4-21-2023

You Can Get There from Here: A Phenomenological Study of Help-Seeking Behavior and Experiences of Student Military Veterans in Community College

Donivan Foster
University of Missouri-St. Louis, dwfp68@umsystem.edu

You Can Get There from Here: A Phenomenological Study of Help-Seeking Behavior and Experiences of Student Military Veterans in Community College

Donivan Wallace Foster
B.S., Truman State University, 2005
M.Ed., University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2009

A Dissertation Submitted to The Graduate School at the
University of Missouri – St. Louis in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education
with an emphasis in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

May 2023

Advisory Committee

Shawn Woodhouse, Ph.D.
Chairperson

Phyllis Balcerzak, Ph.D.

Thomasina Hassler, Ph.D.

Kenton Mershon, Ph.D.

Abstract

This phenomenological study described the experiences of student military veterans in a community college with physical and psychological health needs. Each participant enrolled in the community college by utilizing the benefits of the post-9/11 GI Bill and transitioned from active duty to civilian life. More than 40,000 programs in the United States are designed to assist veterans transitioning to civilian life (Carter, 2013). Further, the health needs and transition experiences of military veterans have been well-documented. Numerous programs seek to reduce barriers; however, many veterans experience challenges when using the programs or services (Perkins et al., 2019; Aronson et al., 2019). Previous studies suggested that veterans reported not using services during the reintegration process for the following reasons: many felt they did not need help, had difficulty identifying a program or service that adequately met their needs, did not understand the types of programs they qualified for, and did not know where to acquire assistance (Morgan et al., 2020). Employing purposive sampling and the Moustakas (1994) method for phenomenological analysis, interviews with eight participants served as the primary data collection source. A phenomenological methodology was used to explore veterans' perceptions of the transition experience to the community college and utilizing college services through the lens of Rendón's (1994) validation theory. Six major themes emerged, including a positive view of college resources, recognizing feeling misunderstood or isolated, seeking community, a challenging enrollment process, possessing mission-driven goals, and pursuing ways to mitigate needs.

To everyone who dares to dream, stands resolute, and persists.

Acknowledgments

Races are given to those who endure to the end. Thank you to everyone who prayed, shared a kind word or advice, or listened to me process information out loud (for years). Your excitement and encouragement were valuable to me. This goal of completing a dissertation has been a process and has taught me countless lessons. I will be ever grateful to my loving and supportive family, who never let me stop and who took the time to fully support every educational endeavor, and who provided the foundation of study and getting an understanding of all aspects of life. I very clearly recall "pray, pray, pray."

In reflection, I was enriched by the faculty at Truman State University and the Ronald E. McNair program, the members of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. for instilling that the greatest gift to the chapter is my degree, employers who supported education, comfort from friends who truly understand this journey, and my ancestors for paving the way for me to grow, critically think, stand with integrity, and never back down from a fight.

To the student veterans, you are amazing. Thank you for the best conversations, enlightened thoughts, and time. You taught me valuable lessons and provided insight that will always be appreciated.

Thank you to the University of St. Louis for the opportunity to learn and study during these years. Thank you to Dr. Woodhouse for carrying a supportive torch during this process. Thank you to Alexandra Gresick. You have been supportive in many ways, and I thank you for always keeping me on task. Thank you to my committee members. I appreciate your willingness to support my goals and work within time constraints.

Finally, to Dr. Boyer. Thank you for getting me to a solid point in this process. While we did not get to finish together, please know that I recognize your efforts.

While I could go on in thanks for many pages, I will stop here, but know that if you were a part of this journey in any way, I appreciate you, and your impact will never be forgotten.

Table of Contents

List of Tables and Figures

Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

The population of military veterans and service members is increasing in higher education, as they represented approximately four percent of undergraduate students in American colleges and universities in 2007-2008, nearly six percent by 2015-2016, and the population has steadily increased in recent years (Radford & Wun, 2009; Fain 2020). There are approximately 2.6 million post-9/11 military veterans in the United States, and it was estimated to increase to 3.5 million by 2019 (Morgan et al., 2020). While most veterans do not experience ongoing reintegration problems and could successfully transition to communities, including higher education, a substantial minority reported ongoing difficulties (Tsai et al., 2015; Elnitsky et al., 2017; Morgan et al., 2020). In addition, the reintegration process for military veterans is impacted by various factors that increase challenges during the enrollment process and further impacts retention and persistence (Morgan et al., 2020).

The post-9/11 GI Bill has been a conduit for military student populations seeking training, certificates, and degrees that are accessible through the Department of Veterans Affairs and provides support for tuition, housing, books, and course materials (Sander, 2012; Steele, Salcedo, & Coley, 2010). The GI Bill is currently utilized nationally in over 6,000 higher education institutions (Sander, 2013). In addition, the National Survey of Student Engagement (N.S.S.E.) surveyed over 11,000 self-identified military student veterans and active service members to understand this population's experiences (DeSawal, 2013). Approximately one million veterans were eligible for education

benefits through the Post-9/11 GI Bill in 2011, which marked an increase of 71% from estimates in 2009 (Reyes et al., 2020). Further, several studies estimate that between 25% and 48% of military veteran college students have post-traumatic stress disorder (P.T.S.D.) or symptoms associated with stressors that impact this population (Barry et al., 2021; Reyes et al., 2020). Military veterans' increasing concern includes emotional fitness and increased physical and mental trauma (Elnitsky et al., 2018). For example, evidence has shown that this student population may demonstrate extraordinary social and personal stressors, including frequent relocation, separation from friends and family, and the stressors of combat experience that affect reintegration experiences when compared to nonveteran student populations (Barry et al., 2021; Reyes et al., 2020; Algoe & Fredrickson, 2011).

The Pew Research Center (2011) studied the complex layers of military veterans' experiences during the transition process. The research finding identified that the layers of "rewards and burdens" are coupled with a lack of familiarity with military-civilian culture on campuses, leading to challenges for institutions that seek to streamline or improve services that support veteran transition effectively. For example, social and academic factors influence how veterans and service members view their college experience. As a result, part of the population may feel underprepared or unaware of admissions or financial aid policy, campus culture, and academic expectations (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009; Osborne, 2014). Sherman (2010) stated, “the homecoming experience of veterans-the process of readjustment to civilian life- is often expressed by veterans as the most difficult stage of their military career.” For example,

reintegration into experiences that are not structured, like higher education, may cause increased stressors that could increase mental health issues (Fortney et al., 2016).

Furthermore, student military veterans are generally nontraditional students and are described as a population that is more likely to work, engage in fewer student activities, and have dependents (N.S.S.E., 2010). Conversely, student military veterans can be described as better prepared, as they have keen study practices and are just as capable as their nonmilitary counterparts (Cate, Gerber, & Holmes, 2010). Additionally, student veterans may be perceived as an autonomous and mature unit of students with superior professional backgrounds and life experiences that differentiate them from their nonmilitary colleagues (Osborne, 2014). While the number of student military veterans fluctuates widely depending on campus and location, national surveys indicated that student military veterans are primarily white males, as they comprise over 60% of the student population (Cate, 2014; Walton-Radford, 2009). The lower prevalence of the student population includes 18% African American, 13% Hispanic, and three percent Asian and multi-ethnic backgrounds (Cate, 2014; Walton-Radford, 2009). Forty-seven percent of student military veterans are married and have children, and nearly 15% are single parents (Walton-Radford, 2009).

The National Center for Education Statistics illustrated the discussion on nontraditional students and noted that no single definition or description defines nontraditional students; however, the nontraditional student category most appropriately fits student military veterans (Choy, 2002). The variables that generally link nontraditional students to military veterans include age, financial standing, employment, enrollment status, and rationale for entering higher education (Choy, 2002). For example,

student military veterans are characteristically older adults. In addition, many are considered transfer students because of credit earned through college courses completed while in the military or through American Council on Education credit recommendations (O'Herrin, 2011). While student military veterans and service members have many similar characteristics, the population can be more visibly defined regarding the community's demographics and attributes, coupled with their military experiences (DeSawal, 2013). The history of student military veterans and the community college dawned with the GI Bill of 1944, as it was utilized as a conduit for access to higher education and postwar reintegration (Katznelson, 2005). The community college has had a meaningful and longstanding connection with student military veterans since World War II and the declaration of the Truman Commission Report of 1946 (Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011). The Truman Commission Report called for the support and extension of community colleges and efforts to charge low tuition, expose student veterans to cultural opportunities, provide comprehensive educational and training programs, and function within the local community (Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011). Having the flexibility to respond to the charge of the Truman Commission Report, the community college became an ideal location to provide educational opportunities, including baccalaureate, pre-baccalaureate, and vocational training credentials to veterans (Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011). In addition, the community college provided frameworks for distance learning, direct course options on military bases, and a more accommodating approach toward the completion of coursework (Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011).

Regarding the higher education institutions that serve large populations of student military veterans, nearly one-third are community colleges (Sewall, 2010; Radford & Wun, 2009). Nationally, community colleges have implemented programs and veteran-centered spaces that explicitly address active-duty soldiers and military veterans (Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011). Veteran centers range from highly organized offices that connect students to resources and transition aids to comfortable spaces where students can eat, utilize computers, gain access to supplies, and converse with students with similar experiences (Chappell, 2010). Orientation programs at community colleges have also developed veteran-centered platforms for students to connect with employers and gather information on support services, health and wellness, and educational assistance (Chappell, 2010). Data collected from roughly 700 higher education institutions, including universities and community colleges, expounded that of the 57% of participating institutions offering services to student military veterans, most do not provide dedicated services specifically for students with military backgrounds, as their services are designed for the general student population (Cook & Kim, 2009). The literature explained that since the tragedy of 9/11, 65% of community colleges have reimagined and redirected their focus on supporting the needs of student veterans (Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011). Community college leadership, faculty, and student affairs staff have begun to recognize the value of addressing the needs of student veterans, particularly for the students who have entered or re-entered institutions following modern combat experiences (Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011). The policies and programs that support student veterans in higher education as a protocol for some institutions have been evaluated to help support this particular student population;

however, there remains an absence of literature regarding the student veteran experience for those who are enrolled in community colleges (Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011). Comparable to military students who attend four-year institutions, students enrolled in community colleges may feel less connected to the campus environment. They may be more inclined to encounter difficulty with the college transition process (Rumann, 2010). Further, the adjustment from active-duty service to civilian life may prove challenging. The perception of appearing unprepared may further complicate the process, which would render community colleges' open-access model and flexibility appealing to prospective students (Bragg, 2001; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010).

There are seven traits representative of nontraditional students: delayed enrollment, part-time enrollment status, financial responsibility, full-time employment, having dependents, single parents, and no standard high school diploma (Pelletier, 2010; Corley & McNeil, 2017). While student veterans possess many of the characteristics of nontraditional students, some are compelled to conceal their identity to avoid intentional or unintentional conflict with the campus community (Bauman, 2009; DiRamio et al., 2008). A leading factor for challenges during the transition and enrollment process for nontraditional students includes high withdrawal patterns and a lack of connection to the campus community (Humes, 2006). Since the enactment of the new GI Bill, approximately 91% of community colleges have experienced student withdrawal during the academic year due to military service (Ashby, 2006). Thus, the community college provides an appealing setting for student military veterans and service members. They are classified as a component of the nontraditional student demographic and express similar enrollment patterns (Rumann, 2010). Like other nontraditional students, the military

student group has a wide range of life experiences that shape the student experience (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008).

Veterans have access to educational benefits through the Post-9/11 Veterans Education Assistance Act, which includes tuition and housing, extended for up to 15 years (Buckley and Cleary, 2010). In addition, the passage of the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017 (the "Forever GI Bill") is projected to further improve education benefits for veterans and family members by eliminating the benefit expiration date and expanding benefits for surviving dependents and Purple Heart recipients (Rattray et al., 2019).

While the expansion of education benefits and services continues to increase, veterans who return from Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom face at least one stressor during the readjustment process. Approximately 90 percent of veterans report an interest in receiving services to support health issues, job attainment, and educational attainment (Kukla, Rattray, and Salyers, 2015). Given the substantial burden of mental and physical health problems that impact veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, the potential for long-term impacts is worrisome, and support for the transition process is necessary (Taylor et al., 2020). However, while research indicates that successful transition is critical for veterans' well-being, the nature of the transition experience and readjustment needs have not been examined in-depth among Iraq and Afghanistan veterans (Taylor et al., 2020).

Statement of Problem

As a result of the current framework of veterans' educational benefits, specifically the post-9/11 GI Bill, higher education institutions are experiencing increased

enrollments (Sansone & Tucker Segura, 2020). For example, in 2012, nearly 97% of U.S. colleges and universities reported some enrollment of military veterans (Queen & Lewis, 2014). Further, since the passing of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, there has been a 15% increase in the total number of eligible veterans using their education benefits (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014). Thus, the collective data findings suggest that veterans enrolled in colleges and universities in record numbers. Moreover, their enrollment will continue to rise as more current service members separate from the military and are eligible to receive education benefits from the present GI Bill (Sansone & Tucker Segura, 2020).

Despite the increases in enrollment, there is limited research on contemporary student veterans (Morgan et al., 2020). For example, Albright et al. (2017) suggested that support for military veteran students is not well understood despite record levels of enrollment in colleges and universities. Further, current studies have primarily focused on examining veterans' transition into higher education while providing little evidence that they arrive on college campuses with unique needs, particularly mental and physical health needs, derived from their experience in the military (Schiavone & Gentry, 2014; Sansone & Tucker Segura, 2020). There is little empirical data on veteran identity that assesses mental stability, traumatic events, and reintegration. However, research established that veteran identity is not static but somewhat varies based on personal experience and characteristics that impact self (Hack, DeFroge, & Lucksted, 2017).

Effective program implementation requires essential elements that include appropriate content, a process for explaining the content, approaches for sustaining the program over time, and strategies to reduce barriers (Rotheram-Borus et al., 2009;

Morgan et al., 2018). Barrier reduction strategies may assist veterans in accessing the support they need to make more successful transitions to civilian life and may increase access to programs (Hamblen et al., 2018). Additionally, aligning veterans' perceptions with tangible support may reduce help-seeking stigma and increase motivation for persistence (Morgan et al., 2020). Unfortunately, there is limited information about how the transition from active duty to civilian life unfolds among Post-9/11 veterans (Morgan et al., 2020). While various programs and support mechanisms are offered to veterans, many report difficulties accessing them (Morgan et al., 2020). Studies have demonstrated that barrier reduction efforts are essential to the success of veterans but are generally underused and often misaligned with veterans' perceptions of need (Morgan et al., 2020).

Programs that incorporate the elements of tangible support, program access, and personal change often find success with sustainability and program usage (Morgan et al., 2020). Tangible support is the physical resource that directly meets basic needs (Zhang, 2017; Faurer & Bailie, 2014). For example, programs that assist with access to food security, housing, and accessibility modifications increase support and address higher-level needs widely used to aid reintegration efforts (Zhang, 2017; Faurer & Bailie, 2014). In addition, programs that focus on increasing access ensure logistical supports that increase engagement by offering services at no cost, providing virtual options for health care, and services that offer childcare (Morgan et al., 2020; Pietrzak et al., 2009; Institute of Medicine 2013). Finally, programs that promote motivation and reduce help-seeking stigma allow veterans to participate in services that lead to behavioral changes (Morgan et al., 2018). Veterans reported a perception of people in society who hold negative

beliefs about those who need or seek treatment, which further deters help-seeking behaviors (Corrigan, Druss, & Perlick, 2015). Programs like the Real Warrior Campaign and Buddy-to-Buddy offer public awareness, peer education, and strategies that decrease stigmas around utilizing services and supports (Corrigan et al., 2002; Vogt et al., 2018). Despite the well-documented needs of Post-9/11 veterans and the abundance of programs, veterans still do not seek to utilize services or find barriers. Instead, they hold perceived stigmas about using these programs during the transition period (Morgan et al., 2020; Aronson et al., 2019).

While studies have offered evidence of reintegration issues, the body of knowledge is incomplete (Albright et al., 2017). There is no concise definition that measures successful community reintegration, and assessments do not capture the complexity and nuance involved in the dynamic method of reintegration (Resnik et al., 2012; Kukla et al., 2015). Findings have highlighted the lack of adequate research exploring veteran identity that correlates to reintegration (Resnik et al., 2012; Kukla et al., 2015). The further exploration concluded the importance of assessing the experiences of veterans to fully capture veteran preferences, choices, and satisfaction and their relation to civilian life (Resnik et al., 2012; Kukla et al., 2015)

Although millions of veterans pursue higher education, it is unclear how many complete a degree or certificate program (Norman et al., 2015). Specifically for the community college, no data supports how barrier reduction and utilization of services or programs contribute to student military veteran persistence. Striking evidence found that most programs did not offer barrier reduction components and essentially had practical barriers and policies that hindered participation (Morgan et al., 2020). While there is

scant research related to barrier reduction misalignment, it has been suggested that policy alignment proves helpful when meeting veterans' needs (Morgan et al., 2020). This study aims to understand the experiences of student veterans with mental and physical health needs and how they can inform interventions designed to address academic achievement, persistence, and the transition to civilian life within the context of community college enrollment. Norman et al. (2015) suggested that more information is needed to understand student veterans' perceived barriers and facilitators to achieving academic success.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative phenomenological study will seek to examine the experiences of student military veterans in a community college with physical and mental health needs. This study posits that understanding student perceptions of college services will increase the information related to expanding the resources and engagement experiences that ultimately lead to persistence. Thus, it potentially will provide greater insight into the nature of resilience, help-seeking behavior, and how this unique group creates meaning around transitioning to the college environment. Further, the aim of this study will explore community college students' perceptions about their enrollment and engagement experiences, including motivational factors, assessments of mental and physical health needs, and the value of seeking assistance from peers and usage of available services, thereby creating opportunities to a) more holistically understand the veteran experience, b) understand the phenomenon of navigating the community college, and c) form effective programming and service models that will work to better aid the military veteran student population.

Significance of the Study

Currently, there are more than 40,000 programs in the United States that are designed to assist veterans with the transition to civilian life (Carter, 2013). The health needs and transition experiences of military veterans have been well-documented. Numerous programs seek to reduce barriers; however, many veterans do not seek to use the programs or services (Perkins et al., 2019; Aronson et al., 2019). Veterans reported not using services during the reintegration process for the following reasons: many felt they did not need help, had difficulty identifying a program or service that adequately met their needs, did not understand the types of programs they qualified for, and did not know where to acquire assistance (Morgan et al., 2020).

The prevalence of low utilization has led program leaders in higher education to employ mechanisms that can help reduce barriers, increase help-seeking behaviors, and support private and community-based systems (Morgan et al., 2020). Further, studies showed that veterans felt less supported and were less likely than nonveterans to engage with faculty members or participate in support programs. These feelings contributed to invisibility (N.S.S.E., 2010, Livingston et al., 2011; Osborne, 2014). Morgan (2020) noted that increasing the reach of programs and services and reducing barriers must align with how veterans report valuing their reintegration goals. The study further demonstrated that barrier reduction efforts are recognized and needed by veterans. Still, they are misaligned with what veterans need and are generally underused. Special efforts must be made to reduce veterans' barriers from the most junior enlisted ranks (Morgan, 2020).

The following are contributing factors to the significance of this study:

- A better understanding of the issues surrounding the veteran transition to the community college will inform recommendations for programs and services
- Expansion of the research on barrier reduction will heighten the value and participation in programs (Morgan et al., 2020)
- Veterans at risk for poor civilian reintegration are least likely to engage in programs. Further understanding of veterans' perceptions could lead to increased program participation and impactful reintegration practices (Morgan et al., 2020)
- Assessment of help-seeking behaviors will contribute to the understanding of connecting veterans, especially those with disabilities, to the appropriate health services and interventions (Blais, Renshaw, & Jakupcak, 2014; Wade et al., 2015)
- Postsecondary education (community colleges) will benefit from expanded efforts to increase college success elements for student military veterans. Cate (2014) highlighted the importance of creating spaces that provide safety and services that alleviate challenges for veterans, which further leads to persistence and academic success
- Considering the recent evacuation from Afghanistan, the subsequent influx of Post-9/11 military veterans will arrive on campuses soon. Further examination, understanding, and proactive policy change will

> create opportunities for the successful transition of military veterans to the community college (Sikes, Duran, & Armstrong, 2020)

This study investigates veterans' perceptions of programs and services offered through community colleges. This phenomenological approach will provide a deeper understanding of veteran experiences, which will inform the body of research, policymakers, educators, and practitioners that might prove helpful in developing barrier reduction and student persistence. In addition, the participants in this study may serve as examples and offer perspectives that will guide the development and sustainability of veteran programs within the community college.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this study:

1. What are military veterans' perceptions and lived experiences with mental and physical health needs regarding seeking help and utilizing college services?
2. How do military veterans with physical and mental health needs perceive their transition experiences from the military to the community college?

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined to help understand the context of various terminology used in this study.

Traumatic experience: From the victim's point of view, trauma is an experience of life, i.e., the complex reaction to the event that endangers one's existence. The response to such an event arouses complex physical, emotional, cognitive, and willing processes. The possibility that prompts such reactions is entirely unexpected, and

behavior becomes unusual. It is an entirely normal response to an abnormal situation; the reactions are deeply rooted in the phylogenetic base of survival (Jaukovic 2002, p. 177)

OEF: Operation Enduring Freedom- was the official name used by the United States government and military for the Global War on Terrorism. This war was in response to the attacks of September 11, 2001, when President George W. Bush announced airstrikes targeting Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. This war started in Afghanistan and lasted from 2001 to 2014 (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014)

OIF: Operation Iraqi Freedom- began with tactical airstrikes on Saddam Hussein and was authorized with the mission to prohibit stockpiling and importing weapons of mass destruction. This war started in 2003 and ended in 2011 (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014)

O.N.D.: Operation New Dawn- marked the official end of O.F.I. and combat by the United States forces in Iraq. Approximately 50,000 U.S. service members continued to serve in the capacity of training and maintaining a presence that worked with the Department of Defense and Iraqi Security Forces (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014)

Service-connected disability: Veterans who are disabled by an injury or illness that was incurred or aggravated during active military service (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014)

Student Veteran: any student who is a current or former of the active-duty military, National Guard, or Reserves regardless of deployment status, combat experience, legal veteran status, or GI Bill use (Vacchi, 2012)

Deployment: a phase that entails the physical movement of the unit to the area of operation. The scope of operation can be statewide or abroad (U.S. Department of Defense, 2011)

Post-deployment: a phase that occurs when the unit returns to its demonization station; contingent upon individuals' typically assigned units, this station could be an entirely separate facility in a different part of the country (U.S. Department of Defense, 2011).

Reintegration: the attempted return to normality from military to civilian life (U.S. Department of Defense, 2011).

P.T.S.D.: posttraumatic stress disorder, defined in 1980, is a psychiatric disorder that may occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event such as a natural disaster, serious accident, a terrorist attack, war, combat, or rape or who have been threatened with death, sexual violence, or severe injury (American Psychiatric Association, 1980; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2019).

T.B.I.: a traumatic brain injury is an injury that affects how the brain works. Defined in 1980, T.B.I. is a significant cause of death and disability in the United States. Anyone can experience a T.B.I., but data suggest that some groups are at greater risk of getting a T.B.I. or having worse health outcomes after the injury (Brain Injury Association of America, 2021).

Servicemembers: a person currently serving or has served in the United States Armed Forces (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and Reserves) (Albright et al., 2017).

Veteran: a person who has served in active duty for any length of time and who was discharged under honorable discharge (Albright et al., 2017).

