterans view college as an obligatory box to be checked to enhance prospects for gainful employment after military service, other veterans embrace the opportunity to immerse themselves in the traditional college experience (O'Herrin, 2011). Veterans face challenges adjusting from military service to student life (Bonar & Domenici, 2011; DiRamio et al., 2008; Livingston et al., 2011). One of the most prominent challenges veterans face when they leave active military service is the process of adapting to civilian life (Jones, 2013). Parker et al. (2019) found, about half of post 9/11 veterans say it was somewhat or very difficult for them to readjust to civilian life after their military service; only about one-in-five pre-9/11 veterans say the same. Taylor et al. (2016) found, "43.1 percent of student veterans provide for dependents living with them while they are attending school, compared to 12.1 percent of non-veteran students" (p. 50). According to the Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University and Student Veterans of America (2019), student veterans are uniquely positioned for academic achievement and success due to their military training, personal characteristics, work ethic, and steadfast commitment. "Each veteran brings individual strengths and liabilities to the transition, and a continual appraisal of the balance of these is also important" (Anderson & Goodman, 2014, p. 41).

For student veterans, transitioning from the military to civilian life includes internal and external factors influencing coping and adaptation. For example, Anderson and Goodman (2014) suggest:

Ongoing assessment across these areas is crucial for effective interventions. Having transitioned from the military, student veterans are familiar with reintegration into an environment that may seem unfamiliar. Regardless of the specific nature of the changes

involved, a transition requires letting go of aspects of the self and former roles and moving towards a new emerging identity and roles.

Ackerman et al. (2009) study participants described the structured life of the military and how difficult it was to move from a strictly defined structure to a loosely configured campus where there was no chain of command from which to get answers. Kirchner (2015) posits that student veterans face challenges when entering classrooms with traditional-aged undergraduates and leaving a highly structured military setting for the less-structured college campus.

In addition, data collected by the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (2020) informs that military culture can be deeply internalized. Sometimes, core beliefs and principles learned through the military can conflict with higher education beliefs and principles. In their study, Ackerman et al. (2009) included that while some adjustment issues could be attributed to being away from school for an extended period, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was also a factor.

According to a study of understanding student veteran disabilities, Parks and Walker (2014) gather, PTSD is a psychological disorder that can develop after exposure to one or more traumatic events. War has always been associated with trauma, but it was not until the Civil War that the United States became aware of trauma's ability to contribute to clinically diagnosable complications. Student veterans may carry with them wounds from war and trauma experiences that require coping strategies. Lighthall (2012) notes:

When a service member is discharged from the military, it is aptly termed "separation," and it comes with all the heartbreak and disorientation that being torn from one's tribe brings. They just spent the last several years inextricably tied to some type of social system, whether a brigade, battalion, company, platoon, squad, team, or just one-on-one with a

battle buddy. During those years, solitude was rare. Suddenly, they are no longer attached to those systems, and the feeling of vulnerability can be terrifying (p. 82).

Additionally, depression and PTSD symptoms have been associated with family reintegration problems in veterans (Misra-Herbert et al., 2015; Sayers et al., 2009). Taylor et al. (2016) inform with potentially one in five veterans returning from service with symptoms of PTSD and with many of these veterans using their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to attend college, it is essential to consider whether student veterans are more likely than other students to face challenges during their college careers. As such, the following section detailed the literature surrounding support for student veterans.

Support for Student Veterans

Because veterans are a diverse population with an extensive range of experiences, it is impossible to take a one-size-fits-all approach to serve them (Gillett-Swan, 2017; O'Herrin, 2011). Schuh et al. (2017) posit that though the responsibility for student success is shared throughout the campus, student affairs professionals play critical roles in assisting students in their transitions to and through college life. Student veterans have an array of services available to help guide them through the challenges of higher education. Taylor et al. (2016) posit that to effectively serve this demographic, student veterans' interests, characteristics, and needs must be understood. There is an urgent need to share best practices, exchange ideas, and conduct research that will provide campuses with the information needed to promote the academic achievement of veterans who are students (Ackerman et al., 2009). Additionally, many student veterans utilize the financial support offered through veteran education benefits.

Financial Support. In 2008, the GI Bill was redesigned to allow for additional educational allowances for veterans and the transferability of the education benefit to veteran

spouses and dependents. The education benefit redesign also offered a living allowance. The passage of the Post 9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 (commonly referred to as the Post 9/11 GI Bill) was the most significant increase in education benefits for service members and veterans since the original GI Bill of 1944—the benefit that is frequently credited with establishing the foundation of today’s middle class (O’Herrin, 2011; Steele et al., 2010; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2021).

The Post 9/11 GI Bill provides financial support for education and housing to individuals with at least 90 days of aggregate service after September 10, 2001, or individuals discharged with a service-connected disability after 30 days (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2020). In its first year of implementation, more than half a million veterans applied for certificates of eligibility for the Post 9/11 GI Bill, and more than 300,000 veterans and family members used the benefit to attend classes (Steele et al., 2010). Although additional research is necessary before certain practices can be deemed “best” practices, one thing is clear: the recently enacted Post 9/11 GI Bill is an incredibly attractive benefit for service members, veterans, and their families, and we should anticipate that these populations will only continue to increase on our campuses over the next several years (O’Herrin, 2011).

In August 2017, the President signed the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act, also known as the 'Forever GI Bill,' which brought significant changes to veterans' educational benefits. The law allows more beneficiaries to use the GI Bill and more time to use it. The enhancements created the most comprehensive education benefits package since the Post 9/11 GI Bill was first established. In addition, this redesign is unique in that it eliminated the expiration date for when the recipient could begin to use the benefit. The original education benefit featured a time limit that required the recipient to begin using the benefit no

more than 15 years following the veteran's date of discharge. The Forever GI Bill removes this limit, allowing eligible veterans the option of transferring the benefit long after discharging from the military.

According to the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (2021), there were six active education programs in the fiscal year 2020; the Post-9/11 Educational Assistance (Post-9/11 GI Bill), All-Volunteer Force Educational Assistance Program (Montgomery GI Bill-Active Duty), Educational Assistance for Members of the Selected Reserve (Montgomery GI Bill-Selected Reserve), Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance (Dependents' Educational Assistance - D.E.A.), Post-Vietnam Era Veterans Educational Assistance Program (VEAP), and the Reserve Educational Assistance Program (REAP).

The Veteran Rapid Retraining Assistance Program (VRRAP) is another benefit to student veterans. VRRAP offers education and training for high-demand jobs to unemployed veterans because of the COVID-19 pandemic (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2021). To be eligible for this program, one must be at least 22 years old, but not older than 66, unemployed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, not rated as totally disabled because one cannot work, and not enrolled in a federal or state jobs program. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2021) reports that VRRAP will be available until December 11, 2022.

Non-Financial Support. Many institutions have implemented the following recommendations to help ensure veterans are successful in higher education and have received a great deal of positive feedback from students (O'Herrin, 2011, Specific needs of returning veterans section):

- Establish specific points of contact within campus offices.
- Create a campus working group that spans departments.

- Collaborate with community organizations to provide comprehensive services.
- Ensure veterans receive a thorough introduction to the university through an orientation.
- Improve campus climate by establishing a student veterans' group, educating faculty and staff about veteran-specific issues, and, if possible, creating a veteran-specific resource center or designated space.
- Investigate the possibility of creating veteran-specific learning communities on campus.
- Streamline disability and veterans' services.

According to Kirchner et al. (2015), one study focusing on the promising practices for engaging student veterans found, “the challenge of reintegrating back into society while pursuing a college education might be the most difficult barrier a student veteran faces” (p. 116). Rumann et al. (2011) and Kirchner (2015) posit that many seek out other veterans who can relate to their experiences. Institutions can support student veterans by seeking to understand their specific needs and providing avenues to address them. In another study supporting student veterans' transition to college and academic success, Kirchner (2015) posits that acknowledgment of the civilian-veteran divide is a first step toward reducing stress levels associated with service members leaving the military. In addition, the study found that adult educators need to be aware of student veterans' programs and services.

According to a Pew Research Center (2011) report, 84% of Post 9/11 veterans report that the public does not understand the problems they and their families face. In addition, a study about veterans on campus found that because of their unique experiences and different demographic characteristics, veterans often feel disconnected in higher education and desire interactions with other veterans on campus (Strickley, 2009). Another study examining the implications of social support for student veterans documented a negative relationship between

social support, family and friends, and PTSD, such that student veterans reporting more significant social support experienced less frequent PTSD symptoms (Elliott et al., 2011).

Gaps in the Literature

According to Whiteman et al. (2013), despite the upsurge of military personnel into higher education, there has not been a corresponding increase in our understanding of their unique needs. Kirchner (2015) posits that student veteran organizations, veteran resource centers, veteran-specific orientations, and faculty training are relatively new approaches that universities use and have not been well-researched or reported. According to Griffin and Gilbert (2015), “Schlossberg’s transition theory asserts that a change is only a transition when one views it as a transition. Thus, future researchers must continue to focus on student veterans’ perceptions and views on the changes they undergo when pursuing a degree, and how these transitions affect their experiences with institutions of higher education” (For future research section).

The researcher interviewed student veterans registered at Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C) in Cleveland, OH, during the 2020 spring semester, when the institution transitioned unexpectedly and temporarily to a fully online learning environment resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The target population had not previously experienced the immediate and urgent need to determine whether to remain enrolled and continue their studies in the unfamiliar and entirely online learning environment or withdraw from the institution. The researcher has identified the literature gap as the voices of student veterans experiencing the unanticipated transition. The gap included how the student veteran identifies the experience of transitioning to a fully online class environment while attending community college classes and deciding whether to continue with online classes or withdraw from their degree program due to the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Summary

Chapter Two provided an in-depth look at the literature supporting this qualitative research study to understand how student veterans experienced unanticipated transition while enrolled in college courses. The chapter discussed research that provided a clearer understanding of transitions and how transitions are experienced in higher education. The chapter also provided a historical analysis of disruptions that have impacted higher education, an in-depth review of Schlossberg's Adult Transition Theory – which includes an in-depth review of the 4S System of coping with transition, and a look at the literature that speaks specifically to veterans in higher education. The chapter concluded by confirming a gap in current literature that speaks directly to student veterans experiencing the phenomenon. The student veterans can provide a first-hand account of the strategies student veterans use to combat the stress associated with unanticipated transitions, especially during periods of disruption. Another goal was to learn how student veterans cope with transition and uncover any tools that higher education leaders can use to support student veterans through the transition.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

While student veterans have experience with transitioning, their experience with an unanticipated transition in higher education is a phenomenon that has not been highly researched. Therefore, the following chapter was organized to discuss the methodological design of this research study. The chapter begins by restating the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the theoretical framework that guided the study. Next, the chapter details the study's phenomenological approach. Then, the chapter summarizes the study setting and participant selection, the instrumentation proposed to collect the data, and how the data were collected and analyzed using Tracy's "Big Tent" Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research. Finally, the chapter concludes with the ethical considerations, researcher's statement of positionality, and limitations of the study's design.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand how student veterans experienced the phenomenon of transition while enrolled in courses at Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C) during an unanticipated period of disruption. The study specifically focused on how student veterans experienced a rapid change in course delivery generated by the COVID-19 pandemic's disruption to higher education during the 2020 spring semester. During this semester, Tri-C swiftly transitioned operations to an online environment for the safety of all. As a result, students and faculty were impacted by the unfamiliarity of online learning and teaching.

The researcher aimed to understand the strategies and resources student veterans used to navigate and cope with the transition through the lens of Schlossberg's Adult Transition Theory. The following research questions (RQs) guided the study:

RQ1. What were the lived experiences of student veterans enrolled in community college courses during a period of unanticipated transition?

RQ2. What resources did student veterans identify as needing while experiencing an unanticipated transition?

Theoretical Framework

Grant and Osanloo (2014) propose that a theoretical framework is derived from an existing theory in the literature that has already been tested and validated by others and is considered a generally accepted theory in scholarly literature. Schlossberg's (1981) Adult Transition Theory guided this study. According to Jenner (2017), the theory focuses on how adults cope with the transitions they experience throughout life and is deeply rooted in psychology and counseling traditions. Schlossberg's theory includes a "4S System" model that describes how individuals cope with transitions. The "4S System" identifies four variables that flow consecutively – situation, self, support, and strategies. Each variable describes what individuals need to cope with the transition as it is experienced. First, individuals must identify the transition (situation) they are encountering. Second, individuals must identify the personal attributes (self) needed to cope with the transition. Third, individuals must identify the assistance (support) available as a guide through the transition. Finally, individuals begin to develop tools (strategies) to cope with the new reality. For a visual alignment of the study's theoretical framework, research questions, and interview questions see Appendix A. As mentioned in Chapter 1, due to the intricate use of the "4S System" found within Schlossberg's theory, the researcher opted against a conceptual framework.

Research Design

The researcher selected a qualitative methodology approach as the design for this study. Roberts and Hyatt (2019) identify the qualitative research approach as focusing on an individual's experience from that individual's perspective. Within the qualitative methodology, there are multiple designs the researcher can use to focus the research. This study focused on a phenomenological investigative design method. According to Lochmiller and Lester (2017), with phenomenology, "rather than studying the individual experience, the focus is on describing how a phenomenon is universally experienced" (p. 110).

Rationale for selecting the qualitative phenomenological design method was the researcher intended to capture the student veterans' lived experiences of processing and coping with the unanticipated transition of progressing with enrollment during a period of disruption. McClenney and Arnsperger (2012) posit that colleges implement various strategies to tackle students' different challenges. The researcher's goal was to collect and analyze the responses of student veterans who experienced the same phenomenon during the 2020 spring semester.

Study Setting

The researcher selected Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C) in Cleveland, Ohio, as the study's host site. Tri-C is Ohio's largest public community college with four main campuses, serving over 60,000 students annually (Cuyahoga Community College, n.d.). The main campus of Tri-C is in inner city Cleveland. The other campuses are in the Cleveland suburbs. Tri-C was selected because of the variety in participants' socioeconomic status and the College's history of over 50 years as a student veteran serving institution. At the time of this study, Tri-C has earned its 13th consecutive Military Friendly[®] School designation in recognition of its commitment to serving veteran and active military students and their families (Moujaes, 2022).

Study Participants

Cuyahoga Community College's website (n.d.) states that the current Tri-C student profile is as follows:

Consists of students ranging from 15 to 75+, 61% are female, 37% are from minority groups, 73% study part-time, 83% are seeking an associate degree or taking courses to prepare for transfer to a four-year institution, 27% are focusing in areas related to health careers, 33% are enrolled in evening or weekend classes, 61% are enrolled in technical job training courses, and 15% are enrolled in business classes.

The study focused on how student veterans who had never enrolled in or attended classes online experienced the College's swift and unanticipated transition to a fully online learning environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The transition began during the 2020 spring (January – May) semester. At the time of the transition, 453 student veterans were enrolled full and part-time at the institution. Considering the difficulty in recruiting participants in qualitative research, the researcher opted to solicit all student veterans enrolled at the College during the period of transition.

Lochmiller and Lester (2017, p.110) suggest conducting in-depth interviews with five to 25 participants for phenomenological research. The researcher aimed to utilize purposeful sampling to identify at least 20 participants. Lochmiller and Lester (2017) suggest purposeful sampling "is when the researcher selects individuals or sites on the basis of specific criteria" (p.141). The researcher's goal was to successfully recruit at least ten student veteran participants who remained with the College following the transition and at least ten student veteran participants who withdrew from the College following the transition. The researcher acknowledged and considered that students who withdrew from the College during the specified

period might be challenging to reach and interview or have since returned to the institution. Any such instances were considered when reporting the data. Additionally, the researcher acknowledges that the ultimate goal was to reach a point of saturation. According to Lochmiller and Lester (2017), “saturation can be defined as the point in data collection and analysis at which no new information and understanding is generated” (p.178).

The target population were student veterans enrolled full or part-time during the 2020 spring semester at the host institution. Each participant was an honorably discharged veteran of one of the United States Armed Forces branches identified by the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, including the Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, or Navy. In addition, each participant was a current or former student veteran (meeting the above criteria) who was not enrolled in online courses in any semester before spring 2020. Phillippe (2020) reports, “In fall 2018, only 14 percent of all community college students studied exclusively online, and slightly more than one-third (35 percent) took some classes online” (Spring effects section). The study focused on understanding the experience of student veterans who were not previously familiar with the online learning environment. Therefore, each student veteran spoke to the experience of a quick transition to a fully online learning environment. Participant specifications were identified in the email sent to the target population and verified with the College’s Evidence and Inquiry department.

Instrumentation

Phenomenological research involves in-depth interviews of study participants who have experienced the phenomenon (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). With the qualitative approach, the researcher served as the instrument for collecting data. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher's ability to conduct face-to-face interviews was limited at the time of collection. Therefore, the researcher utilized Zoom's virtual meeting platform to conduct and record interviews with each study participant.

The specific method of investigation used was the semi-structured interview. With the semi-structured interview approach, the researcher asked predetermined questions as a general guide but allowed for the flexibility of the conversation to bring about additional questions. According to Lochmiller and Lester (2017), "this approach is often used as it provides the practitioner-scholar with the flexibility to conduct the interview in a more conversational manner, and also allows for unexpected understandings to emerge" (p. 151).

The researcher developed questions based on interviews from previous studies identified in the literature review, seeking similar information. The researcher sought and received feedback from student affairs professionals, students, and the research committee to ensure questions were written for maximum input from study participants. Interviews were conducted in up to 60-minute increments, and the participant was notified of the recording at the beginning of the interview.

Each interview proceeded with the following protocol (see Appendix B):

1. The researcher asked the participant for permission to record the interview.
 - a. Once the participant had agreed, the researcher turned on the recording.
 - b. Should the participant disagree, the researcher did not proceed with the interview.

2. The researcher introduced the interview and research study.
 - a. The researcher provided information regarding the logistics of the interview.
 - b. The researcher provided the purpose of the study and the rationale for the data being collected.
 - c. The researcher explained the steps that were taken to assure participant confidentiality and data protection.
 - d. The researcher proceeded with interview questions.
3. After all the interview questions were asked, the researcher thanked the participant and stopped the recording.

The researcher developed open-ended interview questions (see Appendix C) to gather data to answer the study's overarching research questions. An alignment of the research and interview questions can be found in Appendix A. Additionally, the interview began by reviewing the signed consent form (see Appendix D) and collecting necessary demographic information to confirm diversity in participation.

Data Collection and Sources

Prior to data collection, the researcher began by obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Boards at the host site, Cuyahoga Community College (see Appendix F), and Kansas State University (see Appendix G). The data collection was conducted through the Zoom online meeting platform, requiring access to a computer with the internet. The researcher began data collection by requesting target population information from Tri-C's Evidence and Inquiry department. Four hundred fifty-three student veterans were enrolled at the institution during the 2020 spring semester. Upon receipt of the list, the researcher evaluated and removed any names deemed ineligible due to the target population's previously stated qualifications. The researcher

then sent an email (see Appendix E) to the remaining eligible target participants. The request for participant email included a list of parameters that were met in order for the participant to qualify. The list included the following:

- Honorably discharged veteran of one of the United States Armed Forces branches (i.e., Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, or Navy)
- During the 2020 spring semester, you were attending classes (full- or part-time)
- The 2020 spring semester was not your first semester at the College
- Before the 2020 spring semester, you never enrolled in and attended classes online

The researcher allowed enough time to collect participant interest before pursuing additional options. As the desired number of participants (20) was identified, the researcher contacted participants to schedule interviews and send the consent form. Unfortunately, the original email did not produce the desired number of participants. Therefore, the researcher called the target population until the desired number of participants were identified. Once the interviews were complete, the researcher proceeded to analyze the data.

Data Analysis

The Zoom platform allowed the researcher to record the interviews. The researcher opted to use Otter AI to transcribe the audio recordings. First, the researcher reviewed the transcripts for errors. Once the transcripts were reviewed, the researcher forwarded a copy of the transcription to the participants for approval. Once approval was received, the researcher utilized Microsoft Excel to analyze the data. The data were reviewed and categorized into themes. After themes were identified and all research reviewed, the researcher summarized the findings. Finally, the researcher ensured trustworthiness by utilizing Tracy's (2010) "Big Tent" Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research, described in the next section.

Study Quality

The researcher followed Tracy's "Big Tent" Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research (2010, p. 840) to increase the quality of the research specific to this research study as follows:

- Worthy topic: the topic of the research is relevant, timely, significant, and interesting
- Rich rigor: the study uses sufficient, abundant, appropriate, and complex theoretical constructs, data and time in the field, sample(s), context(s), and data collection and analysis processes
- Sincerity: the study is characterized by self-reflectivity about subjective values, biases, and inclinations of the researcher, transparency about the methods and challenges
- Credibility: the research is marked by thick descriptions and concrete detail
- Resonance: the researcher influences, affects, or moves particular readers or a variety of audiences through naturalistic generalizations and transferable findings
- Significant contribution: the research provides a significant contribution theoretically, practically, morally, and methodologically
- Ethical: the research considers procedural ethics (such as human subjects), situational and culturally specific ethics, relational ethics, and exiting ethics
- Meaningful coherence: the study achieves what it purports to be about, uses methods and procedures that fit its stated goals, and meaningfully interconnects literature, research questions, findings, and interpretations with others

The following table summarizes how this study address each criterion. To ensure credibility and dependability, the researcher used the guide in Table 3.1 to quality-check the research study's planning, collection, analysis, and reporting processes.

Table 3.1. Data Quality Using the “Big-Tent” Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research

“Big-Tent” Criteria	In this study...
Worthy Topic	The study utilizes student voices to address how student veterans experienced an unanticipated transition while enrolled in courses.
Rich Rigor	The researcher utilizes a well-known theoretical framework to guide the study. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews and analyzed all data collected.
Sincerity	The researcher has provided a clear explanation of the delimitations and assumptions presented in the study. Additionally, the researcher has clearly outlined the method used to collect and analyze the data.
Credibility	The researcher provided transcriptions for participant review to ensure the accuracy of data received during interviews.
Resonance	The researcher provided information and recommendations to educational professionals and students regarding the experiences of student veterans during a period of unanticipated transition.
Significant Contribution	The researcher will use the study to extend the knowledge of how student veterans experience unanticipated transitions during a period of disruption.
Ethical	The researcher gained approval from the host institution and the educational institution’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) before conducting the study.
Meaningful Coherence	The researcher achieved the stated purpose of understanding how student veterans experience transition while enrolled in community college courses during an unanticipated period of disruption.

Ethical Considerations

Research studies require that ethical considerations be made. The researcher safeguarded against unethical research practices by obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of both Kansas State University (KSU) and Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C) before collecting any information relevant to the study. Participant names were not used in the data analysis to protect the identity of human subjects. As the interviews were transcribed, the information was coded to prevent identity concerns. The researcher stored signed consent forms and interview recordings electronically and on a USB flash drive. Data will be stored on the USB

flash drive and locked in a safe for five years. All participants were extended respect and granted equal time to participate in the interview.

Also taken under ethical consideration was the relationship between the researcher and each participant. At the time of this study, the researcher served as an employee of the host institution directly connected to the target population. Pritchard (2006) identifies conflicts of interest as “a conflict between certain interests and obligations” (p.60). Therefore, the researcher had the interview questions reviewed by a group of student support professionals at the host institution to mitigate biases. The review team consisted of a Dean of Student Affairs, an Assistant Dean of Student Affairs, and a Veteran and Military Connected Services Program Manager. The researcher acknowledged potential biases as a veteran of the United States military, a veteran graduate and employee of the study site, and a professional with first-hand access to the participants.

Statement of Positionality

As the author and principal researcher, I acknowledge my position as a veteran of the United States Armed Services, Program Manager of Veterans and Military Connected Services at the host institution, and student veteran alum of the host institution. With this knowledge, I commit to conducting a quality research study professionally, ethically, and objectively to capture the lived experiences of student veterans facing a period of unanticipated disruption while enrolled at a community college.

Limitations

Limitations are beyond the researcher's control. The following have been identified as limitations of this study. First, while most of the 453 student veterans were invited to participate, the researcher could not predict how many students would respond. The participation invitations were delivered to current and former students enrolled during the specified time frame. Therefore, the study is limited to the number of respondents.

Additionally, as the intended participants were contacted via email, participant response availability is limited by the number of individuals with valid email addresses. Plans for addressing limited participant responses were discussed in the data collection section of this chapter. With phenomenological research, only a tiny portion of the total population is interviewed. This study aimed to identify a limited number of 20 student veterans at the host institution for participation. To clarify, the researcher hoped to identify and interview ten student veterans who continued with enrollment and ten who withdrew from enrollment following the unanticipated period of disruption. The results of the findings were not applicable to all student veterans experiencing the phenomenon due to the limited number of anticipated participants. However, the results may be transferred to other student populations such as non-traditional students.

Finally, this study was limited by the lack of information participants had about the work being done by College personnel to ensure a smooth transition for both students and staff, while themselves being exposed to an unfamiliar environment.

Summary

The researcher's methodology design was carefully and purposefully selected to provide an effective and relevant approach to collecting information regarding the student veterans' lived experience with the phenomenon of the College's temporary transition to a fully online learning environment resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher intended for the study results to inform community college professionals on how student veterans experience, navigate and cope with unanticipated transitions. The researcher also intended to provide resources for students seeking assistance navigating and coping with unanticipated transitions while enrolled in college courses.

In this chapter, the researcher has provided details about the study's purpose, the theoretical lens selected to inform the study, and the research design and methodology. In addition, the chapter identified the host institution as Tri-C in Cleveland, Ohio, and has identified a projected target population of 453 student veterans enrolled at the host institution during the 2020 spring semester, in which the researcher hoped to interview 20 student veterans to provide insight into their shared experience. Additionally, the chapter provided details regarding the instrumentation used to collect data during the study, the data collection process, and how the researcher analyzed the data.

The chapter concludes with a description of how the research ensured data quality using Tracy's "Big Tent" Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research, followed by the study's ethical considerations and limitations. Next, an analysis of the study's findings will be discussed in detail in chapter four. Finally, the implications and recommendations of the study's findings will be discussed in chapter five.

Chapter 4 - Research Findings and Analysis

The researcher conducted a qualitative study at Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C), a multi-campus institution in Cleveland, Ohio. The College serves more than 60,000 students annually (Cuyahoga Community College, n.d.). This study aimed to understand how student veterans experience transition while enrolled in community college courses during an unanticipated period of disruption. The study was conducted by interviewing student veterans who were enrolled at Tri-C during the 2020 spring semester when the College transitioned to a fully online environment as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1. What were the lived experiences of student veterans enrolled in community college courses during a period of unanticipated transition?

RQ2. What resources did student veterans identify as needed while experiencing an unanticipated transition?

The research questions are provided as a broad lens to uncover the student veterans' experience with transition during the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher used Schlossberg's 4S System of Coping with Transition framework to organize the interview questions and guide the discussion with each participant. The 4S System consists of a set of variables that guides the user to identify the *situation, self, support, and strategies* used to cope with any transition.

This chapter will briefly describe the participant demographics, a summary of the findings, and themes found following the analysis of the information collected.

Participant Demographics

The participants in this study were all enrolled at Tri-C during the 2020 spring semester when the world was faced with a global pandemic causing all institutions to transition their

services completely and temporarily online. Participants were student veterans who had not participated in online instruction before the College's temporary transition to the fully online environment. Interviews were conducted virtually and generally completed within an hour. Participants were allowed to discontinue the interview at any time for any reason. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect the identity of their responses. There were 22 participants: 15 males and seven females, aged 20-69. The United States (U.S.) Army had the greatest representation, with nine student veteran participants. The lengths of service ranged from three years to 33 years, and the time since separation ranged from less than a year to 41 years. The following table provides a visual summary of overall participant demographics.