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

Assumptions

The assumptions within this study are derived from several fundamental components that cannot be proven or validated (Simon & Goes, 2013). While necessary for the research design, the assumptions below, specifically for a phenomenological study, reflect the lived experiences of military veterans.

1. It was assumed that participants in this study would respond to the questionnaire and interview questions honestly, accurately, and to the best of their understanding. Therefore, a semi-structured interview approach will ideally lead to candid responses.
2. It was assumed that this study would accurately represent the lived experiences of student military veterans enrolled at a community college. Therefore, a phenomenological design will provide the information needed to analyze and explain lived experiences.
3. It was assumed that student participants were randomly selected and were willing to participate and provide truthful information about their enrollment at the community college and affiliation with the United States Military.
4. It was assumed that participants in this study would be enrolled in a community college and would be defined as military veterans who, by nature of enrollment, are defined as nontraditional students.

5. It was assumed that there is an essence of a shared experience with the participant group and that the core meanings of the phenomenon being studied will have some commonly shared value (Merriam, 2009).

Limitations

Aspects of the study that are not within the researcher's control are defined as limitations. Thus, the limitations of this study are known constraints or weaknesses inherent in the design, which may affect the outcome of the investigation (Simon & Goes, 2013).

1. The population will be limited to undergraduate community college students enrolled in face-to-face, hybrid, or online classes. This study will not include students enrolled at four-year colleges and universities because of the potential response from student participants. The university-level student is a different population and potentially garners a different reaction. In addition, there is a possibility that university-level students may be more adjusted to the educational experience.
2. Since the researcher is employed at a community college, there is potential bias. However, preference will be minimized by conducting a snowball sample selection from various community colleges in the region.
3. There is the possibility that a limited sample will affect the study. The use of a semi-structured interview will guide the conversation, but participants have the option to not respond to questions or drop out of the study.
4. Sousa (2014) explained that phenomenological research is exploratory by design and will not confirm a theory. Further, it was noted that the purpose of a

phenomenological study is to describe the lived experience and not explain the lived experience. Therefore, the researcher will utilize strategies to reduce limitations and ensure reliability, trustworthiness, and valid practices during the research process.

Delimitations

This study's specific and conscious decisions were placed to control the objective, research questions, and sample selected during the research process (Simon & Goes, 2013).

1. This study will use a phenomenological research design to understand how student military veterans with mental and physical needs perceive help-seeking behaviors and services within the community college. This study is intended to understand the student perspective and is not intended to incorporate military staff, faculty, family members who are eligible for benefits, or nonmilitary-connected students.
2. This study was delimited to students who receive education benefits under the Post-9/11 GI Bill and its amendments. In addition, there are student military veterans enrolled who may use a different GI Bill, but their responses will not be used to inform this study.
3. The population and sample for this study were delimited to research students within a metropolitan city in the Midwest region. The selection was due to the location and proximity of the researcher to the greater metropolitan area.

4. The snowball approach was delimited to reduce the opportunity to interview students who might have had a prior encounter or relationship with the researcher. None of the participants will be known to the researcher.

Chapter Summary and Conclusion

Contemporary research on student military veterans is limited, although enrollments have steadily increased for post-9/11 veterans by thousands (Morgan et al., 2020; Albright et al., 2017). Further, current studies have primarily focused on examining veterans' transition into higher education while providing little evidence that they are arriving on campuses with unique needs, particularly mental and physical health, derived from their experience in the military (Schiavone & Gentry, 2014; Sansone & Tucker Segura, 2020). Because of the lack of rich data on veteran identity assessing mental stability, traumatic events, and reintegration, effective program implementation has not aligned with veterans' perceptions (Morgan et al., 2020). For example, Morgan et al. (2020) explained that various programs and support mechanisms have offered veterans opportunities but are often laden with barriers.

The literature attests that the body of knowledge is incomplete regarding community reintegration, assessments of veteran identity, and the importance of exploring the experiences of veterans (Albright et al., 2017; Resnik et al., 2012; Kukla et al., 2015). In addition, although veterans pursue postsecondary education through community college, it is unclear how many complete a degree or certificate program, and there is limited data on how barrier reduction and utilization of services can contribute to the persistence of student veterans (Norman et al., 2015; Morgan et al., 2020).

This qualitative phenomenological study will seek to examine the experiences of student military veterans in a community college with physical and mental health needs. This study posits that understanding student perceptions of college services will increase the information about expanding the resources and engagement experience, ultimately leading to increased persistence. Further, the aim of this study will explore community college students' perceptions about their enrollment and engagement experiences, including motivational factors, assessments of mental and physical health needs, and the value of seeking assistance from peers and usage of available services, thereby creating opportunities to a) more holistically understand the veteran experience, b) understand the phenomenon of navigating the community college, and c) form effective programming and service models that will work to better aid the military veteran student population. A phenomenological approach will allow for the collective lived experiences of veterans to be analyzed in terms of how they interpret their experiences and make meaning of the college environment (Mirriam, 2009). The data collected for this study will explore the interview responses to research this phenomenon.

The literature review in the second chapter will provide an in-depth description of information related to the substantial population of student military veterans impacted by physical or mental injury and its connection with successful enrollment in higher education. Further, the findings highlighted the need for supportive services to integrate student veterans into campus communities and link them to mental healthcare resources, potentially improving academic success. In addition, the literature review contains literature focused on post-9/11 military veterans with mental and physical disabilities and student services' impact on persistence in the community college. Additionally, the

information had key themes on veteran identity, military transition experiences, and access to education. Finally, the review contains the theoretical framework of student attrition models, validation theory, and a chapter summary. The third chapter will detail the qualitative phenomenological research method, description of the study's design, the sample, data collection methods, data analysis process, and the ethical considerations employed in this study.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This study aimed to examine the persistence of military veterans with mental and physical disabilities who are enrolled in community college. The literature explored student military veterans' needs and experiences in postsecondary education, namely the transition process, gaining access to education, and understanding the barriers and stigmas associated with the utilization of services. This chapter contains literature focused on Post-9/11 military veterans with mental and physical disabilities and student services' impact on persistence. Additionally, this study includes topics on veteran identity, military transition experiences, and access to education. Finally, this chapter contains the theoretical framework of student attrition models and validation theory and a chapter summary.

According to recent estimates, community colleges enrolled nearly 50 percent of all first-time degree or certificate-seeking students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014). Further, 43 percent of military personnel attended a community college; approximately twenty-five percent of that population screened positive for post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD). In addition, many had physical and mental disabilities that affected their opportunity to persist in college (Madaus & Miller, 2009). The challenge for student military veterans with disabilities in higher education is significant (Madaus & Miller, 2009), such as increased social and emotional difficulties, physical injury, adjusting to the effects of combat, and transitioning to civilian life after multiple tours of service (The Rand Corporation, 2008; Smith, Vilhauer, & Chafos, 2017).

Military veterans enrolled in colleges and universities in record numbers following the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Currier, McDermott, & McCormick, 2017). Veterans Affairs reported that approximately 750,000 servicemembers and their families have qualified to use educational benefits (United States Government Accountability Office, 2018). Colleges and universities recognized the increased challenge and responsibility to provide access to and affirm student veterans; however, there has been less attention to this population's success and persistence (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012).

Transition Experiences for Military Veterans Post-deployment

Military veterans are a diverse population with challenges seated in culture, identity, and experience that could impact their readjustment into civilian life (Deamers, 2010; McMenamin & Kurzynski, 2016). There are currently approximately 2.6 million Post-9/11 military veterans in the United States (Morgan, Aronson, Perkins, Bleser, Davenport, Vogt, Copeland, Finley, & Gilman, 2020). Many of these veterans successfully reintegrated and readjusted into civilian life and their communities with few difficulties; however, a considerable minority reported problems in the transition to civilian life that are described within four areas, including finding or maintaining vocation, employment, and education; resolving legal, financial, and housing complications; overcoming health disparity; and reestablishing social relationships (Morgan, Aronson, Pekins, Bleser, Davenport, Vogt, Copeland, Finley, & Gilman, 2020; US Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016; Tsai, Sledge, Southwick & Pietrzak, 2015;

Elnitsky, Blevins, Fisher & Magruder, 2017; Burnett-Zeigler, Valenstein, Ilgen, Blow, Gorman & Zivin, 2011).

Specifically, the transition process for many student veterans could increase stress levels, feelings of isolation, and emergent symptoms related to physical injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, and traumatic brain injury (Church, 2009). Educational accommodations and services are often delayed or unavailable because of student veterans' reluctance to self-identify or seek treatment (Harpaz-Rotem & Rosenheck, 2011). Findings revealed that less than half of veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) used a treatment plan or available counseling services within civilian treatment centers or programs after being diagnosed (Harpaz-Rotem & Rosenheck, 2011; Shackelford, 2009). Rates of mental and physical disorders are prevalent among veterans from Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom; however, studies indicated that only 23 percent to 40 percent of veterans sought professional help after deployment (Porcari, Koch, Rauch, Hoodin, Ellison, & McSweeney, 2017). Further, about half of veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder or major depressive disorder were unwilling to seek treatment due to trauma or stigmas around seeking help (Currier, McCormick, Carroll, Sims, & Isaak, 2016; Kopacz & Karras, 2015).

Additionally, the reintegration experience has impacted various factors that include access to healthcare, reconnecting with family, community support, access to housing, financial and legal complications, and access to sustainable work opportunities (Elnitsky, Blevins, Fisher, & Magruder, 2017; Tsai, El-Gabalawy, Sledge, Southwick, & Pietrazk, 2015). Veterans under 25 experienced more vocational challenges as they had not secured jobs or an education plan upon exiting the military (Castro & Hassan, 2014;

Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). In addition, veterans with eligibility for Post-9/11 GI benefits reported challenges in understanding the documents and process for utilizing the service's advantage, which hindered enrollment or continued enrollment in undergraduate institutions (Steele, Salecedo, & Cole, 2017). Another challenge they encountered is that they account for approximately six percent of the United States; however, they comprise 10 percent of the population without stable housing (Henry, Shivji, & Buck, 2014). Also, active duty and retired military living with a mental or physical disability such as brain injury, burns, loss of limbs, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), major depression, and suicidal ideation comprise approximately 32 percent of the Post-9/11 military population (Ainspan, Penk, & Kearney, 2018; Rossiter & Smith, 2014). Lastly, an added challenge was that veterans experienced the repercussions of social and cultural differences, making it difficult to maintain meaningful relationships and gain access to social supports (Drebing, Reilly, Henze, Russo, & Smolinsky, 2018).

Post-9/11 military veterans' needs are well-documented. Social and educational programs are abundant; though, veterans reported a lack of access to available programs or did not seek to utilize the support due to actual or perceived barriers (Aronson, Perkins, Morgan, Bleser, Vogt, & Copeland, 2019). Veterans reported barriers to using services during the transition process for a variety of reasons that included the perception of not needing assistance, difficulty in finding a social and educational program that met their needs, not understating the available programs, or not knowing where to gain access to programs (Aronson, Perkins, Morgan, Bleser, Davenport, & Vogt, 2019). Presently there are more than 400,000 social and educational programs in place to support the reintegration of military veterans in the United States, ranging from programs connected

to Veterans Affairs and civilian programs (Elnitsky et al., 2017); however, the process is daunting and overwhelming for individuals living with mental and physical disabilities, which thereby correlated to the low utilization of benefits and enrollment into support programs (Elnitsky et al., 2017; Demers, 2011; Randall, 2012).

A population of veterans successfully gained access to and utilized the available services, significantly the education benefits of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, which supports educational attainment (Holian & Adam, 2020). In addition, the Post-9/11 GI Bill has led to an increase of veterans enrolled in two-year undergraduate institutions (Holian & Adam, 2020), though, within these institutions, there were still barriers to student success and reintegration within veteran identity and experiences that help navigate civilian life (Holian & Adam, 2020; Graf, Ysasi, & Marini, 2015).

The Complexity of Veteran Identity

The literature on Post-9/11 military veterans in higher education is growing; still, the body of research is often focused on traditional students and pays little attention to diversity and an understanding of experiences and intensity of training, which developed the identity of servicemembers (Iverson & Anderson, 2013). The process in which veterans create meaning in the military is often different from how they make sense of experiences as a student, leading to a challenge in the reintegration process (Jones, 2013). Understanding military experiences and identity development allowed educators to create more appropriate supports that promoted retention and persistence (Reisser, 2011; Jones, 2013). Unfortunately, there is no empirical data on veteran identity assessing mental stability, traumatic events, and reintegration. However, research revealed that veteran

identity is not static but somewhat varies based on personal experience and characteristics that impact a sense of self (Hack, DeFroge, & Lucksted, 2017).

Military training directed servicemembers into predetermined roles and identities with little correlation to their roles and identities as students (Reisser, 2011). While men and women entered the military from a wide range of backgrounds, the shared experience defined this group's culture and socially accepted norms (Adler & McAdams, 2007). Assimilation into military culture is one of the primary goals of boot camp (Demers, 2011). Often occurring in three stages, military personnel training is a process of socialization that removes civilian identity replacing it with values, the integrity of duty, honor, national pride, allegiance, discipline, commitment, and unit pride (Demers, 2011). During the boot camp training process, new burgeoning military members experienced three stages of identity response, separation, transition, and incorporation that immersed those individuals into an environment that supported a unique cultural identity (Hack, DeForge, & Lucksted, 2017). The military's transition experience created status and a sense of belonging accompanied by commanders' respect, a culture of following orders, and a relationship with fellow service members (Demers, 2011; Naphan & Elliot, 2015).

Military identity is an amalgamation of core values that promote self-sacrifice, discipline, obedience, respect for authority, and merit (Demers, 2011). Generally, in direct contrast to civilian life, military training impacted individualism and pride and refocused attention on collective responsibility, group dynamics, and a superior bond with fellow service members (Tick, 2005; Lafferty, Alford, Davis, & O'Connor, 2008). Simultaneously, however, military recruits and service members were trained for war and were also involved in a process that eliminated emotions, dehumanization, combat, and

weaponry (Tick, 2005; Lafferty et al., 2008). Considering the anticipation of battle or war-related experiences, military veterans did have the added challenge of maintaining a sense of self during traumatic and emotionally charged events (Naphan & Elliot, 2015). In addition, veterans who experienced combat learned to adapt to an ever-present sense of danger and fear, resulting in a need to eliminate the source of threat (Naphan & Elliot, 2015). This ever-present feeling of uncertainty or conflict may affect the personal transitions of military service members as they navigate the process of reintegration or find coping strategies for previous experiences (Hamrick & Rumann, 2013).

Student veterans may experience conflicting identities when transitioning from military life to civilian life as they try to apply military principles to curricular and co-curricular involvements (Hamrick & Rumann, 2013). Added challenges to these newly developed identities were increased by the deeply rooted practices of following orders or meeting expectations that impacted a group rather than the self-directed nature of many higher education institutions (Naphan & Elliot, 2015). Moreover, many student military veterans had challenges identifying coping skills or even a clear understating of their experiences while in combat, which offered additional obstacles during the transition process (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014). The matter of "independence" associated with civilian life was often described as confusing, mostly when no set priority or reporting structure resembled that of the military (Baxter & Magolda, 2001).

Military enrollment, unsurprisingly, shaped the identity of student veterans and directly impacted facets of life for those who entered higher education (Bauman, 2009; Livingston, 2009). Concerning student identity, DiRamio (2008) noted that some military service members desired to find a comfortable niche during reintegration, which

limited their military experience disclosure, mainly if there was a prominent presence of a mental or physical disability. Student military veterans expressed difficulty finding a balance between their military identity and civilian identity (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Reported challenges with balance were common with veterans and service members who transitioned from military life to civilian life. For example, they noted that their previous identity was often confronted by new situations, relationships, social norms, and understanding of the meaning of new conditions (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Veteran-focused research must consider the variance of identity when assessing the transition and reintegration process as it may influence attitudes and outcomes regarding health behaviors and support (Hack, DeForge, & Lucksted, 2017). Military personnel experienced social and political environments with a narrower focus than the civilian population, further contributing to a conflict of identity in educational settings (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011).

Despite the data provided to guide learning outcomes, recommendations, and interventions to support student veterans, the information did not always differentiate the impact of mental health concerns, disabilities, racial and ethnic minorities, women, and the LGBT community (Iverson & Anderson, 2013). Researchers have highlighted the many dimensions and experiences of life for non-white male service members in further studies (Iverson & Anderson, 2013). The complexity of military identity requires consideration because of the unique responses of every individual. In contrast, it is necessary to note that military veterans who had positive reactions to the utilization of services and the transition process to education were reported by those who did not experience traumatic events, distress, injury, or disorder (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011).

Veterans in this category expressed appreciation for training and learning during their military experience (Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015). Service work and deployment, for many, were rewarding, fast-paced, educational, and an opportunity for amplified development (Hassan, Jackson, Lindsay, McCabe, & Sanders III, 2010). The rigor of military work has created a sense of integrity and pride for service members because of the opportunity for team building, discipline, and technical training that can easily translate into civilian life (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Hassan et al. (2010) defined military veterans as insightful, resilient, self-confident, and unique because of their endurance. Their research further expounded on the broad scope of technical skills developed, including critical thinking skills, leadership, decision-making, mastery of foreign language, life-saving medical measures, technology, diplomacy, engineering, and highly technical management in times of conflict (Hassan et al., 2010).

Transitioning Home while Adapting to Redefined Roles

The presence of armed forces has decreased in foreign combat zones, which has increased veteran reintegration in the United States (Ahern, Worthen, Masters, Lippman, Ozer, & Moos, 2015). Returning home from the military was compared to leaving the priesthood as it involved reconceptualizing ingrained roles and beliefs (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Reintegration from active duty and multiple deployments was a significant challenge for veterans searching for strategies to find a new standard, sense of validation, and stability (Jones, 2013; Ahern et al., 2015). Military veterans often referenced civilian life as being "normal" compared to their roles and experiences during deployment, thereby triggering feelings of alienation and isolation (Ahern et al., 2015; Elnitsky & Kilmer, 2017). Further, veterans felt disconnected from family and friends,

unsupported by institutions or service providers, lacked structure in life, and a lost sense of purpose (Ahern et al., 2015; Elnitsky & Kilmer, 2017). Recently returned veterans explained feelings of no longer contributing to a more significant effort or common goal (Ahern et al., 2015). Finally, the lack of meaning intensified when finding employment or opportunities related to their skillset had diminished (Ahern et al., 2015).

The armed forces draft in the United States was eliminated after the Vietnam War in 1973, and subsequently enacted a volunteer military comprised of men and women willing to defend homeland efforts and combat the plight of terrorism (Taylor, Miller, Tallapragada, & Vogel, 2020). Men and women who entered the military found a place that allowed educational and economic gain, personal freedoms, and patriotic service (Taylor et al., 2020). Still, upon exiting, they often faced considerable challenges when returning to civilian life (Taylor et al., 2020). The elimination of the draft contributed to Americans becoming more detached from military issues and has led to a lack of understanding regarding war and deployment experiences (Demers, 2011). That lack of knowledge and national agreement supporting military efforts prevented validation, further complicated transition, and reintegration experiences (Demers, 2011; Doyle & Peterson, 2005). Those who do not have shared combat experience do not truly understand veterans' positions and often diminish their work by referencing stereotypes, asking inappropriate questions, or imposing unrelated incidents to relate ineffectually (Ahern et al., 2015).

Upon exit from the military, service members experienced a process defined as role exit explained by a simultaneous disengagement from military identity and an adaptation to a civilian identity. Both are deeply rooted in expectation, responsibility, and

self-concept (Naphan & Elliot, 2015). The military is hierarchal and includes following orders and making decisions based on survival and group operation (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Upon entering civilian life, veterans must quickly learn self-regulation, adapt to contrasting environments, and relate to new civilian counterparts (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). The military structure is a critical component in successful decision-making because it provides control in combat zones and a framework for excelling, arguably, which helps in the classroom but not with consistent enrollment (Ahern et al., 2015). Veterans described a need for structure and noticed a stark contrast in civilian life that disrupted the clarity and simplicity of living in a military environment, contributing to increased stress levels (Ahern et al., 2015). Particularly with the exit from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, the focus has encouraged healthy transition and research as revisited by the Schuetz Homecoming Theory of 1945 (Ahern et al., 2015). This theory indicated the separation of service members and their home social network and a recurring sense of unfamiliarity between both parties (Ahern et al., 2015). The separation from the family had consequences on mental health during enlistment in the military and reintegration after separation from the military (Milliken, Auchterlonie, & Hoge, 2007; Taylor et al., 2020). Related studies found that many veterans who showed no signs of mental health disorder immediately after returning were later diagnosed with a mental ailment upon reevaluation months later (Milliken, Auchterlonie, & Hoge, 2007). Additionally, there was evidence that veterans who experienced complications in the reintegration process faced an increased risk of long-term issues that included homelessness and higher rates of early mortality, indicating that transition and reintegration have effects that should be

studied longitudinally (Mares & Rosenheck, 2004; Schinka, Schinka, Casey, Kasprow, & Bossarte, 2012).

Higher education has an essential role in community reintegration as military personnel use knowledge as a common pathway for access to stability and career development, community life, productivity, and building social relationships at a satisfactory level (Resnik, Bradford, Glynn, Jette, Hernandez, & Wills, 2012; Hammond, 2017; Rattray, Natividad, Frankel, True, Salyers, & Kukla, 2019). Studies on adapting to civilian life and the reintegration process often highlighted the importance of increasing knowledge, sharpening skills, connecting with new networks, and preparing for the workforce (Jones, 2013). However, several questions exist on the impact of higher education on military veterans' persistence, the advantage of education over going directly to work, identity development, and the effects on multiple deployments (Jones, 2013). Nevertheless, evidence suggested that veterans' degree completion was linked to increased employment opportunities and further education (Tamborini, Kim, & Sakamoto, 2015).

Navigating Postsecondary Education, Challenges, and Access

Veteran students experienced risk factors for stopping out or dropping out at six times higher than traditional students at four-year institutions (Ackerman & DiRamio, 2009; Wheeler, 2012). For example, they reported situations during the matriculation process that were often described as stressful and challenging to navigate (Ackerman & DiRamio, 2009; Wheeler, 2012). Additionally, reports on military veterans enrolled in higher education indicated that 14 to 19 percent who deployed more than once had at

least one or a combination of recorded mental or physical disabilities (The Department of Defense, 2009). In particular, there were estimates that nearly 15,000 military service personnel had a dependency on drugs, alcohol, and other substances (Calhoun, 2008; The Department of Defense, 2009). The United States Government Accountability Office (2013) confirmed that the level of academic achievement and persistence for student military veterans or military-connected students was unclear. Despite the uncertainty, degree completion for military veterans was approximately the same as their non-military counterparts (Cate, 2014). Durdella and Kim (2012) explored the impact of grade point average on military veterans at selective and highly selective institutions. They concluded that the grade point average was lower than non-military students at the same institutions. While military students earned lower grades, they did have higher academic preparation levels, classroom participation, interaction, and time management skills related to their military training. They contributed the lower grade point average to family responsibilities, full-time or part-time employment, and commonalities with other nontraditional students (Durdella & Kim, 2012). Classroom environments that encourage critical thinking, self-direction, and academic challenges may cause a culture shock to military personnel accustomed to taking orders and adhering to chain of command guidelines (De Sawal, 2013; Rumann, 2010). Student military veterans are undoubtedly capable of critical thinking. Still, they trained to follow strict orders due to military socialization and survival during conflicts, suggesting that faculty should consider varied student military backgrounds during class and curriculum preparation (Rumann, 2010). The added function of military consideration could shape academic success for military students (Rumann, 2010).