Table 4.1. Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Age Range	Branch of Service	Length of Service	Time Since Separation
Alpha	Female	20-29	Marine Corps	3 years	4 years
Bravo	Male	30-39	Navy	5 years	6 years
Charlie	Male	50-59	Marine Corps	4 years	29 years
Delta	Male	50-59	Army	33 years	7 years
Echo	Male	20-29	Army	3 years	7 years
Foxtrot	Male	30-39	Navy	5 years	9 years
Golf	Male	30-39	Army	5 years	13 years
Hotel	Male	40-49	Army	17 years	5 years
India	Male	50-59	Army	8 years	27 years
Juliet	Female	40-49	Army	8 years	12 years
Kilo	Male	30-39	Army	3 years	10 years
Lima	Male	60-69	Marine Corps	3 years	41 years
Mike	Female	30-39	Marine Corps	4 years	9 years
November	Male	20-29	Army	6 years	>1 year
Oscar	Male	50-59	Marine Corps/Navy	18 years	13 years
Papa	Male	60-69	Air Force	4 years	not provided
Quebec	Female	30-39	Marine Corps	10 years	5 years
Romeo	Female	20-29	Air Force	8 years	>1 year
Sierra	Female	30-39	Navy	3 years	6 years
Tango	Male	30-39	Air Force	6 years	5 years
Uniform	Male	60-69	Army	6 years	33 years
Victor	Female	20-29	Marine Corps	4 years	3 years

Twenty student veteran participants remained enrolled during the 2020 spring semester. One participant withdrew from one course and remained enrolled in all other courses. One participant withdrew entirely from the semester. The following section provides a summary of interview responses.

Summary of Interviews

During the interview, participants were asked to respond to a series of questions (see Appendix C), assisting the researcher in understanding the lived experiences of student veterans enrolled in community college courses during the 2020 spring semester when the College transitioned to a fully online environment as the result of an unanticipated disruption. The questions were developed through the lens of Nancy Schlossberg's (1981) Adult Transitions Theory. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Schlossberg's theory consists of a defined set of variables that influence an individual's ability to cope through transition: situation, self, support, and strategies – also known as the 4S System of Coping with Transition. Schlossberg et al. (1989, p. 17) suggest that by looking at the balance of resources and deficits in each category, it is possible to predict how a person will cope. This section will provide the participants' account of the unanticipated transition or phenomenon. Throughout the section, each narrative will begin by providing each participant's assigned pseudonym, gender, age range, and branch of military service.

Situation

Schlossberg et al. (1989, p. 104) suggest that by knowing an adult learner's particular situation, one can design interventions tailored to that individual. The following section provides participant narratives to illuminate the student veterans experience with the unanticipated transition in their own words, using the following questions:

- During the spring semester (January – May) of 2020, Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C/College) temporarily transitioned to a fully online learning and support services environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Describe your experience of learning the College was transitioning all services, including class meetings, fully online.
 - Participants responses varied due to the individualized nature of each experience. Overall, approximately 64% of the participants described the experience as either stressful, difficult, or challenging.
- Describe the factors (i.e., family, employment, health, etc.) you considered as you decided whether to continue with enrollment.
 - Approximately 41% of the participants mentioned completing their credentials as a motivating factor for staying enrolled. Family, finances, work, and previously established computer skills were the other major factors participants considered.
- Describe any specific conversations you had that contributed to your decision to continue with enrollment.
 - Half of the participants mentioned having specific conversations with family, friends, College employees, and others that contributed to their decision to remain enrolled during the spring 2020 semester.
- What enrollment decision did you make during the spring 2020 semester due to the College's temporary transition to a fully online environment?
 - Twenty participants remained completely enrolled, one participant withdrew from a course while remaining enrolled in the others, and one participant completely withdrew during the spring 2020 semester.

The following section provides more detailed participant responses.

Participant Responses

Alpha, female, 20-29, Marine Corps:

It was stressful from going in person to going completely online. I already had access to a computer. I think the biggest issue was just getting used to the new normal. During the outbreak my grandmother was in the hospital for lung cancer, she transitioned home, and a month later, she passed away. The virus made it hard to help her, because I didn't want to pass anything to her. To be cautious, I would leave things outside the door or wait before I went in. As far as school goes, I just wanted to finish. During that time, I was out of the Marine Corps for a year, and I only did one semester. So, I didn't want to take any breaks. I remained enrolled.

Bravo, male, 30-39, Navy:

My experience was pretty abnormal. Long story short, due to my past mental health issues, which I was not addressing, the capacity I needed, plus my breaking up with my girlfriend less than a week before the lockdown happened, I just stopped caring. I did not even bother with it. But I enrolled and remained enrolled. The way it works with the GI bill. It's like even if you fail, you can fail. You just can't drop out or get kicked out for the semester. Otherwise, you owe the VA money. So, to not have to owe the VA a ton of money, I chose to let my grades tank.

Charlie, male, 50-59, Marine Corps:

It was bittersweet. Some classes and experiences were fairly easy to transition and learn. Then there were classes where we had problems connecting with the professors and getting in. It was difficult for everybody to learn how to transition, be on time, and send the right links. And I know it was also a big adjustment for the professors. I retired with disability, which allowed me to return to school and retrain in another job in another industry. The

pandemic helped me spend more time with my kids and family. Because I wasn't getting up and going to work every day, and I wasn't punching the clock. I had time to do the things that I believed in doing. As a father, it was the first time I could spend a lot of time with my kids. So, yeah, it worked out for me. It had a positive effect on my family. I remained enrolled, and I kept going. The whole time I was at Tri-C, I never took a semester off. I enrolled every semester, and it was cool. I really enjoyed it.

Delta, male, 50-59, Army:

It was a little bit difficult because I was used to being in the classroom. It was almost like you were trying to teach yourself about a subject you didn't know anything about then; if you had a question at that given moment, it couldn't be answered. You couldn't get an answer to your question until like a day or two later. Sometimes you needed that question answered right then and there to continue with whatever block of education you were doing then. I just wanted to make sure I finished college because it was paid for; it was practically free. Many people spend a lot of money to get an education, and it was on the house for me. I just wanted to make sure I took full advantage of it. I remained enrolled.

Echo, male, 20-29, Army:

I thought online was cool. The rise of COVID is here again, and every other disease is still popping up, so most of these classes remain online. I don't mind. I prefer it because I work. I think, for people who go to school and that's all they do, it's okay. They can be in class all day. But for people who go to work, I think it's better to go online. I don't think there were too many factors involved. I just wanted to get the degree finished. The online portion didn't affect me but seemed to affect others. Many people like to be in person and face to face and talk with others. My main goal was to finish so it could be another bookmark on

the resume. I think that everybody I spoke with knew I was planning to continue. There wasn't any pause, but COVID scared a lot of people. But for me, I wasn't that worried about it. There was no stopping; I just wanted to knock it out. I remained enrolled and decided to keep going. Because sometimes, if you stop school, you don't go back. I was like, keep taking the classes. I didn't stop going to summer classes. I went all year because it's easier to stay in and get it over with, then pause and do it part-time. I had to do it full-time even though I work. It's just easier for me to stay focused.

Foxtrot, male, 30-39, Navy:

For the most part, the professors I had made it relatively smooth. With the incorporation of Zoom and things of that nature. Especially Zoom, opening up their parameters and reducing restrictions on time constraints and things like that. Many of the students and the faculty were patient as people adjusted to the new schedules. I feel like I've always been a more in-person learner. I need to have direct access to a professor. Sometimes, when you're emailing, or even through a video chat, depending on what's going on around each person's environment, there can lead to miscommunication; things can get lost in tone or translation when you're trying to decipher an email from somebody. The school was probably looking out for people's best interests by making people go remote. Any health concerns were removed since I was at home. The only downside is that cabin fever occurs after a while. I had roommates and stuff at the time. And I had other mediums to do things and outlets of social interaction I could use. For the most part, it was mostly just isolation that gets to you after a while. As long as I had the technology, there are ways around isolation. I remember talking to the veteran representative at the school about the transition. They were always a great help. They made sure we had what we needed, and if we needed someone to reach

out on our behalf, we had that resource available as veterans going to Tri-C. That made it way easier than I'm sure it could have been. I remained enrolled.

Golf, male, 30-39, Army:

2020 was not a good year for me academically, at least for being at Tri-C, from what I remember. I'm not saying that Tri-C was a bad educational institution. I was not in the mood to relearn the Pythagorean theory and other unnecessary stuff. I wanted my education to be more so towards learning what I needed to do the job I wanted to do if that makes sense. There were no actual family factors and nothing like that. It was purely me. I did not want to have another English class and write a 13,000-word memoir that's seven pages long and stuff like that. I just wanted to learn what I needed to learn, so I could go on and start my new career. I spoke to my VA counselor over at Veteran Affairs. I spoke to her about it because she was the one that wanted me to go to Tri-C in the first place, and I did not want to go there. So, I tried it. I didn't like it. I withdrew.

Hotel, male, 40-49, Army:

I had a very difficult time, especially with certain classes. I had to be in class and couldn't do it online. Specifically, math, I struggle with math. So, it was hard not being able to ask questions right then and there on the spot. I didn't have any other issues, just the math and not being able to connect with the professor in the face-to-face environment. I don't want to say things were at your own pace, but it was easier. Now you have access to the information and a whole day to go through and try to research and study. Instead of being in a classroom, we only had so much time to do the work and ask questions. So, I withdrew from math and remained enrolled in the other classes.

India, male, 50-59, Army:

The experience was stressful. To go from seeing the professors on a daily or weekly basis, I had to figure out a lot of stuff by myself. Like, how to operate a computer and organize things for the professor. Things they would have done if we were in class, I had to learn to do for myself at home, on top of studying and learning and then taking the test. It was very stressful. I didn't get phone calls returned efficiently and within a proper amount of time, either from the professors or study groups. So, it was a struggle. I was considering stopping, but just quitting was hard to accept. I was like, Dear Lord, there must be a way to get this thing done. I remained enrolled.

Juliet, female, 40-49, Army:

I was notified (about the transition) through email. Of course, the professors and other students spoke about it. The program I was in was good, but wasn't easy due to the clinical component, making it even more difficult. It was even more difficult if you didn't have discipline; I don't care how old or young you are. Online really made it more difficult. I talked to the professor and a few other students. Some thought they would go to the advanced class, and some did. I said, well, I'm going to take it, and I'm going to go ahead and finish the whole thing. And that's what I did. I remained enrolled.

Kilo, male, 30-39, Army:

It was a good thing for me because I worked most of the time, and the opportunities and resources I had while attending the school were remarkable. Because they were there, they had certain times you could call them and talk. And they had extended hours. I normally get off work at 4:30 or 5 o'clock, and some tutors were there till seven. So, it was good for me because I had time to see a tutor. And I emailed my instructor, and they wrote back the

same day. It was nice. I was glad Tri-C went online, because in-person, I had to try to get from campus back to work and then home. I had no sleep. When we went online, it was like operating at my own pace, but it had due dates. It was good for me. I remained enrolled.

Lima, male, 60-69, Marine Corps:

At the time, I had two classes. One was math, and one was an English class. Both of them transitioned right away to at-home only. It was difficult, especially for someone my age. I wasn't so familiar with transferring files and stuff. Especially for English, it brought about some problems. At that time, I realized I probably needed a course in computer applications, which would cover my basic emailing, Excel, and other programs within that group. I did not have that at the time. I thought it would be hard for me to continue because I had another English class coming up. And when I looked at it, they wanted you to combine a lot of files. I remained enrolled, but I did not return at that time after the spring. I didn't return until the spring of this year (2022). I knew it would be difficult for me without getting more computer application skills to continue. When we went strictly online, and there was no one on campus, that cut me out as actually coming back because I didn't have those skills. I did speak to my future wife at that time. We didn't get married because of COVID. Because she couldn't have a ceremony, people couldn't come and gather. There were some difficulties, especially financially. It did help when we became eligible for those government supplement plans. That got me through. But when that stopped, we were back to square one. I had to return to school. The school doesn't supply all my financial needs, but I do get a stipend. I only returned to school because I became displaced because of a disability from the VA.

Mike, female, 30-39, Marine Corps:

It was an adjustment because I wasn't used to online classes. I was kind of happy that classes were still happening. It was just really confusing because everything stopped. During that time frame, I wanted to learn American Sign language. So, I was trying to take my classes, and it was an adjustment for them to be online. I just wanted to work towards my degree. I remained enrolled.

November, male, 20-29, Army:

I don't think it was so much that I even learned it was taking place, as it just started happening. I was taking classes full-time, and I was working full-time. Then one day, no more in-person classes. It was like a drinking from the fire hose immediately kind of thing, with college-level biology and statistics. It was definitely a challenge. I felt like these classes weren't made to be online. Not to take away from any of the professors, some of them were great in person, but I could tell that some weren't accustomed to that online experience. I felt like some of the courses' quality wasn't where it should have been. So, I did feel like I suffered a little bit, or at least I was missing out. Granted that over time, I feel like it's gotten better. And I've gotten better at taking classes, specifically online. My employment was one of the biggest factors I considered. I definitely had to prioritize working and paying bills that I couldn't while going to school full time. That semester, I don't think I talked to anyone at the school. I might have had conversations with my mother or friends who were also enrolled in other colleges at the time. I knew a couple of friends who didn't return to school at all after that. They more or less just dropped out. I had a friend who was going to a four-year university, and she said there was no point in her spending all the money if she was to get these less-than-subpar classes. She didn't go back.

I wasn't in the same boat because I was only spending \$100 a credit hour at Tri-C and staying with my parents at the time. I hadn't moved out on my own. And I was working full-time. With my job, I could pay to go to Tri-C, even before I got the Pell Grant. So it wasn't that big of a financial burden. That was part of why I decided I would stay in because it wasn't as big of an impact on me as on others I knew. I remained enrolled. But I did take one of the classes, pass/fail, because it was hard to balance them all. Taking classes online increased the workload. The amount of learning you have to do in your own time; I simply didn't have the time.

Oscar, male, 50-59, Marine Corps/Navy:

I was shocked. Because I was used to going to class face to face, I wondered how I would transition to online classes. I was worried more about time and being able to sit in front of a laptop or computer to do the work. But, you know, I didn't want to stop going. So, I spoke with a counselor, and I remained enrolled.