Military veterans are, by nature, identified as nontraditional students (Evans, Pellegrino, & Hoggan, 2015). They are diverse subpopulations that may require varying levels of support, validation, specific degree programs, and college context to support persistence and retention efforts (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014). Veterans are often older than traditional college students, have previously completed college coursework, and generally have enrolled in college to enhance skills to gain employment after completing their military experience (O'Herrin, 2011; Radford, 2009). Some veteran populations were perceived as ill-prepared for collegiate studies and student life because of reported stress, injury, and cognitive disorder (DiRamio & Spires, 2009). Conversely, however, the literature defined military veterans as autonomous, proficient, professional, and generally more prepared than their counterparts in the classroom (Livingston, Havice, Cawthon, & Fleming, 2011; Osborne, 2014).

A myriad of definitions explained adult learners or nontraditional students that included the student's age—those who were twenty-four years or older, life responsibilities—connection to home-based communities and families, and roles within work communities (Chaves, 2006). More specifically, nontraditional students have experienced the reality of job loss, military service, those who have recently completed a General Education Development (GED) certificate, and those with a lack of experience related to higher education (Kenner & Weinerman, 2011; Chaves, 2006). To their advantage, nontraditional students, including military veterans, have been identified as being goal-oriented, motivated, and more focused than their traditional-aged counterparts (Kenner & Weinerman, 2011). Returning military veterans also possessed skills and higher maturity levels that extended into classroom discussion and understanding of

topics related to current affairs, specific work duties, and heightened worldview (Byman, 2007). The literature contributing to the more profound knowledge of the adult learner or nontraditional student highlighted the factors that underwrite student success, a sense of belonging, making connections, and navigating the collegiate experiences lacking in the student veteran reintegration experience (Kenner & Weinerman, 2011).

Response to Increasing Access to Education for Student Veterans

Many intuitions have committed to making recommendations to help student veterans, implementing high-impact programs to support transition and success (Ackerman & DiRamio, 2009). For instance, colleges and universities have adopted the term *veteran-friendly* to strategically work with students to remove barriers and support educational goals while recognizing the presence of mental and physical concerns (Lokken, Pfeffer, & Strong, 2009). Institutions with this designation aimed to streamline the transition process while creating environments that support veterans' needs and develop a sense of community (Ackerman & DiRamio, 2009). To maintain veteran-friendly environments, institutions have implemented staffing and financial support to effectively create space, financial aid, tutoring, academic advising, and other wraparound services for mental and physical health students (Lokken et al., 2009). Further, college and university administrations have partnered with academic and student affairs divisions to create a more direct and meaningful connection with students from enrollment through transfer or graduation (Ford, Northrup, & Wiley, 2009; Jackson, Fey, & Ross, 2013). Moreover, these collaborative efforts worked to remove duplication of services, programs, and course offerings, where the collaborations directly coincided with strategic initiatives and allocation of resources (Hamrick & Rumann, 2013; Jackson, Fey, & Ross,

2013). While institutions have taken great strides to increase services, student veterans sometimes do not disclose their disabilities to the institution, which further exacerbates veteran-friendly environments' effectiveness.

Colleges and universities took steps to assess the number of military students on campus and recognized the need for accurate student information to create and connect student resources while improving existing resources (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014; Cook & Kim, 2009). Institutions have identified primary areas that serve student veterans, including campus departments, dedicated student fees, state and federal funding, partnerships, and gifts (Vance & Miller, 2010). Varieties of partnerships and resource allocation are necessary because student veterans do not comprise a single demographic, lending opportunities for combinations of tailored services (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014). Generally, while some veterans may need more assistance than others, once veterans feel validated in a class, degree program, college context, or community member, any veteran's natural talents will sustain them through to degree completion (Vacchi, 2014).

Bailey and Alfonso (2005) reviewed institution practices with increased persistence and completion rates regarding community college. They recognized academic advising, counseling, mentoring, orientation, learning communities, and developmental education as valuable when considering effective practice (Bailey & Alfonso, 2005). Several studies commissioned by the Association of American Colleges and Universities and the Center for Community College Student Engagement on active persistence and retention efforts expanded the body of literature by separating two-year and four-year students (Brownell & Swaner, 2009). Evidence in the literature highlighted the value of experiential learning, learning communities, and first-year experiences for

students at two-year and four-year institutions (Brownell & Swaner, 2009). These studies included interventions and analysis of program offerings, policies, and processes connected to student military veterans. They found that community colleges developed innovative practices with learning communities, student success courses, first-year experiences, and supplemental instruction as noted efforts to support student success, persistence, and retention rates (Crisp & Taggart, 2013; Hatch, 2016). The Center for Community College Student Engagement recognized that the literature was specific to particular campuses and developed a series of reports that expanded the focus to larger populations for continued research on primary functional areas, including planning for success, initiating success, and sustaining success (Hatch, 2016).

Student affairs practitioners, specifically in the community college, have encountered challenges and opportunities related to a shift in mission, an influx of military veterans international students, and a widening scope that supports a holistic approach to student support that includes increasing online access, college orientation programs, and enhancements to streamline the registration process (Kisker, 2015; Kratochvil, 2014). This scope and need for intervention with students require a balance between practice and theory (Kenner & Weinerman, 2011). For example, as postsecondary institutions identify student veterans' needs and characteristics, a connection with appropriate resources becomes essential. Minnis, Bondi, and Rumann (2013) clarified further that military student programs should consider the size and type of population when planning; for example, part-time commuter students could benefit from a welcome meeting, and full-time residential students could benefit from an orientation program. These flexible approaches still support partnerships and resources

while respecting the background of the student population (Minnis, Bondi, & Rumann, 2013).

Hamrick and Rumann (2013) explained the context for initiating social interactions with faculty and campus partners. They noted that the expansion of resources, connection with faculty, peers, and community development contributed to increased learning and academic success (Hamrick & Rumann, 2013; Minnis, Bondi, & Rumann, 2013). Non-military students, faculty, and staff may be familiar with media reports and anecdotal information on military experience or may even personally know a veteran but are not able to truly understand the complicated and very personal issues in the transition from military to civilian life, especially in an educational setting which contributes to a decreased connection with faculty and community reintegration opportunities (Hoge, Auchterlonie, & Milliken, 2006; Hosek, Kavanagh & Miller, 2006; Stringer, 2007).

The American Council on Education evaluated coursework, military experience, and preparation that provided successful transfer recommendations (McBain, Kim, Cook, & Sneed, 2012). Students have found difficulty transferring credit to and between institutions because of varied guidelines and course credit applications (Boerner, 2013). While the institution may take the credit for transfer, the hours are often applied as individual transfer credits or electives (Boerner, 2013). DiRamio (2008) found that while military students could transfer credit, the application process and documentation of credits were vague and confusing; 83 percent of institutions awarded credit for military experience, and 63 percent honored or applied credit for professional experience (McBain et al., 2012). Further, it was explained that students who have transferred credit found

the process cumbersome, resulting in retaking classes or losing credit hours (Williams, 2013; Williams-Klotz & Gansermer-Topf, 2017). DiRamio (2008) and Boerner (2012) explained that students who work more closely with faculty for preparation experienced smoother transfer and felt more motivated to persist at the institution.

Recognizing student military veterans' wide-ranging experiences, colleges and universities have created initiatives to increase student engagement through professional development, campus and statewide discussions, and strategic planning (Cook & Kim, 2009; O'Herrin, 2011). The American Council on Education provided recommendations to campus leadership that included increasing contact with military veteran students, streamlining communication, intentional involvement with surrounding communities, and veteran-specific communities on campus (O'Herrin, 2011). Student veteran organizations at community colleges and four-year institutions worked with student groups to help them achieve academic goals and influence their adjustments in culture and climate (Summerlot, Green, & Parker, 2009). Veteran student organizations at many institutions offered a familiar atmosphere that provided social outlets, group comradery, orientation to the institution, and informational discourse (Summerlot, Green, & Parker, 2009). The University of Pittsburgh, for example, has a large nontraditional and veteran student population that uses Veterans' Club membership to introduce and expose students to professional, academic, and community-based opportunities (Ackerman & DiRamio, 2009). Like many, this organization provided a positive extracurricular experience for veteran students (Ackerman & DiRamio, 2009).

Mentoring is a component of student veteran programs and classroom experiences that leads to student success (Ackerman & DiRamio, 2009). According to Ackerman and

DiRamio (2009), veterans programs have a dual function that gives direct support to students in transition and works in conjunction with early alert programs that provide additional support when students are in need. Beyond campus involvement and classroom experiences, student veteran programs have been encouraged to increase civic and political engagement and partner with agencies to support students' mental and physical health (Graf, Ysasi, & Marini, 2015). For example, the Student Veterans of America began working with student groups nationally to provide education on using benefits, connecting with academic support, and clarifying political knowledge regarding the Post-9/11 GI Bill (Saxe, Janson, Dennehy, Stringari, Murray, Hirsch, & Waters, 2007). Campus resources and support were indicators of the success of student veteran organizations. According to Summerlot, Green, and Parker (2009), the programs' success depended on administrative support, adequate marketing, designated space, and formal recognition from the institution.

Student veteran programs and support systems across the country are varied and diverse, considering the campus, climate, and student demographics. Hamrick and Rumann (2013) noted that while diversities exist between programs and initiatives, they often work toward a common goal to align with college and university stakeholders to address student needs and provide an outlet for successful student matriculation. These organizations influence learning, involvement, goal attainment, and persistence (Hamrick & Rumann, 2013). Studies that addressed the balancing act of theory and practice understood that many of the best-known and most-used approaches are not appropriate to thoroughly understand student military veterans' needs and attitudes. The theories that informed community college research were skewed towards students who were

traditionally aged, residential, full-time, white, male, upper-middle-class, and high school graduates (Kenner & Weinerman, 2011). Further, the studies did not address the student perception of college services and programs. However, the research and application laid the foundation for critical analysis and theory development later in the text.

Understanding Veterans with Psychological and Physical Disabilities and Barriers

There are approximately 2.6 to 3.5 million Post-9/11 military veterans in the United States. Many veterans do not experience ongoing adjustment or reintegration complications; however, a substantial minority struggle with reintegration tremendously impacts the burden on veterans, support systems, community support, and healthcare (Morgan et al., 2020; National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2016). The reintegration experiences of Post-9/11 veterans appear to be impacted by a variety of factors operating at different levels that include personal, interpersonal, community, and societal factors that vary per person (Elnitsky et al., 2017). The Iraq and Afghanistan wars have caused various health challenges. Due to innovations in protective gear and medical advances, there were fewer casualties but higher rates of prolonged mental and physical conditions (Aikins, Golub, & Bennett, 2015).

Some of the common challenges experienced by Post-9/11 veterans are housed within the compartments of vocation, employment, education, legal matters, financial burden, housing disparity, health needs, and social relationships (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2016; Tsai, El-Gabalawy, et al., 2015; Morgan et al., 2020). Nearly one-third of veterans live with physical health problems due to combat, such as brain or musculoskeletal injuries, burns, or loss of limbs (Ainspan, Penk, and

Kearney, 2018). Common mental health problems include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and suicidal ideation compounded by difficulties in making connections in the civilian world (Drebing et al., 2018). Presently, between 15 and 23 percent of veterans were diagnosed with PTSD symptoms, 18.5 percent experienced significant depression, and 19.5 percent reported traumatic brain injury (Donnelly, Donnelly, & Dunnam, 2011; Bray, 2009; Barry, 2014). Among those with mental and physical conditions, nearly 30 percent of veterans have died due to lethal drug overdose, and 46 percent experienced suicidal ideation. Of that group, almost 82 percent had significant PTSD symptoms (Rudd, Goulding, and Bryant, 2011; Chiarelli, 2010). Consequently, nearly 58 percent of Post-9/11 veterans received disability benefits for a service-related injury or condition, with post-traumatic stress disorder being the most common (Sayer, Carlson, & Grazier, 2014; Rattray et al., 2019). The United States Department of Defense and Veterans Affairs has allocated over $6 billion to treat and comprehend the scope of PTSD, traumatic brain injury, and the numerous health concerns related to service and war-related injury (Congressional Budget Office, 2012; Aikins, Golub, & Bennett, 2015). Considering the thousands of service members who have endured injury in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and the significant resource investment in education benefits, understanding the barriers and facilitators to effectively obtaining an education is vital (McCaslin, Thiede, Vinatieri, Passi, Bull, Ahern, Armstrong, & Chitaphong, 2014; Norman, Rosen, Himmerich, Myers, Davis, Browne, & Piland, 2015; Rattray et al., 2019). The following section will detail some common representations of combat injuries that impact veterans and reintegration outcomes.

Complications with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Post-traumatic stress for military veterans is associated with several factors, including combat experience, deployment duration, perceived social support, and family history of mental illness (Riggs & Sermanian, 2012; Borowa, Robitschek, Harmon, & Shigemoto, 2016). Post-traumatic Stress Disorder is differentiated from other mental disorders because of the importance placed on the initial stressor instead of the manifested symptom (Friedman, 2011). Individuals cannot be diagnosed with PTSD unless they have experienced a traumatic historical event, which rings especially true for service members who were ambushed, seen combat remains, experienced combat tactics, or been seriously injured (Barry, Whiteman, & MacDermid, 2012). Findings revealed that student military veterans who experienced combat had significantly greater symptoms than military veterans who did not experience battle and civilian students (Barry, Whiteman, & MacDermid, 2012). Symptoms related to deployment are vast and generally grouped into physical (trouble sleeping, headaches, difficulty breathing, rapid heart rate, and loss of appetite), emotional (night terrors, flashbacks, anger management issues, fear, bleak mindset, and anxiety), and behavioral responses (strain with concentrating, jumpiness, abuse of alcohol, and other drugs) (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2011). Alcohol abuse and self-medication are leading consequences of PTSD symptoms in military veterans (Barry, Whiteman, & MacDermid, 2012). While alcohol abuse and self-medication are not direct symptoms of PTSD, there were simultaneous incidences as veterans attempted to cope with combat experiences and injury (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2011). Understanding and recognizing students' nuances with PTSD is paramount for college counselors and mental

health professionals to ensure proper screening and intervention (Kahler, Strong, & Read, 2005).

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms were associated with lower grade point average, diminished motivation, and lower persistence (Barry, Whiteman, & MacDermid, 2012). Reactions to PTSD presented challenges for student military veterans and impaired performance, particularly on standardized tests and certain on-campus or classroom experiences that may have compounded stressors that impede academic function (Barry, Whiteman, & MacDermid, 2012). Related studies corroborated the wide range of concerns related to students with PTSD symptoms noting that difficulty sleeping and anxiety were significant (O'Connor, Graham, Herbst, Leach, Armstrong, Jersky, & McCaslin, 2018). Among other stressors, the college environment posed concerns for many respondents, noting that they required support with understanding finances and strategies to manage stressors (O'Connor et al., 2018).

Overall, studies suggested that student military veterans with one or a combination of service-related injuries expressed some level of difficulty with reintegration (Rattray et al., 2019). For example, veterans with various post-traumatic stress disorders and traumatic brain injuries were more likely to face more severe symptoms than veterans with PTSD alone (Barnes, Walter, & Chard, 2012). The most common themes for servicemembers with physical or mental injury were maneuvering institution-related obstacles (Rattray et al., 2019). Determining eligibility for benefits, opportunities, and mechanisms for taking care of primary health needs, establishing a balance between education and redefined family responsibility, and developing or maintaining a sense of self as a civilian person were hindering military veterans' success

(Rattray et al., 2019). These challenges may have contributed to prolonged time toward degree completion, lower persistence rates, or an uncertain outlook on career goals (Barry, Whiteman, & MacDermid, 2014; Sayer, Frazier, Orazem, Murdoch, Gravely, Carlson, Hintz, & Noorbaloochi, 2011; McCaslin et al., 2014).

Persistence and the Impact on Student Military Veterans

This section will explore the literature on persistence related to student military, nontraditional, and community college students. While scant research investigating veteran persistence in community college (Bailey & Alfonso, 2005), this section will highlight traditional and recent models focused on community college students.

The national attrition rate for American colleges and universities has held constant at approximately 50 percent for decades, where notably, community colleges experienced higher rates than four-year institutions (Bradburn, 2002; Nakajima, Dembo, & Mossler, 2012; Pravasnik & Planty, 2008; Summers, 2003; Tinto, 1982). Delayed enrollment, part-time status, full-time employment, financial responsibility, dependents, single parenting, and not completing high school are primary factors in the risk for non-persistence (Horn & Premo, 1995). Students who possessed the highest risk factors for attrition attended community college at higher rates than traditional and nontraditional students attending four-year institutions (Barr, 2007; Horn & Berger, 2004). While the persistence rates have remained constant, there is an increasing concern as enrollment rates decline nationally (Braxton, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). In contrast, supporting studies from Barr (2007) and Horn and Berger (2004) noted that the first-year

experience was significant in determining completion. As a result, students generally decide to stop out or drop out after the first year of college.

Foundational Studies Connecting Student Military Persistence

While developed for students attending four-year institutions, three principal attrition models laid the foundation for studies applied to community college (Summers, 2003). Spady (1971) and Tinto (1975) studied traditional college students attending four-year residential campuses, and Bean and Metzner (1987) developed a model that applied to nontraditional students. Several studies have tested these foundational models to better understand student persistence and attrition in postsecondary education and further indicated that a singular student attrition model is insufficient (Baily & Alfonso, 2005).

Veterans enrolled in postsecondary institutions are equipped with unique skills and experiences; however, studies showed several special needs shaped their transition experience (Cervero & Wilson, 2006). Additionally, special needs, including PTSD, physical disability, academic challenges, wavering support, increased attrition (Cervero & Wilson, 2006). Researchers and higher education professionals agreed that student veterans, being nontraditional and possessing physical and mental challenges, were more at-risk than representative college and university students (Chappell, 2010). O'Herrin (2011) noted that while student veterans were at-risk, few formal assessments tracked completion or retention rates in postsecondary education, specifically regarding veterans. Considering external environmental factors, social support for college students and student military veterans has demonstrated significance for adjustment and connection with student persistence (Astin, 1993; Dennis, Phinney, & Chuatteco, 2005). In terms of intimate partnerships, family relationships, peers, friends, and connections with the

college community, social support was essential for student military veterans (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Social support is also associated with college students' mental health, particularly with student military veterans (Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009). Hefner and Eisenberg (2009) noted that students were at greater risk for feelings of isolation if they possessed attributes that distinguished them from the larger student population. Additionally, lower social support levels contributed to mental health problems and lower academic success (Kessler, Sonnega, Bromet, & Nelson et al., 1995). While research has revealed the significance of social support in student persistence, there is a gap in quantitative studies and studies in the category of community college (Whiteman, Barry, Mroczek, & Wadsworth, 2013).

Existing policy and practice are not universally standardized, making data collection and benchmarking virtually impossible (Mikelson & Saunders, 2013). Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) persistence tracking does not always apply to nontraditional students or student veterans. It was intended to collect data on first-time, full-time students (Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges, 2012). The influx of military veterans receiving Post-9/11 benefits warranted an increased interest and need for learning outcomes and understanding of experiences; however, the national databases on student veterans lacked accurate counts and provided limited information (Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges, 2012). Radford, Berkner, Wheeless, & Shephard (2010) developed a detailed report for the US Department of Education that provided a profile of student military veterans enrolled in postsecondary institutions. This report's data collection was conducted before the New GI Bill and did not

specifically focus on persistence at the community college level (Lang & Powers, 2011; O'Herrin, 2011).

Since the enactment of the Post-9/11 GI Bill and President Obama's executive order mandating outcomes from institutions receiving federal benefits, several national studies have focused on student persistence for student military veterans (Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges, 2012; The White House, 2012). Cook and Kim (2009) and McBain et al. (2012) collected data on behalf of the American Council on Education to gauge the enrollment influx and institutional preparedness level following the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Their research was a collaborative effort that assessed policy, programs, and services for student military veterans at two-year and four-year institutions (Cook & Kim, 2009; McBain et al., 2012). Further, their foundational work created a path for two-year institutions to include veterans programs and support into their strategic plans, resulting in increased faculty and staff support, training, increased budgets for veterans departments, and increased professional development (Cook & Kim, 2009; McBain et al., 2012).

The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (2013) revealed that approximately 75 percent of represented public two-year institutions employed departments and staff dedicated to student military veterans, veterans' needs, and student success. However, of this population, reports showed that only 25 percent of programs and initiatives collected data on retention and completion rates to demonstrate their programs' effectiveness (NASPA, 2013). This study indicated the need to enhance the research necessary to support implementing veteran's centers, increasing financial resources, and data-driven policy (NASPA, 2013). The Million Records Project (Cate,

2014) was a national study that increased student veterans' accurate postsecondary education data. The MRP was a cooperative between Student Veterans of America, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the National Student Clearinghouse that focused on completion rates, degree or certificate goals, education level, and time to completion (Cate, 2014). With positive results, the MRP reported that student military veterans achieved an associate degree within five years, and approximately 52 percent of student military veterans completed an associate degree (Cate, 2014). This study was more comprehensive and provided a more accurate benchmark for further research.

Utilization of College Services and Perceptions of Student Veterans

Gaps in the literature still exist about how the transition from active duty service to civilian life unfolds among Post-9/11 military veterans, particularly on program and support utilization (Morgan et al., 2020). Numerous programs exist to support veterans through transition experiences and strategies that support college retention; however, veterans reported difficulties accessing them, and many did not seek to use the programs (Morgan et al., 2020; Aronson et al., 2019). To address the frequency of low utilization of programs and services, military and civilian (i.e., college) programs employed mechanisms that may have helped reduce barriers to services (Morgan et al., 2020). Barrier reduction, as a practice, was aimed to align services with the needs of veterans and increase the reach of programs targeted at veteran support (Morgan et al., 2020). For example, programs that offered physical resources, financial assistance, more accessible access to education, and inherent motivation to obtain assistance while decreasing stigma were reported as favorable (Morgan et al., 2020). Examples of barriers to using services included the perception of not needing help, not identifying programs that sufficiently

met a need, not understanding how to qualify for benefits, and not knowing where to obtain support (Aronson et al., 2019).

Further, events or situations on campus could trigger memories related to combat; for example, veterans who tested positive for PTSD reported heightened stress in small offices or in crowded lines, which provoked anxiety (Medley, Cheney, Abraham, Grubbs, Hunt, Lu, Fortney, & Curran, 2017). Additionally, veterans reported non-use of services simply because of lacking awareness of college or community-based programs, thinking that services had to come from daunting processes under the Department of Veterans Affairs (Randall, 2012). In many instances, studies indicated that despite the availability of health services, student veterans were less likely to seek assistance from the VA or from veteran centers, which further exacerbates the need for heightened screening, outreach, and accessibility of services on and off-campus (Bonar, Bohnert, Walters, Ganoczy, and Valenstein, 2015).

Morgan et al. (2020) reported that program barrier reduction efforts and veteran perceptions did not align. For example, they highlighted that approximately 94 percent of programs in their study had available content online, which was offered to increase access; however, veterans did not mention this aspect as being used or helpful when achieving goals. Moreover, programs did not mention VA benefits assistance as a priority, while nearly 24 percent of veterans reported gaining assistance with VA benefits helped achieve educational goals. Finally, many barrier reduction efforts listed by programs were either not used or not seen as helpful by student veteran respondents. For instance, 16 percent of programs provided transportation, while 2.7 percent of veterans reported benefitting from this service (Morgan et al., 2020).