Papa, male, 60-69, Air Force:

All I can tell you is I didn't like it. But I never considered not enrolling. I only needed a few credit hours to complete my program. So, I just wanted to get it wrapped up and done. I didn't have any specific conversations with anyone. I just remained enrolled.

Quebec, female, 30-39, Marine Corps:

I'm more of an in-class person. I felt I struggled a little bit. Because it was all online, I preferred to do it in class. I wanted to finish my Associate's because I didn't want to start something and not finish it. I didn't do bad. I'm more of a perfectionist with a good GPA, which went down to 3.5 or something. Before this, I think I had a 4.0 or 3.8, which dropped down a lot. I worked so long to keep my grade point so high, and it took COVID to drop it

down. This was a struggle for me. My son was going through private school at the time, and I could not handle me going to school online and him going to school online. It was a little rough. But I remained enrolled.

Romeo, female, 20-29, Air Force:

For educational purposes, I think the accessibility was a lot better. Other resources, like tutoring and online appointments, were much better. Everyone was readily available online. It was way more effective than anything in the past. I remained enrolled.

Sierra, female, 30-39, Navy:

I absolutely hated it. I had a mental breakdown. The teachers gave out way more homework than usual. And I have to complain about one of them, the English teacher to be exact. It was a Composition II class. And she had us doing three different assignments all at the same time. Usually, when they come to class, we'll focus on one of them. But she had us doing discussion boards, she had us reading and then writing essays about it, and then she also had us working on the final paper, which was like eight pages. And she had us doing all of that. All three of those things were assigned every day. Every single week, all of it was due. It was just too much. In theater, he had us reading plays on top of plays, and we had to write about what we were reading. It was so much. I had never experienced that much of a load of homework ever in my life. And I was just a sophomore at a community college. I just wanted to get it done. I remained enrolled.

Tango, male, 30-39, Air Force:

It really didn't affect me too much. I considered the amount of time required to work in class and the prospects of future employment. I spoke to a few counselors regarding academic achievement and things I could put on my resume. I remained enrolled.

Uniform, male, 60-69, Army:

Being a veteran going through a Chapter 31 (Voc Rehab) program, the VA was explicit about not doing online learning. That was a prerequisite of going to school; you have to be on campus going to school. So, they were against it, first of all, and I was fine with that. I am a person that likes to interact in learning. The whole transition of going online was like running into a steel iron wall. Especially me being not so computer literate, using basic skills, like Word and PowerPoint, and knowing these different systems of how to use the computer. There was a lot of stumbling. Then, on the other side, there were professors who were also in unfamiliar territory. So, that created even more chaos. It was hard for me. Things were crazy because of how everything was being managed. It was difficult to contact people because they were working from home and couldn't give out a home number. So, they give you this robo number that goes through a system before they can talk. It was just so frustrating. I had no choice in the matter. Because I wanted to get credentials in the field. I was looking at network security. I worked with communications security equipment in the military, but I actually repaired that. In this sense, I will be looking at it from the software side, which was one of the motivating factors for me to continue with the program online. Even though it presented challenges, it did give me a little more freedom. I remember thinking, I don't know how to do this, and I don't know how to do that. So, I had conversations with guidance counselors inside and outside the college. It was a learning period for everybody. I remained enrolled.

Victor, female, 20-29, Marine Corps:

I felt like it was difficult but easy; because I was already on spring break, it was easy to transition. But it was difficult to communicate with the professors and understand what

they were actually saying without them being there. There were some health concerns in my family. With employment, it was hard to focus on grades and work at the same time. I had conversations with the veteran services team because my personal and financial life was stressful. But I remained enrolled.

The following section will disclose the participant responses to the interview questions related to the “self” variable of Schlossberg’s (1981) 4S System of Coping with Transition.

Self

Schlossberg et al. (1989, p. 104) suggest “self” refers to the adult learner’s strengths for coping. The following section provides participant narratives to illuminate their motivation for selecting Tri-C, the experiences they had while serving in the military that prepared them for the unanticipated transition, and how this preparation contributed to the decision whether to remain enrolled during the 2020 spring semester, in their own words, using the following questions:

- What was your motivation for selecting Tri-C?
 - Approximately 45% of the participants were motivated by the smaller school feel of a 2-year institution, 18% of the participants were interested in transferring to a four-year school after graduating from Tri-C, 36% of the participants were motivated by the affordability of Tri-C and their ability to use their veteran education benefits.
- Describe any experience you had while serving in the military that prepared you for the College’s unanticipated transition to a fully online environment.
 - Participants offered various experiences of their time in the military and how it prepared them for an unanticipated transition. The majority spoke of their time in boot camp or basic training. Others offered specific examples of missions and the

challenges met. Three participants chose not to offer any experience and one participant offered there was nothing that could prepare us for a pandemic.

- How did this preparation contribute to your decision whether to continue enrollment with the College in a fully online environment?
 - Half of the participants said the military prepared them to be flexible, adaptable, and an overcomer which contributed to their enrollment decisions. 23% said the discipline they developed in the military contributed to their enrollment decision, and one participant spoke about how you have to move forward even if you don't have all of the information.

The following section provides more detailed participant responses.

Participant Responses

Alpha, female, 20-29, Marine Corps:

I thought a four-year university was going to be too hard to juggle all the classes. The military is unpredictable, so transitioning into something unexpected was normal. This was normal. I just thought it was just another transition period, like the military. One day, you're going out to the field but the next day, you're not. But then an hour later, you're going back to the field. But now you're staying for three weeks instead of two weeks. It's always been the ability to readjust and adjust again.

Bravo, male, 30-39, Navy:

At that time period, I only needed a couple more classes. My motivation was just to get a couple more classes under my belt before I went to a four-year college. I've always had a passion and wanting to be a music producer. Help with music production, audio engineering, or even a stagehand kind of thing. I actually had some intent, at least initially,

to do something I was passionate about. In the military, you don't really have a choice in the matter of what you're tasked with doing, you have to do it. That would really be the one benefit of the military. It's just discipline and routine. I've felt that my experience in the military prepared me for college.

Charlie, male, 50-59, Marine Corps:

I was at the Veterans Service Commission sitting down with a counselor when they started talking about a two-year program, the Associates for Construction Engineering, at Tri-C. Because it was a two-year program, is what really attracted me, and I wasn't going to have to do a lot of traveling. I didn't know what to expect, I just gave it a shot. After being out of school for over 30 years, I didn't want to bite off more than I could chew. The two different areas within the military that prepared me for this experience with Tri-C would be boot camp and Desert Storm. I would say boot camp because we're faced with many obstacles. I'm still traumatized. It prepared me in a way, not to give up, to continue no matter how hard it looks. There were times at Tri-C where things got a little trying, and I was able to tap into that training and keep going and find ways to speak to people. Desert Storm was another area where I had to learn patience. Being out in the middle of the sea for seven months and 25 days. You have no choice but to learn patience. That was a test of strength. Because just to be bouncing out on the water, all that time. Not knowing what the next move was going to be. Because you never know. It prepares you. When I got to Tri-C, it wasn't that hard, not knowing what to expect. I didn't waver, I didn't stumble, you prepare yourself and you do your best. You handle the things you can change and the things you can't change you deal with it. I mentally prepared myself that I was going to complete.

I was hell-bent on completing and finishing. The military training prepared me to deal with adversity and change as well. Adapt and overcome.

Delta, male, 50-59, Army:

Close to my home, the Veteran Center was already at the college, and Tri-C was a stepping-stone to getting into a four-year school. In the military, I interacted with people from all walks of life, gender, race, education, backgrounds. This helped me in school because the people in my class were from different parts of the world. Everybody had input and you could pick up what somebody else said in the class. Maybe there was something you didn't think of, and they made it make sense. You didn't have to wait for instructor feedback.

Echo, male, 20-29, Army:

I just got out of the Army, and it is a small school, with fewer people. I guess in the military everything was situational and nothing was really routine, anything could change the agenda of the day. You learn how to be adaptive. If the mission is going and something happens, you don't just stop, you just figure out another way to complete the mission. Same with COVID. You don't stop your education; you find another way to go about it. If that means going online, you just have to adapt to the new environment and get it over with.

Foxtrot, male, 30-39, Navy:

It was close to home, and it was affordable. I could quit my job and go to Tri-C and focus entirely on school. I didn't want to waste my money at a four-year school when I was still on the fence about where I wanted to take my education. Tri-C was a really good spot to figure that out. Being in the mine fleet, we were always having things change on us. Being prepared to adapt to new environments and new surroundings, especially in emergency situations, like a global crisis, how can I do what I need to do to focus on myself and try

not to worry. The military helps you realize that overall, you might not have access to the big picture of everything that's happening, so do what you can do to make it easier for yourself and the people around you.

Golf, male, 30-39, Army:

I came to Tri-C to use my Post 9/11 GI Bill, then Voc Rehab. Most of my military career I spent overseas in the Iraq war. It prepared me to expect the unexpected. And it made me realize that when you want something, that's what you want. You will begin formulating a step-by-step process in order to get to where you wanted to go. I wanted to get to the career that I wanted to get to, and I wanted some job-specific training.

Hotel, male, 40-49, Army:

Location. It was the closest place to my house. I guess I would say going from the states to a different country. You just have to adjust to new surroundings and new ways of doing things and dealing with people.

India, male, 50-59, Army:

Everybody should start at Tri-C. Now that I'm at 100% (service-connected disability rating), the VA won't let me work, but allows me to go to school. I still have that desire to help people, that's why I came to Tri-C. In the military one of the favorite sayings is "hurry up and wait." They'd be like move, move, move. Then you get there, and they say wait. I recall a time we had training in the desert. Everyone set up their tents, then in the middle of the night, two or three days in, the first sergeant would say "jump," and everybody had to jump up, take down all the tents, and head out. We would have no idea where we're going. We knew we were going somewhere; we just didn't know where. All of that was

stressful. At Tri-C we had to jump from in-class learning to online learning and had to learn how to use a computer and navigate taking tests online. That in itself was almost crippling.

Juliet, female, 40-49, Army:

I actually graduated from Tri-C before going into the Army, and then I came back because I knew what path I wanted to go on. Tri-C is a good school, and it isn't expensive. Tri-C has a funny way of reminding you to think outside the box, and that's what I liked about it. In the military, I experienced a lot of adversity. There was one time when I wore sunglasses, because my eyes are really light, and sun hurts them. A sergeant comes over to me and tells me to take off my sunglasses. I can't, I said, it hurts my eyes. Of course, I would have gotten in trouble if I didn't, so I did. There were times I wanted to give up because that's how rough it was. It just reminded me to remain mature, calm, stand my ground, and just keep going, no matter the amount of adversity.

Kilo, male, 30-39, Army:

I was just getting out of the military, and I wanted to better myself educationally. I wanted to go into the field of engineering. And that's why I originally started with an engineering tech program. I said, okay, I'm going to try tech out and see if I like it, then I'll move on to engineering. As time rolled on, that changed. I changed to an Associate of Science degree that I could transfer to a four-year college. It was cheaper for me at Tri-C, and I gained the same equivalent knowledge as going to a four-year college without paying as much money. I took some classes on base when I was in the military. It prepared me to get in the habit of going to school again because I haven't been to school since I was 16 or 17 years old.

Lima, male, 60-69, Marine Corps:

I used to be a letter carrier and my disability did not allow me to continue because of an injury to my ankle. I was put into Chapter 31 (Voc Rehab). The VA kind of steered me over that way (to Tri-C). Now I'm seeking a non-physical trade such as Accounting. I'm pretty late in the game, trying to make a new career. I originally felt very disheartened. But you know, there's a plan. You know you got to believe there's a plan. The military just builds upon your nature and your character already. And I think my character is, I stay at it, I'm not a quitting person. I can't afford to quit. There are always going to be obstacles.

Mike, female, 30-39, Marine Corps:

I didn't think I was going to get into another college. I didn't want to take my SATs. I was considered a non-traditional student. So, I wasn't going to take my SAT and I thought it would help me integrate with student life in general. I just figured I would dip my toes into a community college and work my way up. I can't think of anything that could prepare for a pandemic.

November, male, 20-29, Army:

I was going to go to a four-year, but I was kind of undecided about my major. That first summer I took a class at Tri-C just to test out the waters and see what it was like. It wasn't expensive and I could take different general credits at Tri-C at a lower cost. So I decided to stay. In the military, there's this big bureaucracy of people making decisions. Like, hey, this is what's happening now you just got to roll with it. I guess being adaptable is just the culture of the military. That's something I learned when I was at boot camp. People would try and fake sick, or injured, or something like that to get out of the training. Then they had to go through this other long process, and had to stay longer, when they could have just

stuck with it, and been out a lot faster. I guess that's one thing that I did learn, the best way to get through something difficult is to go through it.

Oscar, male, 50-59, Marine Corps/Navy:

My major, IT (Information Technology). I could get a two-year degree, then I could work in the field with a degree while pursuing a four year. In the military, I learned discipline and learning how to complete what I started. I figured I would have to adjust.

Papa, male, 60-69, Air Force:

Location was a big factor. But also, I really didn't want to jump into a large university environment. I wanted to start off at a slower pace. I wanted to see how this went and decide later if I was going to continue with a large university or not.

Quebec, female, 30-39, Marine Corps:

Well, I started going to Voc Rehab. It was just the easiest, fastest, and quickest that she suggested, and I trust her. So far, she has not led me astray. I don't think I ever had any experience like this.

Romeo, female, 20-29, Air Force:

I had been going to a four-year University and I couldn't keep up. I came to Tri-C to be able to go to school part-time and graduate and have the support and understanding because they get that if you're going here part-time you have a job and classes, and they offered that support. That's why I transitioned over. I think the military kind of prepared me to weather the storm and be prepared for whatever's coming and sticking with it in the long haul, because it's not going to be easy.

Sierra, female, 30-39, Navy:

Because they were accredited. I was going for Nursing at another college, and I found out they weren't accredited, and the credits didn't transfer, so, I chose Tri-C because they offer all that. I guess the military prepared me. I wasn't mentally strong then, but I knew how to handle it by just going up the chain of command. I don't think it had anything to do with me staying enrolled. I guess because I'm getting older, and the older I get the more I want to just get this done.

Tango, male, 30-39, Air Force:

I didn't want to dive head-first into a big, name-brand college. I wanted to take the open door to college and then later transition. It would be an easier transition into a bigger state college from Tri-C. There is a notable amount of computer work and paperwork. The military doesn't un-prepare you for schooling.

Uniform, male, 60-69, Army:

My motivation for selecting Tri-C is that it had a direct path where I could do two years at Tri-C and then two years at a four-year to complete the bachelor's program in Network Security, now called Cyber Security. When I was in basic training, there's a 15 mile or so road march that we do. You carry all your gear with you the whole time. It was really cold in the morning and hot in the afternoon, so we had everything. When I was running, my leg came up broken. They told us, if you feel you can't make it, if you feel hurt, when the truck comes around, get on the truck. So, after hours of me grueling in this pain, the truck comes around and I go to get on it and this guy says, "get away from the truck, nobody gets on the truck." I couldn't make it no more. But you know what, I had to make it because they led the truck away. The next day, I immediately went to sick call. They took some x-

rays, and my leg was broken. So, I went on a profile. The drill sergeant told me, private, you can't finish your training if you're on profile. You don't want to be a holdover because holdovers, they never leave here, they never get back to their training. It's this psychological thing that just got put in my head at that time. It was like you have to keep going, no matter what, you have to keep going.

Victor, female, 20-29, Marine Corps:

I was a returning student and felt like going to a four-year college would have been a heavy workload with my small experience with the college atmosphere. I feel like my entire experience in the military prepared me for this transition because everything is never set in stone. It's always an adjustment so you always have to be flexible with your plans. I felt like it was just another transition. While I was in the military, I was used to the feeling of going a different pathway than the usual plan. It was a smooth transition with a bumpy ride.

The next section will disclose the participant responses to the interview questions related to the “support” variable of Schlossberg’s (1981) 4S System of Coping with Transition.

Support

Schlossberg et al. (1989, p. 104) notes that support is particularly critical for adult learners. An inventory of external supports and options suggests ways the institution can help the adult learner in this critical area. The following section provides participant narratives to illuminate examples of support received during the transition in their own words, using the following questions:

- What support(s) did you receive from the College that helped you decide whether to continue with enrollment during the transition?

- Participants received significant support from College resources including faculty and staff, tutoring, counseling, Student Accessibility Services, and Veteran Services. There was also mention of students supporting and encouraging each other during the semester.
- What support(s) did you receive outside of the College that helped you decide whether to continue with enrollment during the transition?
 - Participants received support from multiple external resources including the VA Hospital, food banks, churches, and family and friends. There was also mention of financial support provided through the stimulus package offered by the government, and services extended through online platforms like Zoom.
- How did the support you received help you cope with your enrollment decision during the 2020 spring semester when the College transitioned to a fully online environment?
 - Participants provided various responses including the need to change their mindset, maintain lines of communication, utilize the support of friends and family, and stick with your goals. Many of the participants mentioned only having themselves for support and they relied on that.

The following section provides more detailed participant responses.

Participant Responses

Alpha, female, 20-29, Marine Corps:

I received support from the Veteran Services Center at the College. I received guidance through the transition, different resources, and advice. The VA Hospital and the Foodbank also provided resources. It was one less thing to worry about during that time so I could focus on just going to school full time.

Bravo, male, 30-39, Navy:

Therapy through the VA Hospital, and friends and family were my main support networks. I wasn't chastised for not going to college. At that point, they kind of understood; he needs time to himself. They were very supportive and didn't shame me for it. I was more ashamed of myself. They understood, saying things like, take your time, good luck, life's a marathon, it's not over, get back to it whenever you're ready.

Charlie, male, 50-59, Marine Corps:

Tri-C's Music program. My professor was a great man. We really had some meaningful conversations. He called me personally and said, "I need you to enroll this semester." When someone calls you and says whatever it is they see in you, to inspire you to enroll, that motivated me as well. Also, the person interviewing me right now. Those are the two staff members that stood out to me on my journey. I don't care what it was I was dealing with. I knew I could always stop, and you would listen, and you would always give me some good advice, and whatever you could to help. I know I would have made it through if you weren't there, but I thank God that you were. I forgot about a tutor. He graduated from Tri-C. He was a tutor for math. He was an individual who would meet with me outside, on Sundays, at a coffee shop. We would go and sit down, and we would go over the math. We would have coffee and would be discussing formulas and things of that nature. I'm talking late at night; we would be on Skype, and I would be emailing him. He's emailing me and showing me different ways and how to get through formulas and the concepts of, you know, getting to the answers. He was very helpful. We still speak. Yeah, I met some great people. Also, my lady. She was always supportive of me. She's always encouraged me and inspired me to keep going. She heard me crying a little bit and singing my Jodeci and my Keith Sweat.

But she really inspired me and pushed me to hang in there. Nobody wants to look like a quitter in front of their lady. She was a very influential person outside of Tri-C. She was very inspirational. It was the verbal communication that I received from all of you. Because I would talk to you all about many things that were going on and you all gave the same encouraging words. Just keep going. It's going to be okay, just keep going. You're going to get through it. You all believed in me. You had faith in what I was doing, and how I was moving along. The support that you guys gave really helped me cope with and continue to enroll, and I got through enrollment with no problems.

Delta, male, 50-59, Army:

The counselors were very helpful. Making sure you had the proper classes lined up. And it was easy because I would pick my own schedule. I had a daughter in college, and she was doing most of her classes online. She also helped me. My daughter helped a lot.

Echo, male, 20-29, Army:

A few faculty reached out, they said, "you gotta go online." I said, ok and just did it. It was just straight to the point. Maybe if I were a little more worried about it, they would have been more detailed. I was just like ok, let's do it. People didn't assume that I would stop because of COVID, they know me, and everybody knows I'm going to keep finishing it. Once you start, get it over with, especially if it's free, why stop. The support that I received was good, nothing too massive. Again, it was more of me saying, let's get it over with. I really didn't need a support panel. So I just did it myself, it was an easy decision.

Foxtrot, male, 30-39, Navy:

The Tri-C Vet Center was the largest factor in making sure that I stayed on task. The stimulus package helped financially. I was still on the GI Bill, so my employment wasn't a

factor. The largest outside factor was just all the other programs, like Zoom. They made it so you can have up to 50 people and there's no time limit. They opened up all the restrictions, if that hadn't, I probably would have bailed, because it would have been next to impossible. It's hard enough for me to learn online.

Golf, male, 30-39, Army:

The only support I had at the time was Veteran Services and me. That's all I have. In the African American community, not to make this about race or anything like that, no one really supports you when you're trying to do something. They support you once you get there. But during the process, no, you don't have support. You have nothing but ridicule, and no, you shouldn't do that. You should just go do this over here. Then once you make it, all of a sudden, you're the goat of the family. So, no, I didn't have any support. I relied on myself.

Hotel, male, 40-49, Army:

It was easy to contact someone and get motivated to knock out these classes. I got phone calls and emails from the Veteran Services team. Also, the government was paying me. I just knew I had the support of other people.

India, male, 50-59, Army:

The kindness of everybody that worked there, even you. They ask questions about you to understand you, so they can make sure they can fit you into whatever it needs to be. So, you can get where you're going. Nobody's ever made me feel bad about it. I think that kindness and consideration for humanity goes a long way with somebody, not wanting you to quit. One of the other things I did get was paperwork for people with disabilities through the Student Accessibility Services (SAS) department. I had my doctor fill out the

paperwork. Then the gentlemen in the accessibility department spoke to me. He was really kind and really appreciative of my service in the military. He made sure that we put everything in my accessibility sheet to let the professors know what I needed in class. Before we went online, the professors were very helpful in making sure that work was done. And if I had questions and attempted to talk to them, they didn't mind that. They will talk to you and email and have conversation with you. When we got online, it became difficult to get to the professors. One of the professors did acknowledge the difficulties that they too were having in the transition process. On top of that, I got like, 100 or 200 emails. I had to learn to start checking emails. I was doing it on a daily basis, which was very stressful. My wife is amazing. She would push me. She would always say, "do they offer extra credit?" She's big on getting extra credit because you never know what you might need. I was encouraged, at the church, by some people to finish school. My sister lives in California, she has two master's degrees, my brother has a master's degree. They constantly encouraged and reassured me. Again, just the kindness of Tri-C staff. I said, I can't let these people down. Tri-C makes it hard to give up. Before the semester is over, they are already sending me information about next semester.

Juliet, female, 40-49, Army:

Two professors reached out to me, and they both broke it down in their own way. They didn't tell me it was going to be a walk in the park. No, they let me know, it's not going to be easy, and it wasn't. They said if I continued it would put me years ahead of others, so I kept going. I'm glad I listened.

Kilo, male, 30-39, Army:

The support I received from the college was what I needed to excel in the class because it was available during the weekends, which was good for me. It was basically because the tutor and the teacher was being so nice and understanding, and she gave us the due dates ahead of time. So, I didn't have to worry about what I was doing next because it was in the syllabus. As long as you follow the syllabus, you'll be good in the class. Don't deviate from it. Because I'm a lone wolf. I stay to myself. It's my own will and motivation to keep going and push through it. I wanted to finish up.

Lima, male, 60-69, Marine Corps:

I can't really say I did. Because everything was adjusting, and I guess, the communication lines weren't there. I don't remember any counseling, trying to reach out to me. There could have been, I mean, I got a lot of emails. I always get a lot of emails. But I really didn't see anything that addressed the fact that they needed us to come back or anything like that. I think everybody was sheltering in place. I did receive support from friends and family.

Mike, female, 30-39, Marine Corps:

The Veterans Services department and the Student Accessibility Services office. A student counselor helped navigate the waters. Other than Tri-C, there was no outside help.

November, male, 20-29, Army:

I guess the Veteran Center (at Tri-C) helped me. Because I had friends who were also in the Army, and they weren't as proactive. They were like, "this is so frustrating, I don't know how to navigate this system, I'm just not going to come back or go to school anymore." I've gotten called, I even still get calls, from the Veteran Center informing me of tutoring services or FAFSA writing services. They definitely reached out and helped me. I feel like

it would have been really easy to kind of just tune out and fall off during that time. But there was a network of people being like, hey, this is Tri-C, we're still a thing you know, this is still a part of your life. Just because you know, you're no longer actively coming here every day, this is still a thing. It definitely kept it in my head like, this was something you were doing. And just because it's a lot more difficult now, or you don't have that face-to-face factor anymore, you can still, and you probably should still continue on this path.

Oscar, male, 50-59, Marine Corps/Navy:

I received a lot of support from the guys in VEAP (Veterans Education Access Program). They were always calling and checking on me to see if I needed anything, or just checking on me. There was plenty of tutoring and counseling, and a laptop. Everyone was more than happy to help me out.

Papa, male, 60-69, Air Force:

No support received.

Quebec, female, 30-39, Marine Corps:

I don't remember but I might have got emails. I supported myself and talked to my Voc Rehab counselor if I needed to. I mean, in the beginning, everything seems easy. Towards the end, when everything starts to pile up, and papers are due, and midterm, and tests and exams and assignments are due, I would communicate with her like, I don't know how to do this. She would tell me, "okay, what do you want to do?" At the same time, I'm not wanting to give up, I'm not failing the class.

Romeo, female, 20-29, Air Force:

I received a lot of support from professors. I was getting a lot of phone calls about missed assignments or just them checking in on me. It was very personable. Also, I didn't miss

any checks (from the government). That was the only support I received outside of the college. I think the professors made me like being an online student. Going from a traditional four-year university, where you're on campus, and then going to Tri-C where there's not a lot of interaction with others. I feel like they put an emphasis on creating that interaction. Everyone was just like, hey, if you're one of those people who has to work, no pressure, and we're here for you, if you need it. And that was really, really nice.

Sierra, female, 30-39, Navy:

No support received. It was just really me. My goal is to finish school. Because I am not from Ohio. So, when I came here, my only goal here was to finish school. And I told myself, I would never leave Ohio until my schooling is done. That was my goal. There was nobody like trying to tell me. Because nobody really cares if I'm enrolled or not.

Tango, male, 30-39, Air Force:

With Tri-C, they have a Veteran Center at a couple of the campuses and the personnel was very helpful. I think I was personally motivated. During this semester specifically, I didn't really receive much assistance from personnel, so I can't speak too much to that.

Uniform, male, 60-69, Army:

I got help from the counselors to map my math path. I also got assistance from Veterans Services to discuss personal stuff and apply for student loans. People were just in chaos. Daily activities made people a little less rational, and on the edge, due to the shortages, restrictions, and closing of businesses. People were staying away from you. Very few people would want to even be around anybody. It created separation between people, family, friends. It was harder to get support, even at Tri-C. Before COVID hit, the support was awesome. Especially, in the Veteran's Center. If you had any trouble, you could go

right up there. I mean, the resources and the connectivity, it was awesome. When COVID struck, it just tore it all apart. You had to change your mindset. Kind of like when you live at home. Your mom and dad are taking care of you, then you have to leave and when you leave, you know, you're going to have to do it on your own. You know you'll get some support, but basically, you're that little bird getting pushed out of the nest, so you have to flap those wings so you can start flying.

Victor, female, 20-29, Marine Corps:

I received support from the faculty and staff at Tri-C. The HEERF fund and the resources helped with enrollment. I received a lot of support from the VA Hospital and their resources. I had a lot of support from my friends and my family, because a lot of them were enrolled in school and they lived in different parts of the United States. We all helped each other with schooling during the transition.

The next section will disclose the participant responses to the interview questions related to the “strategies” variable of Schlossberg’s (1981) 4S System of Coping with Transition.

Strategies

Schlossberg et al. (1989, p. 18) suggest understanding the nature of transitions can help us find ways to cope with them. The following section provides participant narratives related to resources that would have assisted them in coping with the College’s temporary transition to a fully online environment in their own words, using the following questions:

- Can you identify any resources that would have assisted you in coping with the College’s temporary transition to a fully online environment?