Similarly, despite approximately 15 percent of programs offering emergency funds for students, only five percent benefited from this offering. Finally, concerning misalignment, only 6.3 percent of programs highlighted the component of increased motivation for students, while 29.3 percent of veterans reported the usefulness of such features when seeking assistance from programs. Further, 17.5 percent of veterans reported benefitting from the increased motivation components in programs (Morgan et al., 2020). Further analysis also highlighted that veterans diagnosed with PTSD were 85 percent more likely to use programs that provided legal advice compared to those without PTSD, which increased the need for programs to align with the needs of veterans that may fall outside of the parameters of education assistance (Morgan et al., 2020).

Southwell, Whiteman, Wadsworth, and Barry (2018) used grounded research to assess university services' differences and the influence of key personnel on college student retention outcomes on student veterans. Recognizing student veterans as nontraditional students, Southwell et al. (2018) utilized Bean and Metzner's (1985) theories on student retention. They asserted that nontraditional students were less likely to participate in extracurricular activities, engage with faculty research, or participate in community service-related activities (Southwell et al., 2018). Further, compared to traditional students, nontraditional and veteran student populations were less likely to participate in orientation or university support services (Southwell et al., 2018). They argued that military service was an essential factor that should be considered when identifying reasons for student veteran attrition (Southwell et al., 2018). For example, student veterans perceived receiving less emotional support from their peers expressed difficulties navigating classroom and faculty interaction and dissatisfaction with local

campus veteran offices (Southwell et al., 2018). Such findings offered evidence that the possible dissatisfaction with experiences led to a lack of confidence in institutions' ability to attend to the unique needs and nuances of veteran experiences (Barry et al., 2014).

The Southwell et al. (2018) study first measured the frequency of visits to university personnel offices (specifically, academic advising, registrar, financial aid, or faculty), academic persistence, the expectation of completing a degree, and the university environment between student veterans and their traditional student counterparts. Considering the frequency of visits to personnel offices, they found that visits to the registrar's office, financial aid, and student clubs held no significant effects on interactions. Conversely, however, the frequency of visits to academic advising and faculty offices significantly affected student veterans even though non-military students visited both offices more frequently. Further, the study then considered the relationships between the frequency of visits and feeling supported as predictors of persistence. Regarding student expectations to complete a degree, they found significant effects on military status, where civilian students were more likely to expect to finish their degree despite interactions with academic advising (Southwell et al., 2018). For example, military students had positive interactions with academic advisors but still showed lower expectations of completing a degree (Southwell et al., 2018). Secondly, they found significant effects on the perception of feeling supported by the university environment, interactions with faculty, and student clubs rather than merely the number of visits with each group (Southwell et al., 2018).

Their findings further indicated differences between military and civilian students, which corroborated Bean and Metzner's results related to nontraditional students'

participation in the university environment (Southwell et al., 2018). This data was also consistent with the idea that traditional students utilized services at higher rates than nontraditional students (Wardley, Belanger, & Leonard, 2013). More specifically, a possible reason for the lower utilization of services for student veterans could emphasize that veterans have more restrictions on their time considering the myriad of work, family, and other external commitments (Southwell et al., 2018). Although this study did not find significance between student veteran visits to personal offices and persistence, they did note that effects were found for student expectation for degree completion and perceptions of university environment as significant. For example, student veterans with positive interactions with faculty and advising offices offered insight into the importance of quality of education rather than social engagement interactions (Southwell et al., 2018). Notably, these findings were consistent with assertions that academic environments influence nontraditional student commitments. In contrast, traditional students are influenced more by the social interactions of various university support services (Wardley et al., 2013).

Further considerations of this study measured the reported dissatisfaction with support offices' services about transferring military credit and understanding the GI Bill benefits asserting that student veterans who regularly visited these offices would show significance regarding retention and perceived environment (Southwell et al., 2018). However, the study found no significance between student veterans and civilian students regarding these factors, suggesting that these offices may not be as crucial in shaping veteran experiences (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009; Steele et al., 2011; Southwell et al.,

2018). Finally, this study noted that further research should focus on the reasons associated with lower utilization of services and student veterans (Southwell et al., 2018).

Theoretical Framework

This study's theoretical framework was derived from Bean and Metzner's (1985) theory on nontraditional undergraduate attrition, Rendón's (1994) validation theory, coupled with the benchmarking data from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE, 2020). This section described the theories and their relevance to student military veterans.

Bean and Metzner's Theory on Nontraditional Undergraduate Student Attrition

The early work of Metzner and Bean set a foundation for understanding persistence and attrition in higher education. While focused on traditional students, their early studies helped guide the research on nontraditional student persistence in postsecondary education. Metzner and Bean (1985) studied nontraditional first-year students at a commuter university. Compared with their traditional counterparts, Metzner and Bean (1985) noted a distinction between student groups in that nontraditional students were affected by external environmental factors and academic opportunities, then by social, environmental factors. Having utilized conclusions from their previous work, their model highlighted intent to leave and GPA and predictors of a student's decision to persist (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Metzner & Bean, 1987).

The Community College Retention Model validated Bean and Metzner's model to assess community college students (Stahl & Pavel, 1992). Focused on variables connected with student attrition and college persistence interventions, they measured

variables that included the use of academic advising, regularly attending classes, availability of courses, external encouragement, efficacy, goal attainment, and stress factors (Stahl & Pavel, 1992). This model, along with current data, illustrated the higher attrition rates for community college students than for students attending four-year institutions (Johnson, 1991; Provasnik & Planty, 2008; Sorey & Duggan, 2008; Tinto & Russo, 1994). Nearly 50 percent of community college students who entered the fall semester withdrew before the following fall semester (Schuetz, 2005). Further, approximately 46 percent of degree or certificate-seeking students enrolled in community college complete or transfer (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014; Radford, Berkner, Wheeless, & Shepherd, 2010). Community colleges in the United States enroll nearly 50 percent of all first-time degree-seeking students, granting access and opportunity to millions of students annually (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). While community colleges are vitally crucial to student development, job attainment, and community building, there is a gap in areas related to student persistence (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012).

Rendón's Theory of Validation

Rendón's validation theory was first introduced in 1994, focusing on low-income, first-generation students (Rendón, 1994). This theory offered insight into how students managed success in higher education by fostering personal development and social adjustment and validating students as respected members of the learning community (Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011). The original validation theory was framed by student involvement theory (Astin, 1985) and a literature review by Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) that revealed differences between low-income and wealthy students regarding

college involvement and affirmation from sources from within and outside of the college affecting the capacity to learn (Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011). Students reported feeling more motivated by encouragement from faculty, staff, and family members than by getting involved (Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011). Further, there were implications that validation impacted students who have experienced powerlessness, misgivings about succeeding, and absence of care, as data reflected increased confidence, motivation, and increased capacity to learn in instances where validating factors are present (Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011). Rendón (2002) applied the theory to nontraditional students stating that this group required direction and guidance with a nonpatronizing delivery. This theory suggested that students who encounter obstacles on college campuses would benefit from reassurance and confirmation from faculty, noting that while some students can overcome the barriers, the students at most risk would likely respond by leaving the institution (Rendón, 2002).

The validation theory had six principles that reflected the ongoing process of empowering, confirming, and supporting students (Rendón, 1994). First, the institution must initiate contact with students, particularly nontraditional students, as they may find it challenging to navigate the college environment (Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011). This first element was essential because nontraditional students (i.e., military veterans) were unlikely to have taken advantage of student support because of outside obligations and avoided appearing ill-prepared or lazy (Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011). The second and third factors coincided with student development theory; when validating factors are present, students feel a sense of self-worth, creating a higher potential to succeed and increasing confidence (Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011). Lastly, the three

remaining tenants of the validation theory explained the importance of continuous affirmation, support, and the impact of starting the process early (Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011). Students validated at the college commencement reported having a richer experience, positive interactions, and the aptitude for acquiring knowledge (Rendón, 1994). Validation theory has been applied to academic and interpersonal literature that provided frameworks for research on low-income, first-generation students of color, students in developmental education, immigrants, international students, and community college (Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011). The framework has been cited in each case when understanding underrepresented populations, at-risk students, and strategies for improving retention (Rendón, 2002; Rendón, 2009). Research enhancements suggest that most studies that applied validation theory are qualitative, leaving an opportunity to expand the theory's impact through quantitative measures (Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011).

The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE)

The Community College Survey of Student Engagement is an instrument that measures educational practices that led to student success in community college (Nora, Crisp, & Matthews, 2011). While designed specifically for community colleges, this instrument identified student engagement and academic experience areas that inform student achievement, satisfaction, persistence, and degree attainment (CCSSE, 2005; Kuh, 2007; Marti, 2009). Additionally, this survey data provided insight into how students used their time in academic environments (McClenny, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). For example, McClenny (2008) explained how and how often students interact with faculty, other professionals, and students connected to what was gained

from the college experience. This survey utilized theory on student satisfaction, student effort, involvement, and the "principle of good practice" for undergraduate students that informs accreditation assessment, financial decisions, and policy development (Nora et al., 2011).

The five benchmarks of effective practice in the CCSSE were the consistency of student engagement, level of student effort, degree of academic challenge, frequency of student-faculty interaction, and institutional support of learning (Nora et al., 2011). Using structural equation modeling, Schuetz (2008) explained that approximately 50 to 60 percent of the variance in a student's sense of belonging was in self-competence and sense of autonomy. Further studies cited that patterns of student grade point average, credit attainment, degree completion, the achievement of academic milestones, and fall-to-fall retention were statistically significant outcomes (McClenny & Marti, 2006; Nora et al., 2011). In alignment with current community college research, the CCSSE, while innovative, has not been thoroughly studied, thereby creating an opportunity for further institutional research (Nora et al., 2011).

Chapter Summary

This review of the literature provided insight into the bodies of research that inform this study. Community colleges are positioned to provide access to education, solutions for workforce needs, and successful reintegration for military populations. While enrolling nearly 50 percent of all first-time degree and certificate-seeking students and 43 percent of military veterans, community colleges reported high attrition and low graduation rates. Students with the highest risk factors for attrition attend community college at higher rates than traditional and nontraditional students attending four-year

institutions. While persistence rates have remained constant, there is an increasing concern as enrollment rates decline nationally. The focus of this review reported the information related to the substantial population of student military veterans impacted by physical or mental injury and its connection with successful enrollment in higher education.

Post-9/11 veterans enroll in colleges and universities in record numbers following the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The influx of veterans has heightened awareness and increased the responsibility to provide access; however, there was more attention to enrollment and less focus on this group's success and persistence. The significant challenges for student military veterans included sustainable access to housing, healthcare, community support, career opportunities, and information. Findings suggested that veterans' needs are well documented, but there are barriers to gaining access to the nearly 400,000 programs to support the reintegration experience. Veteran students are at risk of stopping out or dropping out of school at six times higher than traditional students. Recent studies suggested that academic achievement and persistence rates for student military veterans or military-connected students were unclear.

Further, findings indicated that many recommendations to support veteran success include environments that build a sense of respect and community. As a result, institutions have implemented high-impact practices, including wraparound services and policies that support students' mental and physical needs. However, the process for veterans living with physical and mental disabilities was daunting and overwhelming, leading to low utilization of established programs.

Veteran identity is a nuanced factor that is limited in research. The research suggested an absence of empirical data assessing mental stability, traumatic events, and reintegration. While identities vary, studies predicted that student veterans might experience conflicting identities when transitioning from military to civilian life while applying military ideals to curricular and co-curricular experiences. The literature on military students that guides learning outcomes and interventions did not always explore the impact of mental health concerns or disabilities. It is essential to note that interventions correlate with traumatic events, distress, injury, and medical conditions.

Studies recognized the utilization of academic advising, counseling, mentoring, orientation, learning communities, and developmental education as valuable factors when assessing effective practices to support increased persistence rates. Additionally, evidence suggested that experiential learning, learning communities, and purpose-based first-year experiences positively impacted military veterans' success rates. While diversities exist between programs and initiatives, they worked toward a common goal to align student needs with college communities to influence learning, involvement, goal attainment, and persistence. Early persistence models explored attrition factors for traditional students attending four-year institutions, suggesting that first-year experiences significantly determine completion. These first models laid the foundation for further research related to community college students. Moreover, delayed enrollment, part-time status, full-time employment, financial responsibility, having children, single parenting, and not completing high school are primary factors in heightened risk for attrition among community college students and common characteristics.

Research validated those veterans with physical and mental injury, being nontraditional students, were at greater risk than their college counterparts. Environmental factors and social support demonstrate significance for successful adjustment and connection with student persistence. Social support was associated with mental health. Lower levels of social support contribute to mental health issues and lower quality of academic success. While the literature on social support and student persistence expands, there is still a gap in quantitative studies on community college students. The findings highlighted the need for supportive services to integrate student veterans into campus communities and link them to mental healthcare resources, potentially improving academic success.

Chapter 3

Methodology

In this qualitative phenomenological study, I will examine the experiences of student military veterans with physical and mental health needs and their help-seeking behavior in a community college. Further, I posit that understanding student perceptions of college services will increase the information needed to expand resources, increase student engagement, and improve experiences that will ultimately lead to increased persistence. This chapter will include the rationale of phenomenological design, study setting, sampling procedures, participants, explanation of data collection, analysis, measures to ensure credibility, trustworthiness, ethical practice, and navigating potential risks during the study. A phenomenological approach will allow me to understand the collective lived experiences of veterans and analyze those experiences in terms of how they interpret their experiences and make meaning of the college environment (Merriam, 2009).

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this study:

1. What are military veterans' perceptions and lived experiences with mental and physical health needs regarding seeking help and utilizing college services?
2. How do military veterans with physical and mental health needs perceive their transition experiences from the military to the community college?

Research Design and Rationale

In the proposed study, I will utilize a qualitative phenomenological methodology. Traditional qualitative research addresses issues using five approaches, including narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In each case, qualitative research aims to understand and represent the world through interviews, field notes, recordings, photographs, and observations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Second, narrative research explores individual lived experiences through the lens of unique stories. Third, grounded Theory seeks to develop a theory based on the views and responses of participants and field notes. Fourth, ethnographies describe and understand culture through the shared patterns of cultural groups. Fifth, case studies explain and describe certain cases or multiple cases (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Finally, phenomenological studies seek to understand the essence of the lived experiences of a group that has experienced a particular phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Although existing qualitative research has presented some insight into the experiences, interactions, and needs of student military veterans, empirical research is currently scarce (DiRamio et al., 2008; Rumann & Hamrick, 2009; Southwell et al., 2018). Support for student military veterans within higher education is not well understood despite the high levels of enrollment in colleges and universities (Molina & Morse, 2015). Further, current studies have been criticized for being siloed in nature and approach (Vogt et al., 2018). Veteran studies have been conducted by investigators from a single organization and have focused on the specific concerns of the funding source and not the concerns of the veteran student (Vogt et al., 2018). For example, Veterans Affairs has often conducted narrowly focused research and excludes the interests or

circumstances of other stakeholders (Vogt et al., 2018). In addition, recent literature reviews on post-9/11 veterans have identified a lack of research on veterans' transitions experiences related to well-being, adjustment, social connections, employment, and education (Vogt et al., 2018; Mattox & Pollard, 2016; Aslan et al., 2013; Seal et al., 2014). Finally, despite the documented needs of student military veterans and the variety of programs, there is limited research on why many veterans do not seek to utilize the programs and services offered (Morgan et al., 2020).

A phenomenological approach will create an opportunity to understand the lived experiences of student military veterans at the community college level (Silverman, 2013; Yates & Leggett, 2016). Specifically, phenomenological research answers how and why questions associated with the lived experiences within the parameters of a particular phenomenon (Merriam, 2009; Yilmaz, 2013). For example, phenomenological methods are used to explore the in-depth lived experiences of the individual who lived or witnessed a specific occurrence (Yilmaz, 2013). Unlike a quantitative research approach, qualitative methods intend that the researcher is the research instrument used to conduct face-to-face interviews or observations of the participants in the study (Yilmaz, 2013). Because the researcher serves as the key instrument, data collection is performed by means and usage of documents, observation of participant behavior, and first-hand accounts of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I will collect data employing in-depth interviews specifically on the lived experiences and influences that direct the lives of student veterans (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The usage of emergent design allows for changes and shifts during the data collection process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Further, the characteristics of this design

remind the researcher that the data informs the process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, data collection does not focus on numeric values but will consist of a detailed and extensive description of research observations and lived experiences. Further, this type of research will implore the researcher to reflect and analyze to discover the in-depth meaning of the detailed experiences of student military veterans (Parker, 2018).

Although quantitative methods are applied to describe social, practical, and visual concepts, this approach is not appropriate for this study because the research does not seek to understand or explain the relationships between variables, cause-and-effect outcomes, or a causal nexus (Barnham, 2015). Instead, quantitative researchers aim to investigate relationships through statistical analysis, where most research is conducted under controlled conditions (Yin, 2016). Additionally, data collected on the lived experiences of student military veterans and their perceptions of help-seeking, programs, and services cannot be analyzed using statistical methods. Thus, utilizing a qualitative phenomenological approach will create an opportunity to understand better the essence and variation within a lived experience (Merriam, 2009).

Methodology

Site Location

The college of study is located in a metropolitan area within the Midwestern region and enrolls students from urban, suburban, and rural demographics. The college district has four campuses, two education centers, and two training sites. During the data collection process, some information will be altered to ensure the confidentiality of the students and the institution. For example, all participants will use pseudonyms; faculty

and staff names will not be included during reporting, and the exact campus location will not be defined.

The institution has the following generalized demographic data: (a) an approximate headcount of 14,000 students enrolled in non-degree-seeking, degree-seeking, certificate, and continuing education programs; (b) approximately 90% of students are classified as in-district residents and pay in-district tuition rates; (c) approximately 50% of the student population identified as Black, Hispanic, Asian, American Native, Pacific Islander, or two or more races; (d) nearly 50% of the student population receives financial aid, including 28% who are Pell-eligible and 5% who have student loans; (e) approximately 550 students identified as active duty military or veteran.

Population Sampling and Recruitment Strategy

Data will be collected prospectively from currently enrolled student military veterans. In addition, I will work with the Director of Veterans Affairs at the college to recruit student participants through email communication, digital and paper flyers, and announcements through the Veterans Club. Additional recruitment methods may include tabling and participation in Veterans Club meetings or events. I have received verbal consent from the Veterans Affairs Office at the college and have been approved to recruit students for interviews. Written permission will be established before student recruitment begins.

Using purposive sampling, students that meet the following criteria will be included in the study:

- All the respondents are active-duty military or of veteran status

- The respondents are currently enrolled in a credit-bearing course (degree-seeking or non-degree-seeking)
- All respondents are willing to discuss student experience in an interview or focus group
- Prepared to complete any necessary forms or questionaries
- At least 18 years or older
- Willing to participate in a virtual or in-person platform during data collection

Volunteer participants will be selected using purposive convenience sampling and will be eligible to participate regardless of age, ethnic background, sex, and general state of mental or physical health.

I will interview a maximum of eight participants, including in-depth interviews and follow-up questions. The unit of analysis for this study will be the individual student. This study will use the recommended data collection method of sampling between three and ten individuals to analyze emergent themes (Creswell & Poth. 2018). While the goal is to reach data saturation with eight participants, it may not be achieved with eight; therefore, I will interview more to ensure data saturation is reached. Before data collection, I will secure all approvals from the Institutional Review Board, the community college district, Director of Veterans Affairs at the college of study, and college administration. Finally, due to interviews with student participants, measures will be taken to remove identifiers. For example, student participants will be asked to change their display name if they work on a virtual platform. In addition, I will refrain from taking pictures, video recordings, or screenshots during data collection.

As the researcher, I will take every precaution to ensure the protection of privacy by (a) limiting the personal identifiers of participants; (b) using pseudonyms; (c) managing data within the guidelines of the institution; and (d) ensuring the elimination of potential threats (mental, physical, legal, or disruption to well-being) with maximum precaution. Participants will not receive an incentive for participation in the study.

Data Collection Procedures and Management

The data collection for this study will occur through interviews (virtual and in-person) with participants. To do this, I will first communicate with the Director of Veterans Affairs at the college to obtain the information required about working with student veterans. During this time, questions will be answered and discussed the needs and parameters of the study. Then, I will obtain signed disclosures from the Director of Veterans Affairs to begin communicating with the veteran students. Next, I will complete the human subject's protection portion of the IRB and obtain IRB approval for the study conducted at the community college of study and IRB approval through the University of Missouri-St. Louis. After securing these approvals, I will recruit potential participants (listed above) and schedule interviews. Before each interview, I will administer the informed consent process. During this time, I will inform each participant of the purpose of the research, the type of research being conducted, and the interview length. In addition, each participant will be advised that this is a voluntary experience, and that participation will not alter their educational potential or attainment. Finally, during the informed consent process, participants will be informed of the risks, benefits, and my role in ensuring confidentiality, how results will be shared, and risk mitigation. After conducting the interviews, I will transcribe the interviews, score on confidential files, and

use personal equipment. I will utilize appropriate transcription and data collection software and necessary software to code and analyze emergent themes from data collection. Finally, I will write the participants' narratives in the findings section.

Confidentiality is vital to the management of the data collection and analysis process. Therefore, I will take the following steps to ensure confidentiality: (a) data from interviews and all materials (including transcriptions, recordings, and notes) will be stored in password-protected files, (b) identifying information of all participants will be removed from all files, and (c) any identifying information will be stored in a password-protected or locked file in my home. This precaution will include any identifying information and a copy of the pseudonym key, and the data will be destroyed at the appropriate time designated by the supporting university.

Interview Protocol and Data Collection

I will collect qualitative data using an interview protocol. The questions will be derived from the literature and will align with the purpose of the study. Additionally, the questions intend to evoke detailed responses from the student participants. Finally, the research questions, interview protocol, and literature will all align to support and illustrate the lived experiences of the respondents. The questions will consider experiences, perceptions, motivations, supports, and challenges associated with enrollment at the community college. The research questions and interview protocol will be organized using a table to set the platform for emergent themes.

Table 1 (example)

Literature Review Table (Question 1)

Research Question 1	Interview Questions	Supporting Literature
What are military veterans' perceptions and lived experiences with mental and physical health needs regarding seeking help and utilizing college services?		
How do military veterans with physical and mental health needs perceive their transition experiences from the military to the community college?		

Data Collection Plan

The data collected will not be generalized but will detail the directly lived experiences of the respondents to inform the study and analyze outcomes (Vagle, 2018). Using an emergent design, I will use a semi-structured interview format to obtain the information used for analysis. The semi-structured interview will allow me to understand key ideas from the participants that may cause shifts during the interview (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thus, rich and descriptive data collection will be practiced. For example, the data collection methods will include unstructured interviews and detailed descriptions of

lived experiences from participants (Vagle, 2018). The data collection method was decided upon based on the study's intention, the participants being studied, the research emphasis, the essence of human uniqueness, and the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Further, phenomenological studies collect information through in-depth interviews with small populations to describe how meaning is created for those who have experienced a particular phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Collection, Management, and Coding

Phenomenological research has a set of defined and specific data collection methods utilized in this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study will use the Moustakas (1994) approach for practical data analysis that includes the following: (a) describe the personal experiences within the phenomenon to eliminate bias to focus on the experiences of the participants, (b) develop a list of non-repeating and unique statements based on the responses from the interviews, (c) group the statements into broad themes that will provide foundational units for interpretation, (d) describe verbatim examples from the participants to understand what was experienced during the phenomenon and provide textural descriptions, (e) describes how the phenomenon was experienced and provide structural descriptions that describe the setting and context of the experience, and (f) write a composite description of the phenomenon to understand the essence of the experiences within the context of the setting.

The descriptions and information collected during the interview will start the coding process. I will use the strategies of inductive coding to allow the emergent data to inform the study. The codes and themes will be created from the responses in the interviews. While inductive coding practices will be used in this study, the process of

lean coding will be used as a practical means to stay organized (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For example, I will create a shortened list of codes that will expand during analysis. This step will help me stay organized and direct the final data reporting (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Trustworthiness is the degree of confidence in the data or data collection and the methods employed during the study (Connelly, 2016). For example, credibility occurs when the participants in the research find the results to be accurate, credible, and represent the participants' original accounts (Yilmaz, 2013; Anney, 2014). The study will establish credibility through the practice of reflexivity, peer examination, participant member checking, and prolonged participant engagement. For example, Creswell and Poth (2018) note that research data is not merely about gaining perspective, but the goal is to translate ideas and perspectives into strategies, interventions, and techniques. Therefore, qualitative researchers work to ensure valid findings and reporting strategies.

In the practice of reflexivity, I will set aside bias to understand the participants' perspectives. Weiner-Levey and Popper-Giveon (2013) coined “dark matter” or prejudiced, often omitted from discussions. I will ensure a discussion and position reflection that includes connections to past lived experiences, bias, and preconceived notions that shape the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, member checking, feedback, and participant engagement will be central to understanding the views and information collected from the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For instance, participants will be involved in the data collection process. I will connect with the

participants through continuous communication. They will have the opportunity to see the findings and themes and see drafts before data is presented (Hays & Singh, 2012; Stake, 1995). This exercise aims to ensure that gaps and missing elements are closed during the data collection process (Richards, 2015).

Finally, detailed and thick descriptions will be incorporated into the data and reporting. Rich and thick description allows the reader the opportunity to understand the details of the study and allows the reader the chance to make connections (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Creswell and Poth (2018) expressed the idea that details emerge through description. For example, physical descriptions and activities can narrow general ideas, or rich descriptions can show intersections of ideas (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, data will be analyzed immediately after it is collected to remember the context, descriptions of the settings, and interpretation of subtle details (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ethical Procedures

Considering the possibility of the ethical concerns that may arise during all phases of the data collection and analysis process, I will employ several prescribed methods to ensure ethical standards.

Several ethical issues will be considered. Before the study, I will seek approvals from the college being studied and the degree-granting institution by submitting to the IRB, ensuring that the site locations will not create issues for the participants, and obtaining permission to use any property materials of the institution or participants. During the commencement of the study, I will be sure to disclose the purpose of the study to all participants, obtain consent, ensure voluntary participation, consider respect of norms for each participant, and remain sensitive to vulnerable populations. During the

data collection process, I will build trust and convey the context of the study by minimizing disruptions, not deceiving participants, and storing data and materials with security measures.

During data analysis, information will consider the multiple perspectives of participants and will respect the participants' privacy by using pseudonyms and a composite profile of the population. The data will be reported honestly and avoid disclosing anything that will potentially harm the participants. Further, all information will be communicated using appropriate language free from plagiarized text using APA style guidelines. All published results will be shared with the participants and will be shared in a format that is understandable and appropriate for diverse audiences. Finally, all published results will comply with ethical standards.

Finally, participants must be aware of informed consent. I will explain the study's purpose, voluntary nature, potential risks, and measures to mitigate risk. Participants will be informed of my connection to the institution, the goals of the research related to the doctoral program, and the removal of conflicts of interest. I, in this case, will not act as an agent of the institution. Lastly, the participant and I will establish ground rules to ensure trust and transparency during data collection.

Chapter Summary

This qualitative phenomenological study will seek to describe and understand the perceptions of student military veterans enrolled in a community college. After careful consideration, this method is most appropriate to address the research questions. Furthermore, the data collection and analysis approach will guide the research and minimize the risk to participants. This chapter outlined the steps necessary to conduct in-

person and virtual interviews, sampling procedures, a data collection and analysis plan, and protocols to address trustworthiness.

This study does not seek to provide an intervention but to understand the lived experiences of military students in community colleges. The emergent themes will offer the opportunity to understand better how veterans navigate experiences in community college. The findings addressed in the next chapter may assist our understanding.

Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to examine and understand the experiences of student military veterans in a community college who have physical and psychological health needs. Additionally, this study posits that understanding student perceptions of college services will increase the information that is necessary to expand the resources and engagement experiences that ultimately lead to persistence. An exploration of the experiences of student military veterans, as well as their needs and help-seeking behavior, serve as a guide to address the research questions for this study. First, what are the perceptions and experiences of military veterans who have physical and psychological health needs with regard to seeking help and utilizing college services? Second, how do military veterans with physical and psychological health needs perceive their transition from the military to community college?

The findings presented in this study are based on the responses of eight student participants who are currently enrolled and meet all qualifying criteria. First, purposive or selective sampling was applied during the data collection process. Second, student participants were selected for interviews based on six criteria, as explained in chapter three. Finally, using the Moustakas method (1994) for phenomenological analysis, interviews served as the primary data collection source.

This chapter presents organized themes that address the research questions and student demographics and an analysis of the themes that emerged.

Institutional Profile

All participants in this study are currently enrolled at a medium community college in the Midwest which enrolls students from urban, suburban, and rural demographics. The community college district has four campuses, two education centers, and two training sites. The generalized demographic data for the institution is as follows: (a) an approximate headcount of 14,000 students enrolled in non-degree-seeking, degree-seeking, certificate, and continuing education programs; (b) approximately 90% of students are classified as in-district residents and pay in-district tuition rates; (c) approximately 50% of the student population identified as Black, Hispanic, Asian, American Native, Pacific Islander, or two or more races; (d) nearly 50% of the student population receives financial aid, including 28% who are Pell-eligible and 5% who have student loans; (e) approximately 550 students identified as active duty military or veteran and receive funding from GI Bill or Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP).

In addition, this community college currently provides a variety of student resources that are available at no additional cost to the student and are offered in an on-site or virtual setting. While students are encouraged to utilize all services, opportunities are separated into two categories--required and optional. The existing required services include academic advising and tutoring when enrolled in certain programs. The service options that are listed as required intentional methods to support first-year students, military veterans, and probational students. Optional student services and programs include tutoring, student activities, wrap-around grant programs (TRiO Student Support Services, TRiO Upward Bound, the Black Male Achievement Academy, and College

Bound), veterans affairs, peer mentoring, career development, childcare, counseling, disability services, multicultural experiences, and basic needs support.

Participant Demographics

Table 2

Description of Participants

Participant	*Enrollment Status*	*Semesters Enrolled*	*Persistence*	*Major*
Avery	Enrolled	4	Continuous	Engineering
Blaire	Enrolled	6	Continuous	Hospitality
Chas	Enrolled	6	Continuous	Hospitality
Dylan	Enrolled	3	Stop Out	Finance
Evans	Enrolled	8	Stop Out	Communication
Floyd	Enrolled	1	Continuous	Cyber Security
Gentry	Enrolled	4	Stop Out	Engineering
Harrison	Enrolled	2	Continuous	Business

Of the students who stopped out, two are currently enrolled.

Table 3

Description of Participants cont.

Participant	*Gender*	*Age*	*Ethnicity*	*Expressed Need*
Avery	Female	46	Caucasian	Yes
Blaire	Male	42	Hispanic/Latino	Yes
Chas	Male	57	African American	Yes
Dylan	Male	28	African American	No
Evans	Female	54	African American	Yes
Floyd	Female	48	Hispanic/Latino	Yes
Gentry	Male	35	Caucasian	Yes
Harrison	Male	21	Asian	No

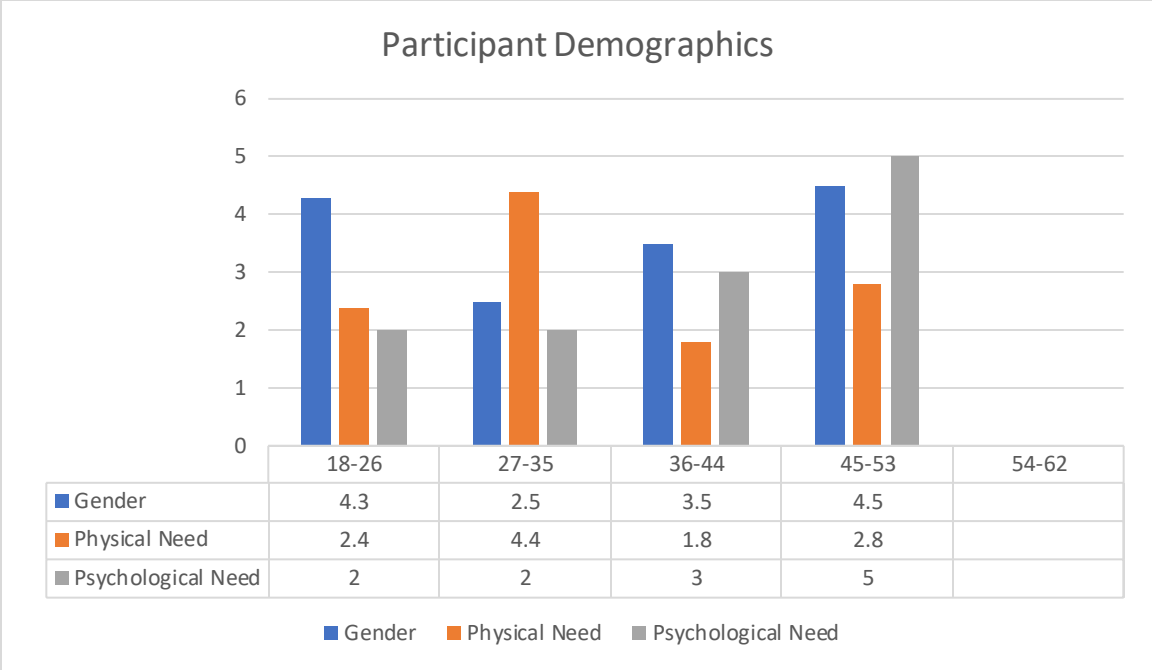

Table 4- *Participant Demographics*

Participant Background

The participants' backgrounds serve as a platform for theme development and discussion. While the background narratives are not comprehensive biographies, the information provided gives context and an introduction to each student participant. The background narratives provide brief contextual information related to military service, the catalyst for college attendance, educational goals, and personal needs.

Avery

Military service. Avery is a forty-six-year-old female and is Caucasian. She served in the active-duty Coast Guard for over twenty-five years and retired from the military with training in engineering technology, recuse support, and countless missions. After retiring from the military in 2019, she decided she needed to do something that enhanced her potential. She enrolled in the community college following the height of the

pandemic. Being well-read and focused, Avery planned to use her experience with the Coast Guard to further her education and career. She felt isolated from friends and family who lived hours away, and the pandemic heightened her need to connect with a community. Aware of her veteran resources, she noted:

> I had been out of the service for six months. I retired in September 2019, and then the pandemic hit in March 2020. For months, three months of being home and by myself and doing that experience, I decided I needed to do something. I figured college was of potential. I could do this online and with getting my veteran benefit. I could do online [classes].

Further, she noted that her decision to embark on the experience of school needed to be supportive and easily accessible.

> Hey, this is a thing that I can do, and then, it was just the recognition that I can't do the pandemic the way it is. I am going to figure something out, whatever that something is, and turn lemons into lemonade. It was certainly an opportunity to figure out that path.

The rationale for attending a community college. Avery learned about several career paths and options for employment before retirement and was already interested in pursuing a degree in engineering but was unaware of how to find the best fit concerning college admissions. She was diligent in locating resources, talking with college counselors, and understanding the subtle details of course prerequisites. Detailing the process, Avery recalled:

> I knew that there was a degree program at a four-year college, and I had already had that plan in mind when I was retiring. I learned about it in March or so of 2019, and figuring out how to get to the path of that degree program was part of what sent me to the Community College, and the degree program that I was looking for is workforce development and instruction.

Educational goals. While connecting with the most appropriate degree program, Avery toured a four-year institution and learned about the prerequisites for the bachelor's

degree and opportunities in workforce development. Being self-aware and attentive during this process, Avery used her research, military experience, and conversations with college personnel to discern an appropriate path:

> So, we were at [a four-year college], and to get into Bachelor of Science, you need an Associate of Science or Associate of Applied Science from the Community College.
>
> Surprisingly, this seemed easy relative to the whole process of the pandemic. I think the one part that just initially felt like a speed bump was talking with the career counselor. I am not certain of what his name was, but just talking with him, he did not necessarily understand my expectations of what I was looking for.
>
> I mentioned Bachelor of Science, and I had looked at the information online, so I kind of had an idea of what I was interested in [based on] what my experience from the military [was], and how that was going to work altogether.
>
> Talking to the career counselor, his suggestion initially was oh, it sounds like you want to go to a bachelor's or an associate of science degree. It took some self-awareness on my part to know that does not feel comfortable. The associate of science degree does not fit right but also lets me go back to the material for that end program and verify that an associate of applied science fits with my future career goal.
>
> I think, in general, maybe the feedback that I would offer at that point is getting maybe a little bit more information to ask. Hey, where are you? What is your life experience? Where are you in life? Even though I did not necessarily wind up getting any credit for my military life experience, I can say without a doubt that in probably half or better of the classes that I've taken [I feel more than prepared] because they're engineering-based engineering technology-based classes.

Personal needs. Avery acknowledged needing resources and support for mental health, a connection to the community, and academic tutoring as a returning student. She garnered that being in a college setting would provide access to necessary support and has been actively involved in the college community. Overwhelmed by the prospect of being an online student, Avery stated that she is happy about the connection to resources and support:

> There was the initial need for mental health resources, so I was very appreciative to the school for having that. I have talked with counselors for anxiety and tutors for math help.
>
> Looking back, I remember they were changing to do an online school, and we didn't know what online school looked like. That was a whole big thing, but I used tutoring and academic support to show me how to do things. I do not recall that being an easy process at first, and then I finally did see how to use online help and other resources before it was too late.

Finally, Avery stated that even a virtual connection to a community reassured her during periods of feeling isolated and anxious. She experienced a sense of relief once in-person classes resumed. While not expressing her veteran status to everyone, she is pleased to have connected with other veterans and the Veterans Resource Center at the college. Avery noted that while there are plenty of resources, getting access to support one's needs must be self-directed.

Blaire

Military service. Blaire is a forty-two-year-old male and is Hispanic/Latino. Blaire enlisted in the military after graduating high school because he believed higher education was not an option. Spanish is his first language; he stated, "I felt like I couldn't cut in college, so I enlisted in the military. In my family, you have to do something after you get out of school [high school]." After serving in the military for more than seven years, Blaire reflected:

> What I did and what I learned in the military didn't mean [anything] after I got out. I had to start over completely. I probably had over fifty hours that could have transferred, but there are way too many hoops to jump just to get them to transfer, so I went to work at first. I learned to cook and was good at it. See, the military is not going to give you a job and not send you to school for it.

Blaire appreciates the training he received in the military and the stamina he developed as a result. He feels that he was provided with tools that helped him decide on a primary career path.

As a single parent, he spoke at length regarding the challenges that he endured to provide stability for his child and gain access to VA benefits while working:

> There are so many hoops to jump once you get out. You see, there was a time when we were almost homeless. I was working long hours, but that was not enough. I knew I had to do something different. Can you imagine the look in your child's eyes when you have to sell the TV, the microwave, and other furniture to pay the rent? Things were so difficult at the time that I didn't think about talking to anyone. Then someone reminded me that I am a Post 9/11 veteran. Finally, I sat down and talked with someone at the VA about getting access to my benefits.

The rationale for community college attendance. Blaire developed a passion for cooking while in the military and enrolled in the community college to pursue a culinary and hospitality studies degree. He stated, "I feel the enrollment process was tedious, but it was worth it. I am using my education benefit and housing allowance to support us while I'm in school." He further stated, "I am glad I enrolled [in the college] because I can do something I enjoy and put food on the table and pay my rent. I am still working, so it is all working together."

Blaire has also connected with students and faculty and feels a sense of relief when he is on campus, commenting, "There are some good teachers here. I don't know if I would have gotten that at a different school, but I think they are looking out for me."

Educational goals. While Blaire is pursuing an associate's degree, he is interested in continuing his education. He would like to get a master's degree in political science or find a career path in which he can work with the government. Initially enrolling in developmental courses, Blaire indicated that he felt embarrassed, but he used

the feelings as motivation, stating, “In the beginning, I had to take remedial courses. I couldn’t believe that. I was embarrassed and did not want to waste money because those courses didn’t count. I stayed focused, arrived on time, and hurried up to get into one hundred-level courses.”

Personal needs. Blaire spoke in detail about overcoming challenges, resilience, and grappling with mental health needs. With limited resources and few personal support systems, Blaire admitted feeling guilty about asking for help from college employees:

> I can honestly say I have never had anyone I can run home to or anyone to ask for help. I have not talked with my family in months, and I see them only once or twice a year. They all live out of town, but we never had a connection. There are times that I want to talk with someone here [the college], but you all oversee thousands of students. I don’t want to take anyone’s time with my issues. I'm nobody special, and you know it's my battles, my struggles, and my job to get myself out of it. That's my mentality, though. Things are definitely better now, but I don’t want to bother anybody.

Blaire stated that he receives mental health resources from the VA: “It took about six or seven years, but I was finally able to get a proper diagnosis. I have PTSD, borderline personality disorder, and bipolar disorder.” He indicated that he felt relieved to receive a diagnosis and that he is working with Veterans Affairs counselors.

Chas

Military service. Chas is a fifty-seven-year-old male and is African American. He joined the Navy to “see and try something different.” As a result, he noted that military life presented unexpected challenges, and he was discharged after one tour. While the challenges led to a shortened career, he is proud of the time. He appreciates the lessons in self-determination and an understanding of giving back to the community through volunteer work, activity in the church, and connection to military service groups.

> It [the military] introduced me to a wide variety of people and built some lifelong contacts and friendships. I learned that it is important to help people out because of what I've been through. I can show them the right path. That's why I still volunteer so much now after all these years.

Chas also noted that being in the military allowed him to understand his career goals and connected him with resources that he has accessed for years, including health benefits, housing allowance, and education benefits.

The rationale for community college attendance. Chas enrolled in the community college because of the hospitality program, recognizing a connection to family and available benefits. He recalled, "My grandmother baked all the time, so I wanted to learn to bake as well." Once enrolled and as he successfully navigated the baking and pastry program, Chas, through community involvement, decided to pursue Human Services and Advocacy. Uncomfortable with being a nontraditional student, Chas perceived that the community college would be an ideal setting because of the support systems.

> To be honest, before I came here, I was completely nervous. For the simple reason, I had been out of high school and in the military for years. I figured I would be around a bunch of youngsters, and I was nervous that I would not remember what I studied so many years ago. I'm just saying that I was nervous about figuring out how that was going to work out.
>
> It wasn't as bad an experience as I thought.
>
> Also, at the time I enrolled, they had a lot of support systems here. You had AAMI [African American Male Initiative]. You had TRiO. You had the tutors and the lab under the library. So, it was just a lot of helpful organizations to help out.

Educational goals. Equating school and work, Chas feels comfortable in the community college setting and actively utilizes the tutoring center and connection with faculty to achieve his goals. He completed the culinary program, received an associate's degree in 2019, and is currently enrolled in the Human Services program with an

emphasis in advocacy. He stated, "I feel like they [faculty] want me to pass my classes. They want me to work hard but also pass." He further stated, "I have had more positives than negatives in my experience in the classes here. I have experienced some negatives, but we can all relate to that. In some ways, I have learned to connect better with people after being in classes."

Personal needs. While Chas reticently commented on his needs, he recognized his need for emotional support. He indicated that his home life and family offered little to no encouragement and did not support his decision to enroll in school. He recalled that some family members felt that he was trying to be "better" than them:

> They say, you know, I'm glad or whatever, that you're doing this school thing, but now you act like you're smarter and better than me, so you think you're better now. You forgot where you come from. Not at all. It's just that I got more support here at school than I ever did there at home.

Dylan

Military service. Dylan is a twenty-eight-year-old male and is African American. While recalling his experience in the Army, Dylan explained that "being in the military was a means to an end. If I stuck with it, I knew I could pay for school and achieve the benefits." He further explained, "Being in the military was difficult, and I did not enjoy my experience. Even though I qualify, I will never enlist again." Conversely, he noted that he appreciates the education benefits and plans to use them to achieve career success and further education.

The rationale for community college attendance. Dylan was candid about his decision to enroll at the community college:

> Well, for starters, I initially tried to enroll in [a four-year college]. But I didn't get accepted to do so. I was not in school for quite some time, was not dedicated to school when I took the ACT and was not as experienced as I am now, you know.

> Now, I am applied [focused] and more serious. So, I applied to [the college] for financial reasons and to get some credits under my belt. I wanted to transfer those credits to earn my bachelor's degree.

He further explained that he talked with admissions personnel regarding career options and school choices to decide where to enroll. Additionally, Dylan is mindful of veteran education benefits and plans to matriculate quickly at the community college in order also to complete a master's degree. He is committed to being enrolled full-time to maintain the full education tuition benefit. He explained that part-time enrollment only allows 50%-75% of the educational benefits needed to finance his education.

Educational goals. Interested in pursuing a degree in finance, Dylan has developed a goal-driven mission to achieve his academic and career expectations. Due to his interest in the field of business and his connection with faculty, his goal is to work in supply chain management. Dylan expressed excitement for education and feels that gaining knowledge is necessary for success, stating, "In order to be successful, you need education because it gives you the tools and knowledge to go into the field."

Notably, he commented on the perceived stigma associated with education, the competition with peers, and the need to gain first-hand experience for success. He feels, "I am separated from my peers because I focused on getting an internship. That taught me more about that field than the people in my classes. I know so much more about it [supply chain management]. He concluded, "I have always been attentive and tried to learn as much as possible. I recently went on a job interview, and they were surprised that I know as much as I do about the field. I guess I was really paying attention."

Personal needs. Dylan feels fortunate to have support and stability and recognizes that fellow veterans find accessing resources challenging. He stated that he

does not have a need and can mitigate his needs on his own. He expressed, "School, for me, is a little different. I am not that old, but I am older than traditional students. I feel more established, you know. I can easily take care of things now at this point in my life." Dylan also feels supported by his family, particularly his brother, who is also a military veteran. He spoke fondly of their bond and commitment to finishing school and achieving success in their chosen fields.

Evans

Military service. Evans is a fifty-four-year-old female and is African American. Proud of her military service, Evans states, "I had some really great times in the military. It definitely taught me a lot, and it gave me a chance to mature. I was young, but I matured quickly." As a first-generation student, Evans explained the challenges of poverty while in school. She is a second-generation military veteran; her father was also in the army. She stated, "My mom had me when she was in high school. She did graduate when I was about six or eight months old. My father was in the military. Both of my parents had to work."

While in the military, Evans worked various jobs, which caused her to think about college, but she did not see it as an option then.

The rationale for community college attendance. As a first-generation student, Evans said, "Years ago, things were tough [financially], and I knew my parents could not afford to send me to a big-time university. The community college made sense." During the interview, Evans explained that this was her second time enrolling in this community college. While finding great success now, she clarified, "I came to [the college] years ago. I took several classes and failed all of them. I was not ready at all. I was blown

away by the amount of work and didn't have a sense of direction." The decision to re-enroll resulted from a program that offered grade forgiveness. As a part-time student, Evans utilizes the education benefit through the VA and has worked simultaneously throughout her education experience.