- Many of the participant responses included better communication from instructors and the College, access to mental health professionals and counselors, knowledge of available resources, tutoring, and computer training.
- Is there any additional information you would like to share about your experience during the College's temporary transition to a fully online environment that was not covered by the interview questions?
 - Approximately, 32% of the participants did not have additional information they wanted to share outside of the interview questions. Of the participants who did respond, some felt the transition was chaotic but went as smoothly as it could, some praised Tri-C for how communication was handled, and some thought there should have been more communication. Additional comments expressed the responsibility of students to seek the help they need.

Of note, the researcher did not capture data from each participant regarding strategies that would have assisted them throughout the experience. Approximately 86% of the participants provided a response. The following section provides more detailed participant responses.

Participant Responses

Alpha, female, 20-29, Marine Corps:

I think it was a good experience. Communication could have been better, sometimes when emailing your professor there was a delay in response or no response at all. Which led to challenges with getting certain assignments done or understanding how certain assignments were supposed to be completed.

Bravo, male, 30-39, Navy:

This is a tricky question. On the one hand, you mentioned that we have counselors on staff. On the other hand, I don't know if there is an actual psychologist. Counselors and therapists would have been the main thing I could identify, to offer specific advice for veterans struggling. Because everyone's different. Some people already have it together, when they come out, and they do well. There's a good amount of people that are kind of in between. Then there's other people, for various reasons, whether they're already stressed out before they joined the military and didn't adjust well afterwards, or something happened to them that really messed them up, especially if they were on deployment. My advice for them would be, don't run away from your problems, or be in denial of how bad it actually is. If you know you have a problem, the longer you procrastinate the more toxic tendencies tend to manifest. Ultimately, you have to be the one to make that choice to start the healing process. It's okay to want to seek help. It's okay to admit that you're extremely vulnerable right now. That you're not okay. People are willing to help you out. Seek out help, but also, take advantage of the help. Oh, and one last thing. Finding the proper mental health support whether it be therapists, psychiatrists, counselors, whatever, is a trial-and-error process. That's one of the things I think a lot of people don't know, it's a trial-and-error process. You're going to struggle; you're going to fail. Just keep trying, and as long as you keep trying things will get better eventually.

Charlie, male, 50-59, Marine Corps:

I believe it was uncharted territory for everybody. When I looked at it in its totality, I had to take my hat off to Tri-C staff at the time because you guys put it together at a moment's notice. Just like anything, it had a few flaws. But you guys fixed it immediately, and we

could progress and move forward. And not only moving forward, could still gain the necessary knowledge to pass the classes. What I've gained by attending Tri-C, no one can ever take that away from me, ever.

Delta, male, 50-59, Army:

The library, because of all their books and information. When trying to log in on a computer when you don't understand, it would be nice to have someone help you. Tri-C is a very nice school. The campus was nice. There is a lot of support, especially if you are a veteran. The tuition is not bad, and it is very easy to enroll.

Echo, male, 20-29, Army:

I could have contacted you (veteran services) or my family members. That's about it. My friends, maybe.

Foxtrot, male, 30-39, Navy:

Tri-C was pretty good at reaching out and checking in on the students. If we needed anything all we had to do was ask. As easy as they made it, I still prefer to learn in person. And while they navigated a tough situation, I mean, just for me to be able to go in person to a brick-and-mortar building helps gear my mind to where I need to do school and stuff, instead of always being at home where I can get easily distracted when I'm not in the environment that I need to be in to do what I need to do. I don't know if there's anything else that I could add that would have made it better. I mean, I'm pretty adaptable. So, it wouldn't have been much worse than it already was, given what we were dealing with.

Golf, male, 30-39, Army:

At that time, I don't think anything would have helped me stay. Mainly because Tri-C didn't offer, and in fact, they still don't offer any specialized training. I want to get straight to the

meat and potatoes. I didn't want to take English or math; I didn't want to take Note; I just wanted IT courses. Well, life is an amazing teacher and if I had the same mindset as back then, I wouldn't be at Tri-C now getting my degree.

Hotel, male, 40-49, Army:

They should have kept everything in class. But I guess online helped out a bit because it was more flexible. I was working and doing classes online.

India, male, 50-59, Army:

I think something like, what you're doing now, asking these questions. If Tri-C had taken the time to say, let's grab these men and women because we know they come under special conditions, and asked them these exact questions. We know what these people need to maximize their potential. Having anxiety and stress isn't necessary, it's like being in a bad marriage. If we had somebody at Tri-C doing these types of questions earlier in the process, we would have been able to get this information out. We would have been able to change the SAS (Student Accessibility Services) process or add to it if necessary because this was a whole different animal doing this thing online.

Juliet, female, 40-49, Army:

Tell them to come up with something better than WebEx. WebEx is only good on smartphones. On a regular computer, it is horrible. That's my biggest issue. Even the professor was saying, we need Zoom. WebEx is horrible. It's great on the smartphone. Horrible on laptop.

Kilo, male, 30-39, Army:

I would say yes and no. No, for the simple fact, there are things I'm unaware of and programs I'm unaware of that you probably have out there that can assist you. Yes, because

the overall professionalism and commitment the tutors had this semester was outstanding. They put effort into making sure you understand your stuff to the best of their knowledge.

Lima, male, 60-69, Marine Corps:

If someone could have reached out to me so I could explain to them, I just wasn't prepared to do online stuff. And like I said, just knowing that whole set of computer applications would have been necessary for me to continue. I would say my whole thing was just not being prepared to work online. Financially, not being able to even work in that environment was another thing during the transition that really set me back. I probably would have come back earlier. But I was trying to figure out a way to get those necessary computer skills.

Mike, female, 30-39, Marine Corps:

I think it was just like a confusing time for everyone just trying to navigate the waters and being patient.

November, male, 20-29, Army:

I don't know if there's anything that doesn't exist because I see now that there might have been services, but I don't think I got that much actual reaching out support from the college itself. Most of the support that I got was from the veteran center. I would have liked to have received more from the actual college. Which I get might be difficult because a couple of thousand people go there, versus the veteran center, which has a list of maybe 100 people to go through. Maybe more eLearning support systems because you couldn't go to school and use the writing center during that time. Later, I learned there were meetings and town halls, I didn't know they were a thing until later on. The biggest part of it for me was the fact that a lot of professors, I don't think, were well trained in online software and class making and things like that. I think even if they don't have specific online classes, maybe

every course should have a backup, emergency course that could be moved online. I think a lot more of the staff should be better trained in how to use the Blackboard interface because I could tell that a lot of them don't really know how to use it that well.

Papa, male, 60-69, Air Force:

I definitely have not liked online learning. Maybe it's more suitable for younger people, but for myself, I wanted the interaction you get with a class. If there is something I don't understand, I wanted it articulated to me, which really was not available with online learning.

Quebec, female, 30-39, Marine Corps:

If I had questions and needed to contact the instructor or submit assignments, I had issues with reaching them. I would communicate with them ahead of time but didn't get a response. Some classes I can do online, but I can't do all of them. I didn't reenroll until the college offered in-person classes again. It was really hard to contact anybody. You were not able to go to the school and everybody was busy, and everyone was trying to get the same help. It was hectic.

Romeo, female, 20-29, Air Force:

I think there was no real support on the admin side of Tri-C. They weren't like "hey, are you guys, okay?" A lot of programs that I did find, like other scholarships, I had to find on my own. And when I transferred to a four-year institution, I was an honors student and never knew that some of these programs even existed for honor students and that I could be granted scholarships. To this day, I'm just now finding out I'm eligible for scholarships with a 3.5 GPA. I think on the admin side, where they usually support veterans, or just students in general, transitioning students and adult students, I think they lacked that. And

it would have been appreciated. I'm a first-generation college student and the only person in my family attending college. I had no idea how to move forward in a time like this, what things would look like for me, and if I would even graduate or wanted to graduate. I think that would have helped me. At the veteran center, since that's kind of like my only real connection, maybe building more of a network within the veteran center. At my current university, in the veteran center, even though we're all good leaders, they try to build a community around us. Maybe trying to implement that at Tri-C throughout all the campuses would be nice because we're so spread out. And there is a lot of us who are veterans, it's hard for us to connect. So maybe trying to make that accessible so we can have that community with each other, and we can all lean on each other with similar experiences. Just building that community even when you're at Tri-C would be appreciated.

Sierra, female, 30-39, Navy:

If I had talked to the veteran people in the school, they probably would have helped. But I didn't need help except for that teacher who made me complain. Other than that, I was fine. I just hated online classes. They should work on the amount of work they give remote students. If we are forced to stay home, then they should think about the lives of the students, especially adults. Like the people who have kids, or people who are going part time. Because it was just really hard. Especially, when it was so abrupt, and no one knew what was coming. I don't know what the teachers were doing at home, but they were working us to the core. I had to book hotels to get away from my son, and his father, so I could do all the work for my class.

Tango, male, 30-39, Air Force:

There hasn't been a lot of opting-in or opting-out of programs. I would have liked a couple more emails or phone calls. Much of the information was usually late, heavily worded, and hard to understand.

Uniform, male, 60-69, Army:

My tutor, one-on-one, just me.

Victor, female, 20-29, Marine Corps:

I feel like it could have been more communication regarding the transition. Even though everyone was frazzled and didn't know what to say, I feel like there could have been more lines of communication from the professors to the students. As far as the transition is concerned, I believe it was as smooth as it could have been. There's not much more that could have been done, it was a learning experience for everyone.

The following section identifies a visual summary of the participant responses to support received from the College (internal) and outside of the College (external), followed by a visual summary of the participant's enrollment decision during the phenomenon and how it relates to the support received, and the current enrollment status of the research participants following the phenomenon.

Further Findings Regarding Support Received and Enrollment Decisions

Twenty-two student veterans enrolled at Tri-C during the 2020 spring semester, when the College transitioned to a fully online learning and support services environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic, were interviewed for this research study. The students interviewed had never experienced taking classes in an online environment. As a result, they faced the decision to remain enrolled during the semester, withdraw from classes and return when circumstances felt

more familiar, or withdraw from school and never return. The following tables provide a summary of the student veteran participant responses to how they felt supported during the onset of the phenomenon, the participant's enrollment decision during the phenomenon, and their current enrollment status at the College.

According to the responses (Table 4.2.), participants expressed their highest internal support came from counselors at 11.54%, their faculty or professor at 23.08%, and Veteran Services at 42.31%.

Table 4.2. Sources of Support - Internal

Internal Support Received	# of Responses	Percentage of Total
Counselors	3	11.54%
Faculty or Professor	6	23.08%
HEERF	2	7.69%
Student Accessibility Services	2	7.69%
Tutor	2	7.69%
Veterans Services	11	42.31%

Also, according to the responses (Table 4.3.), participants expressed their highest external support came from their friends and family at 27.27%. Based on participant responses, more support was received through the College, with 26 responses, than outside of the College, with 22 responses.

Table 4.3. Sources of Support - External

External Support Received	# of Responses	Percentage of Total
Church	1	4.55%
Foodbank	1	4.55%
Friends and Family	6	27.27%
GI Bill	3	13.64%
Myself	3	13.64%
No Support	3	13.64%
Stimulus Package	1	4.55%
VA Hospital	3	13.64%
Voc Rehab Counselor	1	4.55%

While student veteran participants identified areas where they received support during the unanticipated transition, they also had to contend with the decision to remain enrolled in classes. The following sections discuss participant enrollment decisions during the unanticipated transition and current enrollment status.

Enrollment Decision During Phenomenon

Table 4.4. provides insight into the student veterans enrollment decisions during the 2020 spring semester and the support received at the College and outside of the College during the unanticipated transition. There is no clear connection between the support received and the participant's decision to remain enrolled during the 2020 spring semester. Of note, 91% of the participants stated they received some form of support and of the 9% of the participants who stated they received no support from the College or outside of the College throughout the unanticipated transition, decided to remain enrolled during the semester.

Table 4.4. 2020 Spring Enrollment Decision Related to Support Received

Participant	Enrollment Decision	Support from College	Support Outside College
Alpha	Remained enrolled	Received support	Received support
Bravo	Remained enrolled	<i>No Support</i>	Received support
Charlie	Remained enrolled	Received support	Received support
Delta	Remained enrolled	Received support	Received support
Echo	Remained enrolled	Received support	<i>No support</i>
Foxtrot	Remained enrolled	Received support	Received support
Golf	Withdrew	Received support	<i>No support</i>
Hotel	Withdrew/Remained	Received support	Received support
India	Remained enrolled	Received support	Received support
Juliet	Remained enrolled	Received support	<i>No support</i>
Kilo	Remained enrolled	Received support	<i>No support</i>
Lima	Remained enrolled	<i>No Support</i>	Received support
Mike	Remained enrolled	Received support	<i>No support</i>
November	Remained enrolled	Received support	Received support
Oscar	Remained enrolled	Received support	<i>No support</i>
Papa	Remained enrolled	<i>No Support</i>	<i>No support</i>

Quebec	Remained enrolled	<i>No Support</i>	Received support
Romeo	Remained enrolled	Received support	Received support
Sierra	Remained enrolled	<i>No Support</i>	<i>No support</i>
Tango	Remained enrolled	Received support	<i>No support</i>
Uniform	Remained enrolled	Received support	Received support
Victor	Remained enrolled	Received support	Received support

Current Enrollment Status

Twenty-one out of 22 participants (95%) remained enrolled during the Spring 2020 semester. Table 4.5. provides insight into the student veterans' current enrollment decision. Of note, the one participant who withdrew during the 2020 spring semester (not represented in the table) is currently enrolled in courses at the College, in-person and online.