Educational goals. Evans has worked in various fields, including higher education and advocacy. She is currently studying communications and has plans to pursue law or political science. Evans is an active student and found that a community college is what she calls "home." Additionally, she has held leadership positions with clubs and organizations, including Student Government Association, the Veterans Club, and Phi Theta Kappa Honors Society.

Regarding classroom experiences, Evans stated, "The teachers here do not want you to fail. I had an English professor who made me rewrite a paper seven times until I got it right. She never allowed me to give up or fail." She stated, "I see this as a chance for me to get a foundation like academic artillery for future endeavors."

Personal needs. Evans feels a connection to the institution and has taken advantage of the resources. She utilizes tutoring services, counseling, and the disability office. While discussing the need, Evans stated, "I wish there were a program or person to talk to us [veterans] about taking care of our finance. We have money from benefits, but we don't really know how to make good financial decisions. A lot of us [veterans] end up messing over the money."

Floyd

Military service. Floyd is a forty-eight-year-old female and is of Hispanic/Latino descent. She enlisted in the military in the 1990s and recalled the distinction between her experience before and after September 11, 2001.

> When I first got into the military, nobody said, 'thank you for your service.' I think people were OK with me being in the military, but life in the service became very different after the 9/11 disaster. Now, I was in the military before and after, and I notice that people always say, 'thank you for your service.' It's kind of weird, it kind of makes me uncomfortable, but it makes me feel good at the same time.

Additionally, she noted that she endured challenges after her deployments. Floyd became displaced and experienced limited employment and disparities in housing. Her post-deployment experience was challenging, causing her to understand that veteran benefits were unavailable. She explained, "When I became a veteran, an error was made in my discharge paperwork, and I was told that I did not qualify for benefits. I thought there was nothing I could do."

While living in a shelter, Floyd found a flyer and information about the services offered by the 211 Program. The United Way provides services through 211 to support basic needs assistance, housing, and counseling. The program helped her with housing, advocacy, and legal services to correct her discharge record, leading to her enrollment in the local community college.

The rationale for community college attendance. Feeling optimistic, Floyd is motivated to complete a degree and training in cyber security. While recognizing the advancements in technology, she explained, "I am passionate about computers and technology. There are so many advancements now. I also like to help people, so I feel like I can somehow do both. I would like to combine them. I feel like the college can help me do both." She continued to explain:

> There are so many resources here. I'm surprised there's so many homeless people out there, and they're all veterans. I didn't have an idea about the resources. I bet they don't, either. Like, I was turned down for resources once a long time ago. I bet they feel the same way. They probably tried to fight it like me but didn't get anywhere. I'm doing well now, and I want to help them based on my experience.

Educational goals. Floyd has been a student for two semesters and is studying cybersecurity. She explained that her experience in the classroom has been positive, and she has become an active member of the veterans' groups on campus. Additionally, Floyd emphatically expressed that connecting with her academic advisor and veteran support specialist has led to her success in the classroom and while navigating the campus culture. She explained, "I have all positive feedback about my experience. Everyone has been so friendly and encouraging. That has made my transition to school easier."

Personal needs. Floyd noted a variety of hurdles that she can address confidently. While initially displaced in [the city], she mentioned, "I thought I had to advocate for myself at first. I was here all alone with no family support. I didn't have the support I needed."

Further, she explained, "I feel like getting the financial help I needed set everything like a chain reaction." The resources that Floyd has gained through the United Way and the community college have made her feel that she is experiencing stability and safety and has access to mental health counseling. She noted, "With the financial help and getting my benefits back; my needs are met. I am able to take care of my health and my mental health. It's funny; after a few years of service, I now have a lifetime of benefits. Now I can focus on my priorities and what means the most."

Gentry

Military service. Gentry is a thirty-five-year-old male and is Caucasian. As a proud veteran, he was outspoken about the experiences that led to his professional goals. His training in the military created an interest in engineering science.

When connecting his Navy and civilian life experiences, Gentry stoically stated:

> I've given an inordinate amount of thought to what it means to be a veteran since I got out in 2017, and I honestly don't have a good answer to give you at this time about that one. I thought I used to know what it meant, and then I got a deep look at what we were doing, why we were doing it, who was calling the shots, and why they were calling the shots.
>
> I mean, I'd still go back and do large portions of what I did again. I wouldn't do it for the same reasons. And a lot of things that I did do, I would think about a lot harder before probably doing the same thing again because, again, it was either my comrade on the ground there or them, and at that point, it wasn't going to be my buddy.
>
> Being a veteran means that I've seen things and done things in the world that not a lot of other people can say they've seen and done. A lot of people just wouldn't understand.
>
> I guess the role we have in this country, once we cross that, we're never gonna be civilians again, and that's just a fact.

Finally, he commented, "I learned a lot in the military. There are some things I cannot talk about, but I think the work that we do helps to make this world a better place."

The rationale for community college attendance. Gentry enrolled in the college following dissatisfaction with previous jobs and was interested in working in a technical field. Concerned with the cost of education, he assessed that the community college would be a necessary option to recognize his financial constraints and support his educational goals. He also appreciates the traditional pedagogical methods that are used at the college and the unique and varied equipment accessible to students. Finally, Gentry expressed the synergy around the college's connection to the community stating,

"There are so many companies connected to the community, and my training will help me make an impact in the community. It is important to me to train and work within my community."

Educational goals. Gentry talked about being in a "different stage in life" and is committed to getting a degree in engineering to connect his Navy training and intent to work in the field of aircraft technology. He stated, "I got a lot of credits through the schools in the Navy, but those credits do not transfer. I mean, none of those credits transferred out, so of course, I had to start over again. I guess people look at it as a way for me to better myself."

Knowing his age, Gentry feels connected to the campus culture and uses his life experience to inform how he approaches classroom experiences and connections with other students.

> It's kind of odd being a student at 35 years old, any way you slice it. I am working on my first degree, but at this stage in my life, I don't think about it much. I stopped giving a [care] about what people think of me a long time ago. Now, I just chug along, stay focused, and keep doing what I am doing anyway."

Personal needs. Gentry expressed the need for and navigating financial support and mental health counseling. Currently, he is utilizing the college and Veterans Affairs resources. Being a single parent, in 2019, he gained full custody of his child and expressed the value of family support. He noted,

> My parents have been super supportive. My child has been super supportive. My whole family has been supportive. They've been nice. They have been able to take care of my kid while I have been here at school doing my thing, and it has allowed me to basically get everything done that I have gotten done here so far, so they are number one with me.

Gentry feels that the mental health counseling services provided by Veterans Affairs are more appropriate than what is provided by the college, stating:

> I have a lot going on. I do not want to burden the good people here with my issues. I have a lot. Not a lot of people would even understand what I was trying to say if I was saying it to them directly. And if they did understand it, they'd probably have an overwhelming sense of dread and panic, And I don't want to do that. I usually go to the VA and make their therapist drink. When I come around here, if I'm having a bad day, yeah, I'll come in here [student office], and I'll sit down. I'll talk to them [student services personnel] a lot. I try not to say everything that's on my mind because I just know that it is. That is something that I just cannot do. But [the VA] psychologists are pretty cool. They're used to sitting there listening to stuff like this. I don't know if they've ever really met someone quite like me, but it helps.

Further, he noted that he feels supported when talking with the college personnel about general topics and school-related issues and enjoys the comradery in campus settings.

Finally, considering Gentry's needs, he explained that he has been a student at the community college since 2018 and is taking a leave of absence for one semester to work and find stability, stating, "I'm taking a semester off now. I just needed a break. I need an apartment or my own house. I need the money."

Harrison

Military service. Harrison is a twenty-one-year-old male and is Asian American. Working in a dual capacity, Harrison is active-duty military and currently enrolled at the community college. Harrison stated, "I still have time left on my contract with more than two years in the contract. I am still trying to decide if I want to become a veteran at that point or stay in longer to make a difference. I feel like it is important to make a difference." He continued, "As I think on it more, I do want to stay in longer and hope to see changes I've made from the perspective of being a veteran."

Harrison is not currently utilizing the education benefits afforded by the VA. He explained that he was working with a community college VA counselor to understand

and complete the necessary forms to qualify for assistance next semester. He stated, "I am not sure who I talked to at first, but he did not know what he was doing. He gave me an outdated form. Now I am working with someone who is actually helping me."

Further, Harrison stated:

> The military does a good job of preparing you and [helping you] transfer over to being whatever job. They do a good job of it, but I learned that they don't do a good job at transitioning back to what you were before, which is a civilian. Not everyone has access to those resources, nor will they [the military] help you get access to those resources. One thing I've realized is that, yeah, you always gotta help out the next person, and that could go a long way, honestly. Let's just say it is very common for soldiers to lose their identity once they get out because that's all they knew; that's all they were.

He has become an active member of the Veterans Club because of his impact on others in the community, stating, "No one should be left behind. It's good to make an impact in someone's life…you know, to help them be them again."

The rationale for community college attendance. As a native of the area, Harrison relocated to the area in 2020. He feels the college will help him achieve his academic goals while still enlisted in the military. Additionally, Harrison commented, "I have always had to do things by myself. I grew up alone, and I knew getting enrolled at the college would be pretty easy." During the interview, Harrison noted that he was still acclimating to classes and the "college system" because of his recent spring enrollment in the spring of 2022.

Educational goals. Harrison is pursuing a degree in finance and plans to use the VA education benefit to complete law school. Additionally, he commented that attaining education and meeting goals all depend on the individual, commenting:

> Hey, if you want to get a good education or a scholarship, you have to prove to others that you are not just a good student. You have to be willing to join something, or help someone, or do something other than just going to class.

> That's why I joined clubs. That's why I got involved. I really like it here [at the college]. There are so many opportunities. I plan on being a lawyer, and I need to make sure I can get recommendation letters.

Finally, he compared his experience with school and the military. He expressed that there are always opportunities to learn from other students: "I would like to interview alumni [of the community college] to see how other schools are and what they are doing now. I feel like we are all connected in some way."

Personal needs. Gentry feels empathy for veterans who experience trauma. He stated, "I have not experienced trauma, but I have talked to people who have been through so much." He expressed that while he does not have physical needs now, he finds support from friends and other military students at the college. He noted, "I know there is a social stigma with asking for help, but the military actually helped me get over that. I definitely felt that way when I joined the military, but I had to learn and grow as a person. I kind of didn't have a choice with them [the military]."

Participant Summary

The participants in this study met the qualifying criteria: mainly military-connected, enrollment at the local community college, and expressing any range of psychological, physical, or environmental needs. The values of gender, race, ethnicity, and age varied and fit within the demographic profile of the college. Three participants were female, and the cultures included two Caucasians, two Hispanic/Latinos, three African Americans, and one Asian American. While being enrolled is a significant criterion for participation, one of the participants "stopped out" at the time of the interview and planned to register for the spring semester. Two participants discussed pauses in enrollment but are currently taking classes.

All expressed varied reasons for enlisting in the military, with "seeing something different" and "I didn't think college was an option" among responses. Every participant expressed a desire to connect with a community and believed that the military contributed to volunteerism or "giving back" in many instances. All but one, Harrison, are of veteran status. Harrison is currently enlisted in the military. Since this study is specifically about perceptions of being a student, I did not ask about deployments or trauma during enlistments or the details of their physical or psychological needs, although many respondents included those experiences in their narratives.

The respondents in this study have or have experienced a combination of needs, including trauma, anxiety, PTSD, borderline personality disorder, depression, and disparities in mental health. Additionally, three respondents expressed housing disparities, homelessness, lack of support, and physical pain. Seven participants have an honorable discharge or retirement and are eligible to receive GI Bill benefits, including tuition, housing allowance, health, and basic needs benefits. Articulating "being a student like everyone else," all the participants in this study are involved in the college culture through participation in clubs, organizations, the work-study program, internships, mentorship, and various campus initiatives. Everyone utilized at least one college service, including veteran services, counseling, disability services, tutoring, and basic needs support. Regarding counseling, two respondents elected to use VA counseling services instead of the college counseling department.

As they perceived attending college as "a job," six of the eight participants are enrolled full-time, one is a part-time student, and one is currently not registered. The VA tuition benefits are allocated based on enrollment status, and many are motivated to take

a full course load to receive the entire tuition and housing allowance benefit. Additionally, everyone stated that the college enrollment process was "easy" or "fairly simple." Conversely, many expressed challenges with financial aid, advising, and an understanding of the process of completing paperwork. In each case, the students worked with a college veterans' affairs specialist to obtain assistance with the paperwork and secure proper documentation for enrollment. Every student has at least a 2.0 GPA and is motivated to continue their education. Many are interested in pursuing a master's or professional degree. Finally, every student has had positive interactions in the classroom. While the experiences of receiving college resources are varied, many have continued to use the service and share a positive outlook regarding their future endeavors.

Table 5- Findings

	Avery	**Blaire**	**Chas**	**Dylan**	**Evans**	**Floyd**	**Gentry**
Theme 1	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**		**X**	**X**
Theme 2	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**		**X**
Theme 3	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**
Theme 4	**X**	**X**		**X**		**X**	**X**
Theme 5	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**
Theme 6	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**

Situated Narrative of Themes

The transition to college for the participants both produced challenges and alleviated challenges. While many of the student respondents expressed difficulties

accessing support and resources, they have positive sentiments regarding their college experience and professional goals. The results of the hour-long interviews were analyzed to find significant themes that illustrate the phenomenon of being a military veteran student at a community college. Six themes emerged that addressed perceptions of transition and utilization of college resources for veterans with disclosed physical or mental needs. The themes are:

- Challenging enrollment process
- Mission-driven goals
- Positive view of resources and asking for help
- Feeling misunderstood
- Seeking community
- Mitigating need

Each theme will describe the collective experiences of each participant. While the themes are not in consecutive order related to the interviews, the details will illustrate transition experiences, matriculation, and student experiences.

Challenging enrollment process

Enrolling in the community college was an option that provided opportunities to achieve professional goals, connect with resources, acclimate to civilian life, and improve financial outlooks. Seven participants currently utilize tuition benefits from the VA and commonly detailed challenges with clear information or assistance during the process. Avery described:

> The person I spoke with did not necessarily understand my expectations for what I was looking for. I wish that during the entry [enrollment] process, there was somebody to connect me with another veteran. I know there is a new person over the veteran program, and I am sure it's different now, but I look at how the difference could have been for me. It would be nice to talk with an actual person and not just a blind voice on the other end of the phone.

Avery has been aware of the veteran program changes since she enrolled and has talked with other students to assist with their experience.

Blaire continued:

> It was another tedious process because I had to sit for so long. I sat in an office waiting for three hours once just to talk to someone for five minutes. The enrollment process itself was not difficult, but it was tedious. They didn't tell me how long it would take or how many times I would have to go back. I didn't have a car at the time and lived across town. I'm the type of person who likes to take care of things in one shot. I remember I had so many questions and not enough time to get all the answers. I would also get up early to be the first or second person in line.

Chas shared a different experience. He found the enrollment process seamless because he was connected to assistance from the beginning. While the enrollment process was different for him, there were elements of self-doubt that created anxiety around the experience. Chas stated, "To be honest, before I came here, I was completely nervous. At the time, I had a lot of support systems here. It [the enrollment process] wasn't as bad as I thought."

Dylan compared his enrollment and registration experiences. The enrollment process and seeking academic advising were a challenge. After dropping two classes, he began researching transfer credits independently.

> The process was very difficult. They [college personnel] didn't really know how to process my benefits, and I didn't have an assigned advisor. It was definitely different because I was speaking to someone different every time, and they always told me something different on what I needed and didn't need to do. They didn't know what my benefits would cover, which is the complete opposite from people I know at [four-year schools]. As far as getting into school, that was easy.

Floyd experienced challenges as she sought access to benefits to begin the enrollment process. She received legal assistance to correct her discharge status. Additionally, Floyd was given incorrect tuition and housing allowance assistance

information. The veteran resource personnel at the college assisted. She has a positive opinion about her experience at the college. Floyd commented:

> At first, the process was so hard. The people here helped me. They are all so friendly. That kind of made it easier for me, even though there were some things that didn't go well with the paperwork, but they helped me get through it.

Similarly, Gentry experienced limited access to information and clarity of process before enrollment. He has had favorable experiences with the college personnel.

> The people in the front office [at the college] basically adopted me and hand-walked me through everything. Any problems I had were with my records. That was interesting. I called them [VA records] from the parking lot, and they didn't have the time of day for me, so I hung up the phone, walked into the person's desk that I was talking to, and slapped the folder of my military record on the desk and said 'fix it, I'm here now so you can't ignore me. After that, the people here really helped me. They are extremely helpful.

Finally, Harrison had the opposite experience from Floyd and Gentry. While the enrollment process at the college was advantageous, he found challenges with the veteran's office on campus. Harrison is an outlier in this study, as he is the only active-duty student. He is still working through the process of securing financial aid or education benefits. He stated:

> The enrollment process, getting admitted, and getting my courses was easy. I'd say the most difficult part was definitely when I got here at the time; I could tell the veterans resource person here didn't know what he was doing. I could tell because there was no one there to advise him how things were changing with the military with tuition assistance. He gave me an outdated form of how you would go about getting military tuition assistance.

Mission-driven goals

The participants collectively shared that they selected a major or career interest based on military training. As they perceived attending school as a "job," everyone believed that elements like timeliness, attention to detail, focus, and diligence as core

values. Perhaps, not surprisingly, the monthly stipend could contribute to the connection between school and work. Congruent with nontraditional students, the participants were keenly aware of their age. Although they fit the demographics of the college, they created distinctions with other traditionally aged classmates by calling them "kids," "youngsters," "young people," and "traditional students."

Further, viewing failure as "no option," the participants selected courses of study that were of interest and promise. Possessing previous training, they each felt knowledgeable about the class topics and held personal experience in high regard. When discussing college selection and field of study, Avery noted:

> When I observe myself being successful, I recognize that there's comfort in doing the tasks. I'm in my comfort zone. They use that phrase a lot in the military. I don't want to be in my comfort zone. I want experiences that are intentional, you know, you have to stretch, you have to do more. I like to think of my optimal capability and think outside of the box. As a student, when I think of a challenge, I have to roll it back because it's a job; it's my work.

While Blaire concluded that his years of service in the military did not translate to the civilian world, he developed a skill for culinary arts that he finds enlightening in his personal life and education path. He continued:

> I experienced that I had to start from scratch. My years of military training did not count towards a degree, but success for me is being able to look back at my accomplishments. There are times that I don't feel like going to school, but I said to myself that I am going to graduate from this program, and I want to do that. I believe you can still achieve your goals during the most difficult times of adversity and tribulations. There are a lot of people who did not think I was going to make it, but I am going to walk the stage [graduate]. I come back to school every day because quitting is not an option. I don't have the luxury of quitting. When you quit, that door opens to quitting again.

Chas said, "Well, the military is paying for it; this is technically a job. I come on time every day because this is a job with the side benefit of getting a degree." In the

same vein, Dylan described being in school as "being a job that you prepare for." He went on to express:

> You have to have the mental fortitude for this. You set your mind to a goal and work to complete the goal. Of course, being a successful student and employee go hand-in-hand. I tell people college isn't really that hard. You have to dedicate your time to learn something new. They are not going to ask if you have Cs on your degree, but they want you to know if you know the material to understand the job. But whatever your version of success is, you have to have the work ethic. If you want a 4.0, you need a 4.0 work ethic. My path is to get the material to pass the class, strive for it, and know that that's going to be a success.

Evans returned to college after retiring from the military. Feeling unprepared at the time, she attended briefly after high school but decided the military was a better option. Evans enrolled part-time and is focused and engaged in the curriculum. She stated, "I had to work, I mean really work, and I had to put that same type of energy and dedication into my schoolwork to get my grades up, you know. Now I am a proud member of Phi Theta Kappa, which means I have over a 3.5 GPA."

Gentry is not registered for classes this semester because of a need to earn additional money to secure housing. He is committed to continuing his education, saying:

> I have to overcome challenges every day, but I know what I applied for, and I have this in front of me. It's like you have to be like Muhammad Ali. You have to float like a butterfly and sting like a bee, damn it! I have learned that in some situations, you meet with force; in other situations, you need to be met with just saying, 'I'm going to complete this,' kind of like churning out [a paper]. It is a mentality.

Harrison reflected on his failures and stated:

> You have to keep trying, and if you fail, just learn from it and decide what were those contributing factors that led to failure. That's all that matters if you learn from your failures and just keep trying. Eventually, once you get it, then you're succeeding. This is a process, and you have to get up, whether you like it or not. It's also about management. Make sure you understand the course material. I

> learned to contact my classmates and my professor to solve problems. Otherwise, it would take longer than actually solving the problem.

A positive view of resources and asking for help

The participants in this study unanimously shared positive views on asking for help and securing resources. Not surprisingly, more than one-half of the participants experienced some financial insecurities and a need for supplemental help. Furthermore, a common characteristic of being mission-driven is connecting with others to achieve the goal. Every respondent noted having limited support systems and found the college to be a place that encourages goal attainment. In more than one-half of the cases, the participants enrolled at the college to find help. Avery commented:

> I had an initial need for mental health resources, so I was very appreciative of the school for having that. Also, I am not that tech-savvy, so I would write down my questions if I could not find the answer online and would go find someone who worked here. I feel comfortable asking for help partially because I know there's some things that I just can't do. The first thing that comes to mind is my mental health and being able to reach out to someone for those resources. Like, I know I'm not supposed to feel like this. In the military, if you have to talk to your supervisor, it can be a big deal, especially if you are a junior person. There's a matter of authority. This is where having another veteran around would be helpful during teachers' office hours. It's a way to best facilitate those conversations because of the authority factor.

Motivated by a fear of failure and a constant awareness of being a man of color, Blaire was hesitant to ask for help but was willing to seek help to find an accurate mental health diagnosis. He explained:

> I have always had a severe drastic fear of failure, but my military training kicked into gear. I didn't know I was dealing with PTSD issues until I was officially diagnosed. My first diagnosis took six or seven years. My military training keeps [reminding] me perseverance, endurance, adapt and overcome. You know, push through. Being a part of a black and brown community, I feel a little betrayed having to deal with mental stress. It's a sign of weakness, but on the other hand, I found people here that I can feel comfortable talking to. It also helps to find people who look like me to talk to. I'm just being honest.

Connecting with campus resources was a priority for Chas. Viewing school as a job and having limited resources, he stated:

> To figure things out, I went to the lab under the library [computer and tutoring lab]. There are a lot of helpful organizations here. I started here in the summer, and it was great because I had a 4.0. I didn't have a problem with asking for help because I knew that I wasn't going to succeed on my own. The people here were willing and eager to help. If you have somebody who cares about you, they want to see you fulfill your goals.

Continuing the sentiment, Dylan stated:

> Oh, I have no problem asking for help. Actually, when I first got the community college, I really utilized the tutoring service. That semester was really bad, but I went to tutoring almost every day. I asked for help in learning how to pass the class. I didn't want to fail because I did not want to waste the money, time, and energy to just give up. I also went to my teachers' office hours. That's actually how I got my internship. I think the services here are for career building. I can get help to set me up for my future.

Evans is a first-generation student who recognized the need for help, particularly in her current phase in education. She believed connecting with faculty was crucial to academic success. She stated:

> I didn't grow up around college people. My sister took a few college classes, but she did not continue. I feel like the professors here really kicked me into gear. I remember all of the people who would not let me fail. One English professor, in particular, was very inspirational and helped me to solidify my future. She was awesome.

Floyd is a proponent of asking for help. She stated:

> I know I have to ask for help; otherwise, people will not know what's going on in your life. I can't be embarrassed about asking for help. They are there for what's best for you. Like now, I like computers, but all of my assignments are computerized now. Everything is on the computer now. That has taken some getting used to, and I get help for that.

Gentry expressed getting help and giving help. He feels connections should have reciprocity. Gentry described:

> People here have been very helpful. If I have questions, they have answers. I do the same. If they have questions, I have answers. Life can roll you pretty hard. I think working with the veterans' organizations and talking with people around here makes it possible to get things done.

Finally, Harrison said:

> Asking for help contributes to success. I know that for some people, it's very difficult asking for help because either they think it's a social stigma or a sign of weakness, especially when you're so self-reliant. I feel knowledgeable about the college services. For the most part, I feel like some students are confused, but I feel like the offices here help solve problems. They have helped [me] with solving a specific problem, like with food or other social services.

Feeling misunderstood

The participants in this study detailed experiences of feeling misunderstood. These attitudes emerged through conversations regarding being misadvised or feeling marginalized by civilians. While the participants are proud of being a veteran and participate in veteran activities, many do not feel comfortable with some civilian colleagues. Avery stated:

> There are times that have almost become confrontational. Some people do not know how to react to me being a veteran. Working on group projects has been a challenge. I have a certain skill set that helps me drive the work in the project to an overall success. I think that's a mindset of most veterans. As I start to meet people [in class], they immediately ask, 'did you go to combat? Did you deploy? Did you shoot or get shot at?' Now, those things aren't actually the questions they are asking. That's why many veterans are unwilling to identify themselves because it can get confrontational, or we get a negative connotation. I am not sure if they really care or if they are trying to be jerks.

Blaire expressed similar feelings:

> I don't focus on being a veteran because we are dealing with people who don't know how to deal with veterans. If I tell people I am a veteran, and I am treated like a dark cloud. This happened to me. They think if I get mad, I'm going to shoot up the place or that I'm going to be the next active shooter. I usually keep it to myself and just focus on my goals.

Dylan would like to be perceived as a student like everyone else. He expressed feeling misunderstood regarding his education goals.

> Overall, I feel like all of my teachers understand me, and they are all willing to help. I just wish I could talk to the same person about my school issues, so I don't have to keep repeating myself. I don't want to keep telling my story and explaining my situation every time I meet with someone here. I feel like I am being passed around.

Floyd felt unheard regarding her benefits and the help she needed to secure housing and mental health assistance. She stated:

> It was tough being homeless, but now I am taking care of my health. I feel like I had to search for help because nobody understood my situation. I took a test once that was supposed to tell me what field to go into. They didn't listen. Based on that test, I did a major that I did not want to do. At the time, I had no idea what I was good at, and it's hard to know what I think if I don't know what my potentials are.

Gentry stated:

> Most of the stuff going on in my head I don't want to just bug anybody with. I know I've been down so many rabbit holes and to so many different wonderlands in my time. Not a lot of people would even understand what I was trying to say.

He also stated that a personal change has helped him feel understood.

> Because of my training, I learned to assess people. I have also learned that because of my training, I was not a nice person. I have a lot of external traumas that I am dealing with, but you can get a lot more places if you are nice and just say 'hi.' Don't just walk around looking at the ground. People appreciate it if you speak. Maybe if they don't speak the first time, I speak, and maybe they will the next time. Maybe the next time we can exchange a couple of word sentences.

Harrison commented, "Being at school is like a tug of war. There are average students around here and people who are stuck in a mindset." He explained that he feels mature but is trying to understand how to work with faculty whom he feels needs to change.

Seeking community

All the respondents identified groups or programs that provide a sense of community. Everyone has joined a group that facilitates camaraderie, culture, motivation, and support.

Avery stated:

> It is nice to be connected with other veterans. I have met several through the veteran center. We are all from different branches, be we tease each other about that. It's a great networking opportunity. It's much different than with civilians. That can be uncomfortable. I met another veteran here at the school, and he did me a solid [favor]. That's a great experience for a new person coming in. Also, I do a lot of the campus life things. I cannot say enough about those experiences. People actually know my name around here, and that feels good.

Blaire feels that the college community has helped him overcome personal challenges:

> There were times that I ate my only meal for the day because someone here provided lunch. One of my professors looks out for me. He helps me get my classes, but he also encouraged me to get involved in other things like SGA [student government association]. I also look at the other men of color around here who are graduating and going on to do great things. These are the connections that make me want to get a bachelor's degree or a master's degree. I felt like I couldn't cut it in college until I got closer with the guys here.

Chas is an active student. He is involved in several organizations, including TRiO, the Black Male Initiative, the Veterans Club, and volunteer groups. He expressed:

> I have met some key people here. For me, it is just about helping somebody out. I have been through what they are going through. I was in quite a few [organizations] to help me navigate. I am connecting others to those key people.

Dylan is a work-study student and completed an internship experience. He stated:

> I have formed some pretty close relationships here. People on campus who I worked with in work-study. I still keep up with all of them now. It just made it a little bit more interesting around the campus instead of just popping in the classes. I think that's what keeps me here. That and building those bonds and not doing it alone.

Evans is also an involved student and feels the connections have prepared her for professional work. She shared:

> I think about running down the halls and seeing all the people I have met. I was the president of PTK [Phi Theta Kappa], and I ran for student government at one point. As a work-study student and ambassador, I feel like people here have watched me mature. They all played a role in who I am today, so participating in activities and things of that nature are stepping stones and gave me a foundation.

Floyd discussed the importance of volunteerism. She stated:

> Since I came here, I have been introduced to a lot of volunteer opportunities, which I love. I had never been involved in anything before, and my life was boring, but now it's exciting. It kind of feels good to be a part of something. She also stated:

> If I can do it, anybody can do it. I am here all by myself with no family support. I have friends now, so I am making it, and that's awesome.

Gentry feels that becoming involved in the campus culture is helpful. He was a member of several organizations and the president of the green club. He further highlighted the following:

> I have worked with PTK and have done some large-scale projects with the school and community. Also, I worked with the veterans, student council, and the YMCA. I was just kind of like the gorilla in the back of the room [jokingly]. Honestly, if I can give these kids a dose of reality from some direction other than the teacher. I am an open book.

Like the other respondents, Harrison is an actively involved student with the newspaper and the veterans club. He is interested in launching or joining other clubs because he enjoys connecting with other students. He has had opportunities to travel with the newspaper staff and appreciates meeting other students.

> We have tried to get the younger students involved, and that has been difficult. I think it is important to have fresh voices. In general, you have to have that [fresh voice] to keep things moving. Some people see this as just the typical community college. They want to get their classes to transfer, but they don't realize that getting involved gets you scholarships or ways to get into better schools. When

> you do a club, those skills are transferrable into whatever job or internship you might be looking into.

Mitigating need

The students in this study have found success in the classroom, a developed sense of community, and access to resources. Despite finding success, many student participants expressed perpetual needs and the process for mitigating those needs. Avery is actively working on addressing mental health needs and participated in a workshop for women in the military. She described a strengths workshop saying, "The workshop was excellent and super helpful." Avery stated that she would continue to work with college staff because of the access to assistance. At times, Avery feels powerless when facing challenges. She shared:

> There is a whole different conversation about the military and sexual trauma and sexual assaults. I am lucky to not have had an [bad] experience, but I feel disempowered. I know there are creeps and cretins around me. I feel special, but my experience was not the norm. There's a part of me that is beyond frustrated and a part of me that wishes not to have been part of that.

Blaire actively works with counselors and works to provide security for his child. He stated:

> I fear coming across as standoffish or like a loser. There are still some demons I am dealing with. That's not for everybody to see. I deal with machismo and not feeling good enough, but I think that makes me work harder.

Chas admitted that he does not have personal support. He is concerned about challenges with basic needs and says, "It bothers me that there is no cafeteria here anymore. We are hungry and sometimes have to be here late."

Still facing financial hardship, Floyd stated, "They took my car. That's another story, but the school offers a bus pass. I can still get to school on the bus, and that is very

helpful. I haven't missed a beat." Floyd has connected with a resource that will further assist with financial needs.

Similarly, Gentry is experiencing overwhelming financial need. The financial insecurity led him to the decision to work instead of attending classes this semester. Needing secure housing, Gentry has accepted a job and is working to find a balance before returning in the spring semester.

Harrison is working with a veteran's specialist to address tuition assistance. He explained, "I'm trying to [use benefits]. Right now, I'm filling out what's in my past [paperwork]. From there, I'm going to prepare to apply for tuition assistance before the Department of Defense deadline…before they run out of money."

While mitigating the need, every participant is aware of the process of getting assistance. At no point did anyone express feeling defeated, and they had a positive outlook regarding the desire to address their challenges.

Validity and Reliability of Research

Ethical Considerations

During all data collection and analysis phases, I considered the importance of maintaining ethical standards by employing prescribed methods for ensuring anonymity, safety, respect, and due diligence. Before the study, I received IRB approval from the supporting institution and the institution included in the research process. Further, I disclosed the purpose of the research to all participants, obtained consent, ensured voluntary participation, considered respect for norms for each participant, and remained sensitive to the vulnerable population being studied. During the data collection process, I established trust and conveyed the study's context by minimizing disruptions, not

deceiving participants, and storing data and materials with security measures. I explained the study's purpose, voluntary nature, potential risks, and actions to mitigate risk. Participants were informed of my connection to the institution, the goals of this research project related to the doctoral program, and the removal of conflicts of interest. I, in this case, did not act as the institution's agent. Lastly, the participants and I established ground rules to ensure trust and transparency during data collection.

During data analysis, the information that was collected considered the multiple perspectives of participants and respected the participants' privacy by using pseudonyms and a composite population profile. The findings have been reported honestly, and avoided disclosing anything that potentially harms the participants. Further, all information has been communicated using appropriate language free from plagiarized text using APA style guidelines. All published results will be shared with the participants and will be shared in a format that is understandable and appropriate for diverse audiences. Finally, all published results fulfill ethical standards.

Illustrated Data Analysis Steps

To strengthen the objectivity of this study, I used a Hermeneutic framework to understand the phenomenon of veterans in a particular community college. Hermeneutic Theory, designed by Martin Heidegger, is most appropriate for this study because Rendon's Validation Theory and Bean and Matzner's Theory of student attrition are lenses that guide the study and an understanding of the phenomenon (Peoples, 2021). This section will illustrate my process for data analysis and the steps taken to understand the phenomenon.

Dasein and Foresight

Dasein, or the state of being present, is a philosophy that highlights everyone's state of being within the context of a phenomenon. In this process, it is understood that there is no way to separate oneself from the world around them (People, 2021). This thought can be applied to the researcher and the participants in the study. For example, I am an observer of the community college as an employee. Therefore, I understand the common language and terms used in the context of the student experience. Additionally, while I am not a veteran or student at the community college, I have an awareness and preconceived ideas about the services, classes, and other opportunities for successful student matriculation.

Through this process, I did not remove myself from involvement but instead used my own bias to understand the student experience better. For example, I entered this experience with an understanding of community college student retention challenges, student development theory, and a general sense that students utilize college services. I did not, however, understand how this might affect student veterans. The responses from the participants increased my understanding and holistic knowledge of the student experience. Further, while not working as an agent of the institution, I entered this study with the memory of hearing student stories, interpreting complaints or concerns, and observing students participating in college activities. It was not reasonable to remove myself from this knowledge, so it was necessary to apply Hermeneutic analysis to the student veteran population for a greater understanding of the phenomenon in this study.

Hermeneutic circle

While applying the Moustakas (1994) method for data analysis, a Hermeneutic circle was utilized to gain insight and a revised understanding of the phenomenon. The Hermeneutic circle includes reading and re-reading the sum of the data and nuances to create new understanding as data is analyzed to interpret how someone makes sense of their world (Peoples, 2021). For example, I read each interview narrative during the initial data analysis process to understand what was recorded. Subsequent readings led to theme development and connections to the literature. During the subsequent readings, however, the development of joys, frustrations, concerns, and motivation emerged.

Also, contradictions emerged as the student participants reconciled their responses to the interview questions. For example, several participants expressed frustration with the enrollment process, but it was not the same experience. Frustration was connected to limited information, external factors, or certain steps in the process (i.e., VA paperwork, application, financial aid, or course selection).

Further, I began to understand persistence through the studied population's lens. A reflection proceeding each reading created opportunities to understand how each participant's feelings, experiences, and context developed meaning. The sum of these developments allowed me to understand the essence of being a student veteran in the community college.

Chapter Summary

The results described in this chapter present emergent themes based on each participant's responses. Containing profiles of the participants and the institution, information was gathered to address the questions on student veteran transition to

community college and perceptions of the utilization of college resources to address needs. The participant profiles briefly described military service, the rationale for attending a community college, education goals, and personal needs. Six themes emerged: a challenging enrollment process, mission-driven goals, a positive view of resources and asking for help, feeling misunderstood, seeking community, and mitigating needs. The next chapter discusses the results, conclusions, a connection to the theoretical framework, ethical considerations, a description of the phenomenon, the supporting theoretical framework, and the implications for best practices in higher education.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This phenomenological study described the experiences of student military veterans in a community college with physical and psychological health needs. Each participant enrolled in the community college upon transition from active duty to civilian life. They made the decision to leverage the use of the benefits of the post-9/11 GI Bill in order to pursue a college education. Only one of the participants was on active duty in the Army Reserves at the time of the interview. This study aimed to understand the persistence goals of student veterans through experiences related to their perception and utilization of college services and help-seeking behavior.

While seeking to understand the experiences of the student veterans, this study was guided by two research questions. Subsequently, six significant themes were identified during the interview process and analysis. First, the findings highlight a consensus that college enrollment is likened to employment, where success or persistence, among other factors, is connected to timeliness, preparation, and dedication. In addition, themes emerged, including challenges during the enrollment process, possessing mission-driven goals, a positive view of resources and asking for help, feeling misunderstood, seeking community, and finding tools to mitigate barriers.

This chapter will briefly review the methodology and discuss the six emergent themes related to the literature, research questions, and theoretical implications. Additionally, this chapter will present the study's significance, its impact on community college practitioners, and suggestions for further research.

Significance

More than 40,000 programs in the United States are designed to assist veterans transitioning to civilian life (Carter, 2013). The health needs and transition experiences of military veterans have been well-documented. Numerous programs seek to reduce barriers; however, many veterans experience challenges when using the programs or services (Perkins et al., 2019; Aronson et al., 2019). For example, veterans reported that they did not use the services during the reintegration process for the following reasons: many felt they did not need help, had difficulty identifying a program or service that adequately met their needs, did not understand the types of programs they qualified for, and did not know where to acquire assistance (Morgan et al., 2020).

The low utilization of services designed for veterans has led program leaders in higher education to employ mechanisms that can help reduce reintegration barriers, increase help-seeking behaviors and support private and community-based systems (Morgan et al., 2020). Further, studies showed that veterans felt less encouraged and were less likely than nonveterans to engage with faculty members or participate in support programs. These feelings contributed to invisibility (N.S.S.E., 2010, Livingston et al., 2011; Osborne, 2014). Morgan (2020) noted that increasing the reach of programs and services and reducing barriers must align with how veterans report valuing their reintegration goals. The study further demonstrated that barrier reduction efforts are recognized and needed by veterans. Still, they need to align more with what veterans need and the underuse of these services. For example, the programs mentioned in the study provided transportation and financial support; however, the veterans in the study were interested in accessing tools to increase self-esteem and motivation. Special efforts

must be made to reduce veterans' reintegration barriers from the most junior enlisted ranks (Morgan, 2020).

Discussion of Themes and Literature

Three major themes were identified regarding the following research question: What were military veterans' perceptions and lived experiences with physical and psychological health needs regarding seeking help and utilizing college services? The major themes that emerged included a positive view of college resources, recognizing feeling misunderstood or isolated, and seeking community.

The study participants discussed several factors influencing their decision to enroll in the military. Subsequently, these same influences impacted their decisions to enroll in the community college. For example, the participants share commonalities with financial insecurities, varying family support, and goals toward professional achievement. In more than half of the responses, there was an expressed perception that college attendance would help secure health resources, financial stability, connections to other support systems, and new tools for success.

This study recognizes the unique reintegration experiences of military veterans, and that readjustment into civilian life presents challenges. Among those challenges, several factors should be addressed; however, this study is focused on the essence of the community college experience. Although more than 400,000 social and educational programs support reintegration efforts, it is reported that the process can be overwhelming and presents additional challenges for veterans with physical and psychological health needs. For example, a study on veteran educational attainment suggested that services and the GI Bill benefit significantly support educational

attainment and an increase in two-year undergraduate enrollment (Holian & Adam, 2020). Nevertheless, there were still barriers to student success. In addition, Elnitsky et al. (2017) suggested a correlation between low usage of benefits and participation in support programs.

College programs exist to reduce the barriers for student veterans. However, while numerous programs have been established to support veterans, it has been reported that they need help connecting with programs or are not interested in that type of support (Morgan et al., 2020). Therefore, this study aimed to fill the gaps in the current literature regarding the experiences of student veterans in community colleges. Additionally, this study's findings expound on students' perceptions regarding connection to resources, the college community, and the reintegration experiences that support college persistence.

The following discussion will connect the findings of this research to current literature related to the student veteran experiences. Three themes emerged regarding seeking help and utilizing college services, and three themes emerged regarding transitioning from the military to the integration of community college. First, the illustrations show that help-seeking behavior is connected to a positive view of college resources, feeling misunderstood by civilians, and an inclination to seek a supportive community. Further, the second illustration shows that perceived transition experiences are connected to the college enrollment process, students possessing mission-driven goals, and actions toward mitigating additional needs.

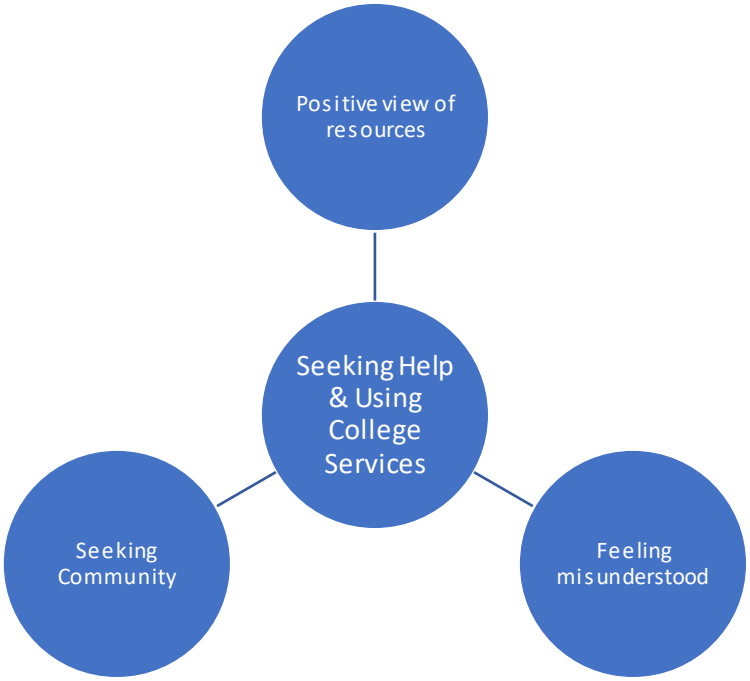

Figure 1. Illustration of seeking help and using college services

Feeling Misunderstood

The identities of student veterans influence their decisions and experiences during the reintegration process. It is important to note that their identity is a source of pride and frustration that requires balance, patience, and respect. Veteran identity is interwoven with personal experiences and characteristics that impact their sense of self (Hack, DeForge, & Lucksted, 2017). The participants in this study described feeling misunderstood when trying to navigate the college experience and connect with campus culture. Participants expressed discomfort when interacting with civilian colleagues. Additionally, it was noted that questions about combat, deployments, or traumas caused many to conceal their veteran identity when meeting people. In corroboration with Southwell et al. (2018), veterans in this study found less emotional support and respect from peers, which impacted their campus involvement. Further, participants desired to be seen and heard like their counterparts. While classroom experiences were positive,

misunderstandings about career goals, advising, and the financial aid process led to initial misgivings about the continued use of college support.

Conversely, the experience of feeling misunderstood was not continuous, and the participants did not view this as a reason to avoid involvement. A study suggested that student veterans may experience conflicting identities when transitioning from military to civilian life as they try to apply military principles to curricular and co-curricular involvements (Hamrick & Rumann, 2013). This was evident when participants described their interactions on campus. For example, participants expressed an awareness of their perceived identity, and they worked to demonstrate their communication skills and outward expressions to appear friendly or approachable.

Attitudes of being misunderstood or ignored surfaced during the interview, which heightened the need to seek additional help from college personnel. For example, the participants discussed feeling marginalized by their civilian colleagues, which led to discomfort or confrontation. Additionally, some expressed that their educational and professional goals were disregarded when talking with reintegration personnel or college professionals. In each case, however, the veterans discussed finding assistance from the College Veterans Affairs Office and disability services. These connections provided aid with classroom experiences and reasonable interventions. In addition, the veterans found solace with the Veterans Affairs Office and student support offices regarding access to housing, food security, and connections to local resources outside the college while not feeling exposed or disrespected. Further, all participants reflected on a sense of maturity and felt comfortable with the college demographics.

Seeking Community

Seeking camaraderie, all participants identified collegiate groups or programs that facilitated support services, exposure to motivational experiences, and connection to the campus community. Membership in Phi Theta Kappa honor society, TRiO Student Support Services, Veterans Club, Men of Color Initiative, The Achievement Academy, student newspaper, and Latin student group are among a selection of programs and activities that have involved the students with the college and provided experiences with travel, internships, volunteerism, and research. In addition, the connection to the campus community has helped the veteran community to overcome personal challenges and provided a sense of self-worth, introduction to professional environments, and motivation to continue the pursuit of educational attainment.

The military offered opportunities that bolstered camaraderie and a sense of belonging, accompanied by a culture of respect, motivation, and relationship (Demers, 2011; Naphan & Elliot, 2015). Further, the literature explains that the military impacts collective responsibility, group dynamics, and lasting bonds (Tick, 2005; Lafferty, Alford, Davis, & O'Connor, 2008). The participants described similar experiences that helped them overcome personal challenges and experiences that created a sense of inclusion. It was reported that veterans have trouble when attempting to identify these experiences in the civilian world; in each case, however, participants reported that a sense of community was essential to their success on campus. Organizational membership encouraged involvement, sharpened leadership skills, and created a heightened sense of pride. In addition, participants reported forming close relationships with peers and faculty and found that these relationships extended opportunities for volunteerism and career involvement. The findings in this study contrast with Southwell et al. (2018), which

suggested that veterans are less likely to participate in extracurricular activities, engage with faculty research, or participate in community service activities. Likely, the participants in this study encountered different external factors that permitted time for campus involvement. Additionally, the participants in this study were employed on campus or worked for employers who supported educational attainment.

Positive interactions with peers and faculty increase learning and academic success (Hamrick & Rumann, 2013; Minnis, Bondi, & Rumann, 2013). This was corroborated by the illustration of campus involvement, group interactions, academic achievement, and a willingness to approach opportunities like internships and to hold leadership roles in student groups. Further, it was observed that many participants found that a sense of community was lacking due to departure from the military, separation from family, or isolation from the community. Participants reported that faculty and campus personnel wanted them to succeed because they offered encouragement, solutions to barriers, and insights to achieve academically or professionally.