Table 4.5. Participant Current Enrollment Status

Current Enrollment Status	# of Participants	Percentage of Total
Graduated	9	42.86%
Enrolled, in-person and online	3	14.29%
Enrolled, in-person only	4	19.05%
Enrolled, online only	2	9.52%
Transferred	1	4.76%
Not Enrolled	2	9.52%

Themes

Phenomenological research is designed to identify patterns among participants who have experienced the same phenomenon. While the 22 participants of this study were all student veterans enrolled at Tri-C at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, they spoke of the experience through their unique lens. Through that lens, two themes emerged: student veterans are resilient during a period of unanticipated transition, and student veterans are resourceful and will take advantage of resources offered by the College when experiencing an unanticipated transition

while enrolled in community college courses. Table 4.6 shows that 100% of participants stated that the military is unpredictable and teaches student veterans to adapt, overcome, and never give up. In addition, almost 55% of participants believed the support from Tri-C's Veteran Services team and other Tri-C staff (i.e., Counselors, Faculty, Student Accessibility Services, and Tutors) helped support a successful transition experience. Finally, 50% of participants stated having a difficult or stressful transition experience and felt they received no support and had to support and teach themselves during the 2020 spring semester.

Table 4.6. Participant Responses From Which Themes Emerged

Key Words/Phrases	Responses	Percentage
Military Unpredictable, Teaches Adapt/Overcome, Never Give Up	22	100.00%
Received Support from Tri-C Staff, Other	12	54.55%
Received Support from Tri-C Veteran Services	12	54.55%
Difficult/Stressful Transition Experience	11	50.00%
No Support Received, Supported Myself, Taught Myself	11	50.00%

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of a semi-structured interview of 22 student veterans enrolled in community college courses at Tri-C during the 2020 spring semester when the College transitioned to a complete and temporary online environment due to an unanticipated period of disruption, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter provided narrative responses from the 22 participants related to Nancy Schlossberg's (1981) Adult Transitions Theory, using the 4S System of Coping with Transition. The 4S System provides four variables that individuals use to cope when experiencing transition – situation, self, support, and strategies. In addition, the chapter provides data to support and summarize the information obtained while conducting the interviews. The chapter also provides further findings regarding support received and participant enrollment decisions during the phenomenon and current enrollment decisions. The chapter concludes by providing two themes from the research study; student veterans are resilient and will utilize resources provided by their institutions when facing an unanticipated disruption while enrolled in courses.

Chapter Five presents a summary of the study. The chapter will discuss the findings related to the research questions, provide practical implications, and implications related to the literature, and include recommendations – in the form of best practices, for college personnel and students. The chapter will conclude with the researcher's recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5 - Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of the study was to understand how student veterans at Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C) experienced the phenomenon of transitioning to a fully online environment while enrolled in community college courses during a period of unanticipated disruption. The study focused on the spring 2020 semester, during which the world was hit by the global pandemic known as COVID-19. The ongoing global pandemic forced individuals to “shelter in place” to prevent the spread of a deadly virus. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2023):

As of November 9, 2022, 1,070,947 COVID-19-related deaths have been reported in the United States. In the first two years of the pandemic, COVID-19 was identified as the third leading cause of death in the United States, trailing only heart disease and cancer. Provisional mortality data indicate that despite a lower number of COVID-19–related deaths reported to date in 2022, COVID-19 remains the third leading cause of death in the United States.

During the 2020 Spring semester, higher education institutions were faced with quickly transitioning all services online. Students could then remain enrolled in their programs or withdraw without penalty. While higher education institutions worked to provide instruction and student support services online, students were facing the realities of changing how they received instruction while caring for themselves and their families. Higher education was one of many institutions facing swift transition stressors. Many employers had to shut down businesses, and the government had to offer a swift response to the needs of its citizens.

This chapter summarizes the study, reviews the guiding research questions, the implications of the findings, provides recommendations from the findings, and make recommendations for future research.

Summary of the Study

The researcher conducted a qualitative, phenomenological research study to understand the student veteran experience of transitioning from in-person to online and support services during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020. During the unanticipated transition, 453 student veterans were enrolled full and part-time at the Tri-C. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Lochmiller and Lester (2017, p.110) suggest seeking in-depth interviews with five to 25 participants when conducting phenomenological research. Therefore, the researcher used purposeful sampling to identify at least 20 student veteran participants for this qualitative study. In addition, participants were required to have been honorably discharged from one of the United States Armed Forces branches identified by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs during the period of disruption. Finally, participants were also required to have been current or former student veterans who were not enrolled in online courses in any semester before spring 2020.

Further, the goal was to recruit at least ten student veteran participants who remained with Tri-C following the transition and at least ten student veteran participants who withdrew from Tri-C following the transition to determine any similarities or differences between the responses. The researcher was able to identify and interview 22 student veterans. However, only one participant fell into the category of student veterans who completely withdrew during the transition period. The researcher experienced difficulty connecting with student veterans who no longer attended Tri-C. Each participant provided a signed consent form and agreed to the interview recording before the researcher could proceed. The researcher has stored all forms of

consent and recordings on a USB drive and will keep them locked in a safe for five years, after which the forms and drive will be destroyed.

Due to the nature of the researcher serving as the primary instrument for data collection, the researcher opted against using a qualitative data analysis software tool and opted to self-code the data. To accomplish this, the researcher utilized Otter.AI, a speech-to-text transcription service, to assist with creating clean transcripts of the virtual interview recordings. First, the researcher provided each participant with a copy of the transcript for review, then utilized Microsoft Excel to comb through participant responses to code and categorize the data. The researcher then summarized the categorized data to identify themes in participant responses. The following section summarizes the outcomes of the research questions used to guide the study.

Research Questions

The following section summarizes the outcomes of the two research questions (RQs) used to guide the study of the student veteran experiences of unanticipated transition while enrolled in community college courses.

RQ1. What were the lived experiences of student veterans enrolled in community college courses during a period of unanticipated transition?

Overall, the student veterans in this study identify the experience of transitioning to a fully online class environment while attending community college classes and deciding whether to continue with online classes or withdraw from their degree program due to the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic as difficult. However, the desire to finish their degree outweighed the urge to give up. Based on the responses given, one might conclude that the military experience of remaining flexible, adapting, and overcoming is why most of the study's participants remained enrolled during the unanticipated period of disruption.

Participants also noted the difficulty in reaching professors, feeling as if they were teaching themselves, and a high level of anxiety around learning how to navigate the technical aspects of taking classes online. Although a few participants noted the experience was difficult, they also mentioned that the experience was good because it allowed them to spend more time with family. Participants also noted that many of the individuals they encountered (i.e., faculty, staff, and peers) were patient, and they assumed that the patience of these individuals was likely because they were also going through the experience.

RQ2. What resources did student veterans identify as needing while experiencing an unanticipated transition?

Over half of the student veteran participants cited individuals at Tri-C (i.e., counseling, faculty, student accessibility services, tutoring, and the veteran services team) as helpful throughout the transition. They stated that these individuals provided the resources and support needed to continue with enrollment and complete the semester. Participants identified loved ones, including family and friends, as support systems that also helped them cope with the transition. Additionally, many of the participants identified themselves as tools of support while experiencing the transition. Many participants stated that while they did not have family and friends to support them, their desire to complete their degree helped them push forward through degree completion.

Implications of the Findings

This qualitative research study aimed to address the gap in knowledge and understanding of how student veterans experience unanticipated transition during a period of disruption. The researcher did this by interviewing student veterans who had never been enrolled in online courses and were experiencing the unanticipated transition of the College's temporary move of all services online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Gordon (2020, p.132) states that COVID-19's overwhelming sequelae will fundamentally and forever alter our world in every sense; economically and politically, socially, and culturally. The researcher's goal was to obtain first-hand accounts of how the student veteran experienced the phenomenon and understand what tools student veterans used to cope.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant using questions (see Appendix C) created with Schlossberg's 4S System of Coping in Transition framework in mind (see Appendix A). The variables or "4S's" within the framework are situation, self, support, and strategies. The participants were asked questions to understand how they viewed the experience as it was occurring (situation), what they believed about themselves and their backgrounds that would assist them through the experience (self), what they identified as support received during the experience (support), and what strategies they utilized or realized they needed to cope with the experience (strategies). The following provides a synopsis and the implications found within each variable.

Situation

Schlossberg (1981) defines the "*situation*" variable as what is happening. For this study, the situation is an unanticipated and temporary transition from in person classes to online classes, during the 2020 spring semester as the world experienced the global pandemic, COVID-19. Due

to the individualized nature of the experience for each participant, responses varied. A majority of the participants described the experience as stressful, difficult, or challenging. Participants also identified the motivation to complete their credentials as the reason for remaining enrolled. Approximately half of the participants had specific conversations with various Tri-C employee groups, friends, and family and those conversations helped them make an enrollment decision. Twenty of the participants remained completely enrolled, one participant withdrew from a difficult course while remaining enrolled in the others, and one participant completely withdrew.

The implication of these findings are that while the majority of the participants found the situation to be challenging and stressful, they were able to overcome those feelings and continue through the semester.

Self

Schlossberg (1981) defines the “*self*” variable as to whom the transition is happening. This study was conducted by interviewing 22 student veterans who had never taken an online class while enrolled in college courses. Schlossberg et al. (1989, p. 17) ask, what is the individual’s previous experience in making a similar transition? Participants spoke of their experiences in the military, specifically, boot camp or basic training, and special operations as examples of the how they learned to be adaptable, flexible, and respond to changes quickly without understanding the change. Participants spoke about how this training also contributed to their enrollment decision while navigating the new and unfamiliar environment.

The implication of these findings are that student veterans are aware of the stressors that come with unanticipated change and are able to tap into skills they developed while serving in the military to address those stresses.

Support

Schlossberg (1981) defines the “*support*” variable as what help is available. Participants spoke of multiple areas of support received through Tri-C specific services (identified in this study as internal resources), such as faculty, tutoring, counseling, Student Accessibility Services, and Veteran Services. There was also mention of how the students supported each other as they had the shared experience of transitioning to online classes. Participants spoke of additional resources outside of the Tri-C (identified in this study as external resources) including the VA Hospital, food banks, churches, family, and friends. There was also mention of financial support provided through the stimulus package offered by the government, and services extended through online platforms like Zoom. Some participants mentioned the only support they had was themselves.

The implication of these findings are that student veterans are aware of multiple areas of support during unanticipated transition and will use those support systems to assist them with navigating the unexpected. Another implication is that student veterans are able to rely on themselves when faced with challenges and have the fortitude to push through the challenge regardless of what support is available.

Strategies

Schlossberg (1981) defines the “*strategies*” variable as how the individual copes. Participants were asked to provide additional information about their experience and the resources they thought might have improved the experience for them. Many responses included a request for better lines of communication from the college and faculty, access to mental health professionals that could specifically assist student veterans experiencing unanticipated transition and the need for computer training for both students and faculty. Participants felt the transition

was chaotic but went as smoothly as it could considering it was unfamiliar territory for everyone. Additionally, participants stated that it is the responsibility of the student to seek and take advantage of the help they need to get through challenges.

The implication of these findings are that student veterans are aware of strategies that exist to help them cope with a situation and of those strategies taking responsibility for their role is just as important as what others have to offer. Remember, 21 of the 22 student veterans interviewed remained enrolled during the semester.

While this study was conducted to understand the student veteran experience, it does not provide an in-depth analysis of how Tri-C administrators, faculty, and support professionals were experiencing the phenomenon and working diligently to address the needs of students while transitioning swiftly through a new and unfamiliar environment. Many of the responses from the student veteran participants directly reflect their lack of knowledge of the work taking place behind the scenes to ensure students were successful during the semester.

Nevertheless, this research study was about understanding the student veterans' experience with an unanticipated transition during a period of disruption from the student veterans' perspective. As such, the outcome of the semi-structured interviews provided the researcher with a brief list of recommendations for college personnel and students, as outlined in the following section.

Recommendations from Findings

Schlossberg (2008, p.10) posits that a severe transition for one person may be relatively minor for another, depending on the degree to which it alters the person's roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions. Considering the transition from a standard, primarily in-person operating structure to a fully online environment, it is recommended that colleges consider the following questions: How might the college prepare faculty and staff to work online? How might the college engage students in an online environment? Does the college have adequate technology in place to support students and employees should the need for a swift transition to the online environment become necessary?

Following an analysis of the interviews, the researcher has identified the following recommendations for college administration, faculty, staff, and students experiencing the unanticipated transition of temporarily moving college classes and services to a fully online environment.

Recommendations for College Administration, Faculty, and Staff

The following is a list of recommendations for college administration, faculty, and staff resulting from the research findings:

- Inform all college constituents of the situation and expectations regularly
- Maintain open lines of communication
- Require staff to respond to student inquiries promptly
- Require online course participation for both faculty and students at least once a year
- Provide ongoing access to resources that assist students in transition
- Set realistic expectations for students, faculty, and staff

It is recommended colleges move quickly to inform constituents of the situation and the expectations during the transition. When changes are made, immediately provide faculty and

staff with the information they can use when speaking with students and other college constituents. Also, set clear expectations for personnel during the transition and over-inform to ensure the message is clear. Offer weekly virtual town hall meetings to inform and answer any questions or concerns of constituents and record them for those who cannot attend the original meeting.

Maintaining open lines of communication is in everyone's best interest. The more information one can provide, the better. Student veterans feel supported when they know what is going on during the transition. They also find it easier to cope when they can connect with someone who can provide them with access to this information. Therefore, colleges should work to maintain open lines of communication regarding the situation and how it will impact the work performed by the college and its personnel.

College personnel must be required to respond to student inquiries within a specific timeframe, never leaving students feeling as if their calls and emails are not being answered by faculty or support staff. Faculty and support staff should also be required to reach out and check in on all students to ensure they have the information they need to succeed during the transition and provide support to students who need to be more engaged in a manner that will ensure their success.

This phenomenon involved transitioning all services online, which was a new experience for many involved, not just students. One way to accomplish preparing college personnel for successful online services is by requiring faculty to teach at least one online course each academic year to provide them with a first-hand experience of working with and providing for students in an online environment. Another way to accomplish this is by preparing backup online course formats for all in-person courses in the event courses require a swift transition to online in

the future. In addition, non-faculty staff should be required to engage with students online, either through email or the college's learning technology platform, at least twice a semester.

Additionally, students should be required to enroll in at least one online course during their first semester at the college. Enrolling in an online course can prepare students to operate the online learning platform and learn basic computer skills as necessary.

It is always a best practice to make students aware of the resources available throughout the transition, whether through or outside the college. Colleges should send out electronic notices to everyone as resources are added. During this transition, student veterans appreciated knowing what was available through the college. For example, access to technological resources like laptop computers – if the student did not have access to a computer before the transition. Gordon (2020, p.136) notes:

Online learning carries with it certain assumptions that students need financial means to meet. Online learning requires at least a computer; a fast, reliable internet connection; and a quiet place to read, study, and Zoom or attend online classes. Economically less well-off students can rarely fulfill these unspoken requirements.

It is recommended colleges research and provide technology platforms that are easy to use over multiple outlets (i.e., computers, laptops, and smartphones). In addition, understanding that all students may not have the same access to technology, they should be able to engage with faculty and peers during class regardless of their access. Participants also mentioned that receiving funds through military education benefits was helpful, as many of them lost the ability to work due to the phenomenon.

Most community colleges offer counseling services to support students throughout their academic journey. However, these services may need to be more specialized to address the needs

of students experiencing an unanticipated transition. During the interviews, it was recommended that counselors and therapists be available to students, specifically student veterans who are struggling. If a college still needs to offer counseling staff that understands the needs of student veterans, the college should invest in preparing counseling staff to address these needs. Another option is to connect with the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) program. According to the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (2023), the VSOC program aims to help veterans, service members, and their qualified dependents succeed and thrive through a coordinated delivery of on-campus benefits assistance and counseling, leading to completion of their education and preparing them to enter the labor market in viable careers.

Finally, it is imperative to the success of the institution and constituents that realistic expectations are set during the period of unanticipated transition, especially in an online environment. First, college administrators must ensure that faculty also have the tools they need to be successful online. Do they have access to computers or laptops at home? Do they have access to the internet? Will they be traveling to the library to teach their online classes, or will they be required to sit in the parking lot of a fast-food restaurant to gain access to the internet? Administrators must work with Academic Deans to create within the budget emergency funds to address faculty needs. Second, college administrators must keep faculty from overloading assignments to compensate for the time lost with in-person interactions. Moving a class from in-person to online is stressful enough. The college must not try to engage students by giving them more work than would have been required in the in-person classroom. Next, are the researcher's recommendations for students experiencing an unanticipated transition resulting in the temporary move to a fully online learning environment.

Recommendations for Students

The following is a list of recommendations for students resulting from the research findings:

- Be patient with themselves and the college faculty and staff
- Become familiar with the new environment
- Take the initiative and seek out resources
- Stay connected to a network

Transition can be stressful for anyone. Students must understand that when experiencing transition, they must be patient with themselves and college personnel. Due to the unanticipated transition, the college administration was unprepared and had to make quick decisions in unfamiliar territory to ensure institution and constituent success. However, everyone was doing their best to keep the chaos from students. Unfortunately, lacking knowledge of what was taking place behind the scenes to prepare for the transition may have led to the responses offered by the study's participants about the College being slow to respond and poor in communication.

Additionally, student veterans receive specialized training in the military that leads them to their selected careers while on active-duty service. Student veterans should be aware that community colleges typically require students to take courses they may feel are unnecessary and, therefore, a waste of time; this is not true. Student veterans must be patient.

Students must become familiar with the new environment. Students should seek out opportunities to take online courses and familiarize themselves with the learning platform offered at the College. Students who need more basic computer skills should seek out these courses. Many colleges offer introductory computer skills courses, and some are free. These courses are also available at local libraries and community centers with computer labs. As

students familiarize themselves with the new environment, they prevent distractions and diminish thoughts of giving up.

Students must take the initiative to seek out resources, understanding that their success depends on their willingness to participate. When students identify resources, they must also use them. When seeking resources, students should ask other students about resources they thought were helpful while enrolled at the college. Seeking assistance from other students provides an opportunity to develop a relationship with someone traveling on a similar journey. However, this researcher believes the best place to start is with the student engagement office. If there is no student engagement office at the college, students should visit the student affairs office. Representatives in the student affairs office can connect students at the college with resources currently available and new resources as they are added.

Experiencing a transition while enrolled in community college courses can cause symptoms of anxiety, stress, and depression. Students must stay focused on those feelings but utilize the available resources to seek assistance in addressing those feelings. Students can accomplish this by staying connected to their network. The network may consist of family and friends but also of faculty, support staff, and counseling professionals inside or outside the college. Some advice offered by the study participants is that it is okay to admit to being extremely vulnerable; transition is stressful, especially when it is unanticipated.

The following section provides recommendations for future research from data analysis collected during this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study used a phenomenological research method. “Phenomenology is primarily interested in the *how* rather than in the *what* of objects (Zahavi, 2019, p. 9).” This study found that the student veteran participants were resilient during unanticipated disruption, likely due to their time in the military and their accounts of how the military is unpredictable and teaches them to adapt and overcome during difficult transitions. Therefore, this researcher recommends that further research be conducted to identify how community college executives, faculty, and staff experience unanticipated transition during a period of disruption to determine the resources that would assist them in better-serving students while navigating an unfamiliar environment. It is also recommended that further research be conducted to gain the perspectives of the individuals mentioned above during this specific phenomenon, understanding that this research study uncovered only one perspective and did not take into account the work that was being done by College personnel to support the students while also experiencing the transition themselves.

The researcher also recommends making further attempts to connect with student veterans who withdrew from college during the specific period of transition to understand their decision to withdraw. While the researcher experienced difficulty in connecting with this population during this study, being able to connect with the student veterans who ultimately withdrew from the college may provide data to inform institutions of how they better support student veterans during times of unanticipated transition.

Finally, the researcher also recommends conducting a study of nonstudent veteran populations who experienced the same phenomenon to identify if the results of this study were solely due to the participants prior experience in the military or if there might be additional data to support similar outcomes of resilience.

Closing Remarks

The COVID-19 pandemic is a phenomenon that claimed many lives. Everyone across the globe shared the experience of an unanticipated transition. The entire population had to change how we lived, provide for our loved ones, and, more importantly, take care of ourselves. While the world focused on moving forward in a temporary, disruptive, and unfamiliar reality, some higher education institutions quickly decided to move forward with educating the students who remained enrolled. This swift transition forced students to decide whether to continue their studies or navigate a reality without the pressures of completing their education that semester. As noted from the response of many of the study's participants, student veterans are familiar with the flexibility of sudden change. They are determined to adapt, overcome, and never give up.

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Appendix A - Research/Interview Question Alignment

Schlossberg's 4S System	Research Question (RQ)	Interview Question (IQ)
Situation	RQ1. What were the lived experiences of student veterans enrolled in community college courses during a period of unanticipated transition?	IQ1-IQ4
Self	RQ1. What were the lived experiences of student veterans enrolled in community college courses during a period of unanticipated transition?	IQ6-IQ8
Support	RQ2. What resources did student veterans identify as needing while experiencing an unanticipated transition?	IQ10-IQ12
Strategies	RQ2. What resources did student veterans identify as needing while experiencing an unanticipated transition?	IQ13-IQ14

Appendix B - Interview Protocol

Prior to the interview, the researcher will provide the following introduction:

Hello, my name is Alaina Foster. I am a doctoral student at Kansas State University. Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study designed to capture the lived experiences of student veterans who experienced an unanticipated transition when Cuyahoga Community College transitioned to a fully online learning environment as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic during the 2020 spring semester.

The interview is scheduled to take approximately 1 hour and will be recorded to ensure all information is captured. Your identity will be kept confidential, as a pseudonym will be assigned to your information and used throughout the narrative of the data reported. You will receive a copy of the transcription of this interview once it is complete and will be asked to review the transcription for accuracy. I will store your signed consent form, interview recording, and transcription electronically and on a flash drive, which will be locked in a safe for five years, after which all information will be destroyed.

Remember, this interview is voluntary, and you can withdraw your consent at any time. You will not be penalized or receive any negative consequences should you decide to withdraw from the interview. Do I have your permission to record the interview?

Upon agreement provided by the participant, the researcher will begin the recording.

At the conclusion of the interview, the researcher will make the following statement:

Thank you for participating in the interview and research study. You will receive a copy of the transcription to check for accuracy once it is complete. Your information will remain confidential, and there will be no way of identifying your responses. If you have any questions regarding this study, please email me at alaina6@ksu.edu

Appendix C - Interview Questions

Demographic Questions

1. What is your gender?
2. What is your age range (20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60+)?
3. What branch of the United States military did you serve in?
4. How long were you in the military? Please provide your dates of service.

Interview Questions

1. During the spring semester (January – May) of 2020, Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C/College) temporarily transitioned to a fully online learning and support services environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Describe your experience of learning the College was transitioning all services, including class meetings, fully online.
2. Describe the factors (i.e., family, employment, health, etc.) you considered as you decided whether to continue with enrollment.
3. Describe any specific conversation(s) you had that contributed to your decision to continue with enrollment.
4. What enrollment decision did you make during the spring 2020 semester due to the College's temporary transition to a fully online environment?
5. What year and semester did you begin taking classes at Tri-C?
6. What was your motivation for selecting Tri-C?
7. Describe any experience you had while serving in the military that prepared you for the College's unanticipated transition to a fully online environment.
8. How did this preparation contribute to your decision whether to continue enrollment with the College in a fully online environment?
9. What is your current enrollment status at the College? (i.e., enrolled and taking classes fully online, enrolled and taking classes fully in-person, enrolled and taking classes both online and in-person, no longer enrolled as a result of completion, no longer enrolled as a result of the transition)
10. What support(s) did you receive from the College that helped you decide whether to continue with enrollment during the transition?
11. What support(s) did you receive outside of the College that helped you decide whether to continue with enrollment during the transition?
12. How did the support you received help you cope with your enrollment decision during the 2020 spring semester when the College transitioned to a fully online environment?
13. Can you identify any resources that would have assisted you in coping with the College's temporary transition to a fully online environment?
14. Is there any additional information you would like to share about your experience during the College's temporary transition to a fully online environment that was not covered by the interview questions?

Appendix D - Consent Form

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research study. Please review and sign the following consent form.

Research Project Title:

Student Veteran Experiences of Transition During a Period of Disruption

Researcher:

Alaina Foster, MBA

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study is to understand how student veterans experience transition while enrolled in community college courses during an unanticipated period of disruption. The study will specifically focus on how student veterans experienced a rapid change in course delivery generated by the COVID-19 pandemic's disruption to higher education during the 2020 spring semester.

Procedure:

If you agree to participate in this research study, you will be asked to participate in a 1-hour long interview with the researcher via Zoom. The interview will be recorded, and you will receive a copy of the transcription, after the interview, to review for accuracy.

Confidentiality:

To protect your information, your name will not be used in any data related to this study. You will be given a pseudonym (alias) and will be referred as such throughout the study. Only your age, gender, branch, and years of service will be used in the narrative of the study.

Right to Withdraw:

You have the right to withdraw from your participation in this study at any time. There is no penalty or negative consequences should you choose to withdraw.

Statement of Consent:

By signing this document, you agree that you have read and understand the above information and consent to participate in this research study.

Participant Name

Participant Signature

Date

If you have any questions about this study, you may email me at alaina6@ksu.edu.

Appendix E - Email Invitation

Hello,

My name is Alaina Foster. I am a graduate student, conducting a research study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for my Ed.D. degree in Community College Leadership at Kansas State University and I need your assistance. The title of my study is Student Veteran Experiences of Transition During a Period of Disruption. This study will examine the lived experiences of student veterans enrolled in classes during the 2020 spring semester when Cuyahoga Community College temporarily transitioned to a fully online operating environment, as a result of the COVID19 pandemic.

Eligibility for participation requires the following:

- Honorably discharged veteran of one of the United States Armed Forces branches (i.e., Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, or Navy)
- During the 2020 spring semester you were attending classes (full- or part-time)
- The 2020 spring semester was not your first semester at the College
- Before the 2020 spring semester, you never enrolled in or attended classes online

If ***all of the above*** eligibility requirements apply to you, please continue reading.

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. Participation consists of an interview up to 1-hour via Zoom. All interviews will be recorded. To ensure accuracy, you will receive a transcription of the recording, after the interview. You will be asked to sign a consent agreement after we schedule the interview. You may choose not to participate in the interview without fear of penalty or negative consequences. Should you choose to withdraw from the interview, any recorded responses will be deleted along with the signed consent agreement.

If you would like to participate in this research study, please respond to this email, within the next seven days, with at least 3 dates and times that work with your schedule. Once the interview dates and times are scheduled, you will receive an email with the consent agreement and a meeting invitation which will include the Zoom link.

Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Alaina Foster

Appendix F - IRB Approval – Cuyahoga Community College



Human Subjects Review Committee Notice of Review and Approval

TO: Alaina Foster

SUBJECT: Notice of ☒ Review and approval
☐ Exemption

The Human Subjects Review Committee of Cuyahoga Community College has reviewed and approved your proposal entitled:

Student Veteran Experiences of Transition During an Unanticipated Period of Disruption

You are advised that with respect to:

1. the rights and welfare of the individual(s) involved;
2. the appropriateness of the methods used to secure informed consent; and
3. the risks and potential benefits of the investigation.

The Human Subjects Review Committee has reviewed your proposal and does consider your project to be:

- ☐ Exempt
- ☒ Fully acceptable (without reservations).
- ☐ Acceptable with the reservations noted below
- ☐ Not acceptable for the reasons noted below

Approval date: June 23, 2022

Signed for the Committee by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. Robert Stuart".

G. Robert Stuart, Chairperson
Human Subjects Review Committee

Appendix G - IRB Approval – Kansas State University



TO: Kathleen Sigler
Educational Leadership

Proposal Number IRB-11238

FROM: Sara Rosenkranz, PhD, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 06/30/2022

RE: Approval of Proposal Entitled, “Student Veteran Experiences of Transition During an Unanticipated Period of Disruption.”

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

APPROVAL DATE: 06/30/2022

EXPIRATION DATE: 06/29/2025

In giving its approval, the Committee has determined that:

No more than minimal risk to 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.

Electronically signed by Sara Rosenkranz, PhD on 06/30/2022 11:36 AM ET