A Positive View of Resources and Help-seeking

Tutoring, disability services, and access to health resources were described as the most beneficial and utilized campus resources among the student veterans. Revisiting the perceived parallels of work and school, the veterans prioritized connecting to campus resources during their transition processes. The participants unanimously shared positive views regarding campus resources despite varying motivating factors, including seeking counseling and medical attention, self-awareness, being first-generation students, having access to limited outside resources, and functioning in society as a marginalized group.

Veterans reported that they experienced barriers when using services during the transition process for a variety of reasons that included the perception of not needing assistance, difficulty finding a social and educational program that met their needs, a lack of understanding regarding the available program offerings, or lack of knowledge regarding where to gain access to programs (Aronson, Perkins, Morgan, Blesser, Davenport, & Vogt, 2019). Further, veterans demonstrated lower utilization of college services due to other factors like work responsibilities, lack of family support, and other commitments (Southwell et al., 2018). Additionally, Southwell's (2018) study reported dissatisfaction among veterans with the services provided by support offices regarding transferring military credit and understanding the GI Bill benefits, asserting that student veterans who regularly visited these offices demonstrated significant improvement regarding retention and their perceptions of the environment. Although the findings of this research contrast with some of the literature, every participant noted having limited support systems and barriers before or during the enrollment process. For example, the participants who experienced financial difficulties or housing disparities were directly related to barriers during the transition process. They could not locate the appropriate program that offered advocacy or assistance, which exacerbated their experiences in gaining access to other resources like counseling, employment, food security, and medical care.

In more than half of the reports, the participants enrolled at the community college to gain access to help and other services. While traditional students utilize college services at a higher rate than nontraditional students, it was found that this population of students welcomed the assistance and unanimously shared a positive view on asking for

help and securing resources (Wardley, Belanger, & Leonard, 2013). Considerations like fear, exposure to new technology, and course rigor were motivating factors to seek help from college personnel. In contrast, however, participants did not feel comfortable using counseling or medical care services at the college. In fact, they used the services offered by the VA to support their health needs, as they did not want to burden the college personnel. This sentiment seemed to have developed due to their desire to maintain a positive college experience. In addition, they felt the VA was better positioned to understand their military experiences and issues connected with those experiences. Finally, it is reasonable to prioritize the variance of identity when assessing the transition and reintegration process, as it may influence attitudes and outcomes regarding health behaviors and support (Hack, DeForge, & Lucksted, 2017).

Support systems are essential to the success of students. While student veterans who have positive interactions with faculty and advising offices offered insight into the importance of quality education rather than social engagement interactions (Southwell et al., 2018), each participant found value in seeking help and using college services. They found assistance and connections from various sources on campus, including faculty, peers, and college personnel. The findings suggested a balance between academic experiences and social interactions. While they found connections with faculty as crucial for success, they also found the campus environment helpful, even to the extent of finding reciprocity from peers, problem-solving skills, and an ability to accomplish tasks.

Three major themes were identified in relation to the research question: How do military veterans with physical and psychological health needs perceive their transition experiences from the military to the community college? The major themes that emerged

included a challenging enrollment process, possessing mission-driven goals, and pursuing ways to mitigate needs.

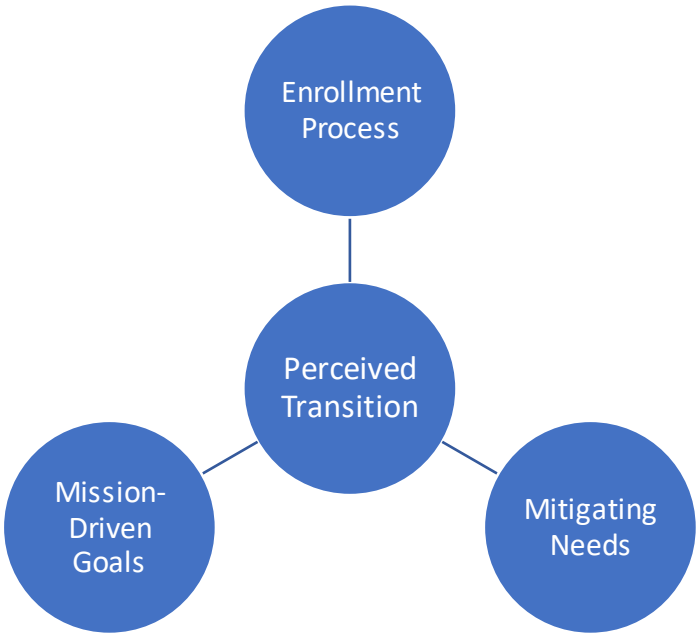

Figure 2. Perceived transition

Challenging Enrollment Process

The expressed challenges with the enrollment process at the community college can be broken into two categories: the daunting GI Bill paperwork and navigating the college enrollment process. Seven of the eight participants currently utilize the education benefits of the GI Bill, and one active-duty participant, while not receiving benefits, is working to finalize tuition assistance. Regarding the perceived transition process, the participants noted difficulties with gaining access to information, a lack of understanding regarding expectations during enrollment, and tedious experiences as hurdles. Conversely, some participants found that the enrollment process was seamless because of guidance from college personnel. In some cases, it was noted that college personnel's

assistance proved beneficial when compared to self-navigation. The participants who experienced challenges with college personnel found success working with a veteran's advocate.

Enrollment in the community college was a favorable option for the participants to achieve professional goals, better acclimate to civilian life, and improve financial constraints. However, while many participants are successfully matriculating through the college experience, they faced challenges during the enrollment process that were described as tedious, daunting, or frustrating. Concerning related literature, veterans reported situations during matriculation that were often described as stressful and challenging to navigate (Ackerman & DiRamio, 2009; Wheeler, 2012). Additionally, there was evidence that veterans found dissatisfaction and a lack of confidence in the institution regarding their unique needs related to the military experience.

Veterans with eligibility for post-9/11 GI benefits reported challenges in understanding the documents and process for utilizing the services, which hindered enrollment or continued enrollment in undergraduate institutions (Steele, Salecedo, & Cole, 2017). In contrast, participants who reported a less challenging enrollment process were supported initially. In addition, they reported that working with veteran support, advising, and other college personnel was beneficial and alleviated some of the stressors connected with completing benefits paperwork, understanding the college process, and selecting appropriate coursework. While most of the participants are first-generation students, they did not express involvement in a new student orientation or first-year program. Compared to traditional students, veterans are less likely to participate in orientation or university support services (Southwell et al., 2018). Although this cohort

of participants actively uses college services, orientation should be considered when understanding the introduction to the college process.

Mission-Driven Goals

The participants collectively shared that the military influenced their career decisions. They relied on the values from their military training to choose disciplines that would allow them to continue working in a similar field. Characteristics like timelines, attention to detail, diligence, fortitude, and preparation were attributed to military training. Further, the participants expressed that while they did not feel prepared during the enrollment process, they did feel knowledgeable in the classroom because of personal experience, intentionality, and critical thinking skills.

College enrollment is likened to a "job," where it is perceived that timeliness, attention to detail, focus, and diligence are essential to success. The participants in this study felt knowledgeable and experienced in courses related to their previous training. Additionally, their selection of majors was influenced by their roles in the military. Congruent with Reisser (2011), the predetermined roles and job training were influential; however, the findings indicate significant correlations to their student roles and professional aspirations. Durdella and Kim (2012) found that while military students may earn lower grades, they are better prepared for classroom participation, interaction, and time management skills related to their training in the military. The prospect of failure was met with a reminder of the values instilled in the military. Each respondent shared values like fortitude, intentionality, getting out of a comfort zone, goal attainment, and preparation as a reflection of success. They also believe that a strong work ethic will yield positive results.

Mitigating Needs

While successfully navigating the college, each participant expressed continued disparity or insecurity regarding access to health resources, basic needs, housing, and employment. Phrases like frustration, feeling overwhelmed, trauma, hardship, and fear were among some of the responses when discussing perpetual needs. However, it was evident that while the participants were still experiencing personal deficits, no one expressed feeling defeated and described plans to continue working with college personnel to mitigate or remove specific barriers that could hinder success.

The findings in this study align with current studies concerning the needs of veterans in the United States. Whether enrolled in support programs or postsecondary education, veterans' access to adequate support for health resources, housing, and other basic needs is challenging. Some of the common challenges experienced by veterans include vocational training, employment, education, legal matters, financial burden, housing disparity, health needs, and social relationships (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2016; Tsai, El-Gabalawy, et al., 2015; Morgan et al., 2020). Further, veterans under age 25 experience more vocational challenges upon exiting the military when compared to civilians in similar demographics (Castro & Hassan, 2014). Another challenge they encountered is that they account for approximately six percent of the U.S.; however, they comprise 10 percent of the population without stable housing (Henry, Shivji, & Buck, 2014).

This perpetual need is conflated with trauma, PTSD, traumatic brain injury, physical injuries, and other environmental factors like lack of support, overwhelming financial hardship, and family responsibilities. In addition, the transition process for

many student veterans could increase stress levels, feelings of isolation, and symptoms related to physical injury, PTSD, and traumatic brain injury (Church, 2009). The participants in this study admitted facing at least one ongoing barrier while being enrolled at the community college and that the transition process has been a "tug of war" experience. Each person, however, reported working with college personnel or a VA advocate to alleviate the pressures of the situation. In addition, Demers (2011) identified integrity, national pride, allegiance, discipline, and commitment as values instilled by the military during basic training. Although challenges are present, each participant seems resilient and committed to completing their academic goals, even if temporary separation is required.

Recommendations for Further Research

While the focus of this study explicitly addresses questions on student persistence, help-seeking behavior, and the experiences of currently enrolled students, some additional questions and themes emerged that could lead to further research beyond the scope of the findings. For example, the participants were community college students with physical or mental health needs and were all military-connected under the post-9/11 GI Bill. In addition, a replication of this study through the lens of a for-profit institution or workforce-specific program could have different outcomes, as students within that phenomenon have different expectations, enrollment processes, and social experiences. Further, regional factors could influence the experiences of students. For instance, this study was conducted in the Midwest, and the participants attended campuses in urban and suburban environments. The size and location of the institution could affect access to services, financial provision for programs, and connection to external support. Moreover,

environmental factors, cultural pressures, and gender identity could also influence professional goals and educational attainment.

Participants discussed their understanding and obligation to their academic success through the support of the GI Bill, which provides financial assistance. While utilization of the GI Bill was a qualifier for participant selection in this study, it was noted that this type of assistance is not always available. Thus, revisiting outcomes for students who use self-pay methods, student loans, and other grants or scholarships could create a different experience, mainly if the students work full-time to subsidize educational costs.

Identified as an area requiring empirical study, the scope of community college policy is an expanding subject that requires distinction and relationship to other branches of higher education, namely four-year institutions. Ongoing research is recommended in the areas of veteran-friendly campuses and the practice of incorporating student voices in decisions that impact the development of student programs. Potentially, this practice could impact how students view services and co-curricular programs and influence their self-efficacy, goal attainment, or perception of their educational career. For example, respondents noted a disconnect between available resources on campus and required resources, consequently resulting in low utilization or negative perceptions.

As noted, the health needs of the participants were designated as a qualifier for participation in the study. However, the goal of this study was not to address the details of the health needs or the interventions that might be used to assist students in crisis. Therefore, it is recommended that additional research is necessary to understand how that might impact the student transition experience, persistence, classroom interaction, student

engagement, and barrier reduction. The literature addresses these topics through the scope of military programs, four-year institutions, and health disciplines. The gaps in the literature regarding community college policy and practice open the door to additional study.

Another recommendation includes the impact of technology and the implications connected to online and hybrid courses. The participants in the study expressed confidence in using technology in their field in contrast to the technology required for classes. However, some feelings of being confused or overwhelmed were discussed. Additionally, the impact of access to virtual resources and access to tools like Wi-Fi and laptops are topics worth discussing.

Students participating in this study had at least a 2.0 GPA. Continued study regarding the access and impact of utilization of resources with academic probation students would expand our understanding of student veterans and academic success.

Finally, barrier reduction, access to education, transition experiences, and understanding student needs are common threads in student retention and persistence studies. While this study focused on persistence, additional research is recommended to continue with student retention and the intersectionality of the two models. The developments of studying this intersectionality have excellent potential for the achievement of student veterans and other populations of students in higher education.

Implications for the Field

Theoretical Implication

Rendón's (1994) validation theory has been applied as a framework to understand student success and its impact on at-risk student populations. For example, this lens has

offered insight into understanding low-income, first-generation students of color, students in developmental education, immigrants, international students, and community college students. In addition, the original validation theory illustrated six principles that reflected the ongoing process of empowering, confirming, and supporting marginalized students as they are less likely to subscribe to institutional support, have outside obligations, and avoid the perception of being unprepared in academic settings (Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011).

Students reported feeling more motivated by faculty, staff, and family encouragement than by getting involved (Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011). Further, there were implications that validation impacted students who have experienced powerlessness, misgivings about succeeding, and absence of care, as data reflected increased confidence, motivation, and increased capacity to learn in instances where validating factors are present (Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011). Rendón (2002) applied the theory to nontraditional students stating that this group required direction and guidance with a nonpatronizing delivery. This theory suggested that students who encounter obstacles on college campuses would benefit from reassurance and confirmation from faculty. While some students can overcome the barriers, the at-risk students would likely respond by leaving the institution (Rendón, 2002).

When applied to the findings of this study, Rendón's theory of validation offers additional insight into the responses from the participants. Compared to other marginalized college populations, veterans experience many of the same barriers to student success and express similar feelings of powerlessness, being unseen, and frustration. Additionally, veterans expressed increased confidence, motivation, and

capacity to learn when encouraged by faculty and other college personnel. Finally, the participants in this study, unlike Rendón, were more likely to get involved in campus organizations and the college community. This unique point offers insight into the veteran experience. While veterans enrolled in the community college with a combination of needs, they also had military experiences that created a sense of self-worth, confidence, and team-centered thinking that allowed them to explore group interactions on campus which enriched their experience and increased opportunities for persistence.

Practical Implication

The student veteran population at the community college will continue to increase as deployments and assignments change. Additionally, transition experiences will always present challenges, as participation and separation from the military produce physical and emotional outcomes often shaped by trauma and injuries. While many veterans successfully readjust to civilian life, considerable barriers influence that level of success. Further, more than half of the veteran population enrolled in community colleges live with PTSD and other psychological or physical problems.

The findings in this study show that while physical and psychological health issues are present, it is reasonable to understand that these impact perception and usage of college services. Aronson et al. (2019) explained barriers to using college services, including the perception of not needing help, not identifying programs that sufficiently meet a need, not understanding how to qualify for benefits, and not knowing where to obtain support. In addition, the participants in this study perceived college services as valuable but expressed feeling unheard or frustrated when trying to access services. This

speaks to the continued need to align college services and student perception. Morgan et al. (2020) reported that 94 percent of programs increased access to services but did not align with the veterans' goals.

Southwell et al. (2018) found significant effects on the perception of feeling supported by the campus environment, interactions with faculty, and student organization participation rather than the number of visits to support offices. These findings support this study's responses and provide insight into soliciting a student-centered voice when developing programs. Institutions practicing proactive program development could find increased success when supporting the student veteran population. Further, identifying meaningful and intentional interventions could increase enrollment, matriculation, and other measures of student success, like fall-to-fall or fall-to-spring enrollment.

Finally, understanding the experiences of student veterans should be ongoing and critical, particularly when considering that veterans' experiences are unique and dynamic. When considering policy development or program implementation, veteran experiences should not be homogenized. However, they should be considered through a lens that puts student voice, experience, and perception at the beginning stages of development.

Summary

The goal of this study aimed to understand the transition experiences and perceptions of student veterans with physical and psychological health needs in the community college. Further, an expansion of qualitative research contributed to understanding help-seeking behavior and using campus resources. Finally, the emerging themes illustrate the dynamic nature of student veterans and the role of validation and a

sense of connection in influencing enrollment patterns, strategies for success, and persistence.

The results described themes that explain the essence of the transition experience. First, the summary of findings could argue that while student veterans experience various barriers during the transition and enrollment process, there is an essence of focus, diligence, and self-awareness that encourages using resources and the community to achieve goals. Second, the participants in this study were academically prepared, confident, and willing to engage in the campus environment; therefore, it could be argued that applying this type of student voice and experience is beneficial when developing policies and programs for student success. Finally, considering the dynamic experiences of student veterans, it could be understood that asking for help manifests in various ways that should be met with clear strategies, respect, and a flexible approach to providing continuous support.

Appendices

Appendix I.

Interview Protocol

Semi-structured interviews with student military veterans

Date:

Time:

Location:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Description of the project:

Questions:

1. Tell me about your decision to enroll in this college.
    a. What fields are you interested in pursuing?
    b. Why this college and not a different school?
2. How long have you been a student here?
3. Could you detail your experience during the enrollment process? What kinds of support did you receive during the process?
    a. What worked well and what didn't work well during this process?
4. Let's talk about your support systems.
    a. Who provides support for you in your personal life?
    b. How do your support systems view you as a student?
    c. Where do you find the most support?
5. Let's talk about your needs.
    a. Could you describe any of your emotions, metal? Or physical needs?
    b. Do you see this as a place to help you with your needs? Why or why not?
6. How do you define success?
    a. What about being a successful student?
    b. What factors contribute to being successful?
    c. Is your education a part of your idea of success?
7. How do you feel about asking for help?
    a. Who do you think of as being helpful?
8. Describe your experiences with receiving help or assistance at the college.
    a. Describe what services you use at the college
    b. What has been your experience with college services?
    c. What has been your experience with military services?

9. Describe your experience after leaving the military.
10. Let's talk about your experiences in the classroom.
    a. Could you describe your positive experiences?
    b. Could you describe your negative experiences?
11. Are you involved with the campus culture/ community? (Yes or no)In what ways have you gotten involved with the campus culture?
    a. Talk about your experiences with friends, teachers, clubs, office supports, etc.
12. Thinking about your experiences,
    a. How would you improve your experiences at the college?
13. What does it mean to be a military veteran mean to you?
14. What does it mean to be a military student veteran mean to you?
15. How do you see yourself today versus when you first left the military?
16. Tell me about your experiences while getting help on campus and what led you to seek help on campus?
17. When you are on campus, have you experienced trauma?
    a. Describe your process for getting help
    b. Describe your process for being successful
    c. Describe how you achieve the goals you have set for yourself
18. What does resilience mean to you?
19. What factors keep you here at school? What makes you come back every day?
20. How can challenges be resolved to address your needs?

Thank you for participating in this interview. While you may be called for additional clarification, all your responses will remain confidential and will be used to inform the study.

Appendix II. Research Participant Flyer

Students participating in interview process will be completed on a voluntary basis. All responses are for the purpose of informing current body of research and dissertation reporting. This experience does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, age, ability, protected veteran status, or any other nondiscrimination policy that is applicable in state or federal law.

Appendix III. Informed Consent

UMSL
University of Missouri–St. Louis

Informed Consent for Qualitative Research

Informed Consent Form for_____

This informed consent form is for completing a dissertation/phenomenological study on the perceptions and experiences of student military veterans in a community college, titled "*You Can Get There from Here: A Phenomenological Study of Help-Seeking Behavior and Experiences of Student Military Veterans in Community College*."

Name of Principle Investigator:	Donivan W. Foster
Name of Organization:	University of Missouri-St. Louis
Name of Sponsor/Chair:	Dr. Shawn Woodhouse

This document has two parts:

- **Information that will be shared with you about the study and participation in the study**
- **Signed Consent (if you choose to participate in the study)**

You will be given a copy of the complete Informed Consent Form.

UMSL
University of Missouri–St. Louis

Part I: Information Sheet

Introduction
I am Donivan Foster, working on a dissertation at the University of Missouri- St. Louis. I am doing qualitative research on the experiences and perspectives of student military veterans enrolled in community college. I will give you information and invite you to be part of this study. You do not have to decide today whether to participate in the research. Before you choose, you can talk with anyone you feel comfortable with about the study. This consent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask me to stop as we go through the information, and I will take the time to explain. If you have questions later, you can ask them at any time.

Purpose of the Research
As a result of the educational benefits of the post-9/11 GI Bill, enrollment has increased for military veterans. As a result, veterans are enrolling in colleges and universities at record numbers. However, research suggests that while several services and programs assist with the transition, many veterans do not seek to use the services. This study aims to explore the viewpoints and experiences of student military veterans in community colleges. In addition, this study will look at factors connected to your student engagement experiences and motivational factors, assess your mental and physical health needs, and understand the value of seeking help from peers and services at the college.

Type of Research Intervention
This research will involve your participation in a detailed one-on-one discussion that will take 1 hour to 1.5 hours, depending on your responses. The meeting will be in an interview format.

Participant Selection
You have been asked to participate in this study because of your experience as a veteran and student. Additionally, you meet the criteria of being an enrolled student, a person connected with the military, and you are at the age threshold of 18 years or older. Your responses will contribute value to our understanding and knowledge of the student military veteran experience.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. It is your choice to participate. Your choice to participate (or not) will remain the same services you receive or your educational opportunity. It will not affect your success in class or further job/educational attainment. You may change your mind and stop participating with no penalty or question.

Procedures
A. I am asking you to help me learn more about the student military veteran experience, and I am interested in getting your perspective on various topics. Therefore, I am inviting you to participate in this research study, and if you accept, you will be asked to schedule and participate in an interview with me.
B. You will participate in an interview with me (Donivan Foster). During the interview, I will sit comfortably with you at your chosen campus. We might talk in a virtual format if it is better for you or if safety prevents it. If you do not wish to answer any of the questions during the interview, you may say so, and I will move on to the next question. Unless you want someone else to be there, no one else will be present. The information recorded is confidential, and no one else except myself or

my dissertation committee will have access to the information documented during your interview. The entire interview will be audio-recorded, but no one will be identified by name on the recording. The file will be stored in an encrypted file on my personal computer. The recordings will be destroyed after the dissertation data analysis and will likely be destroyed before the close of 2022.

Risks
You may share personal or confidential information during our conversation, cover uncomfortable topics, or discuss painful/traumatic memories. You do not have to answer questions during the interview if you do not wish to. Anytime during the interview, you may want to connect with mental health counseling or other services. They will be made available to you.

Benefits
There may be no direct benefit to you, but your willingness to participate will likely help inform the population about the experiences and perspectives of student military veterans. Additionally, this may create opportunities for you to connect with resources or ideas during our discussion.

Confidentiality
Rest assured, your personal information and responses will not be shared with anyone outside the community. Only I, as the researcher and the dissertation committee, will have access to any data or information that has been collected. Any identifying information will not be disclosed, and pseudonyms (fake names) will be used throughout the data collection and reporting.

Sharing Results
Nothing you mention today will be shared with anybody outside the research team, and nothing will be attributed to you by name. The knowledge that we get from this research will be shared with you before it is made widely available to the public. Each participant will receive a summary of the results.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw
You do not have to participate in this research if you do not wish to do so. Choosing to participate will not affect your job or educational opportunity in any way. You may stop participating in the interview any time you wish without penalty. I will allow you at the end of the interview to review your comments, and you can ask to modify or remove portions of those if you disagree with my notes or if I did not understand you correctly.

Contact Information
If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to ask during the interview or after. If you wish to contact me late, please get in touch with me at (314) 440-7993 or donivanfoster@gmail.com. The IRB has reviewed this proposal at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. This IRB committee ensures that research participants are protected from harm. If you wish to find out more about the IRB, please get in touch with IRB@umsl.edu.

Form and information adapted from the template and retrieved from
https://www.thecompassforsbc.org/sites/default/files/strengthening_tools/InformedConsent-qualitativestudies.pdf.

UMSL
University of Missouri–St. Louis

Part II: Certificate of Singed Consent

I have been invited to participate in research about the perceptions and experiences of being a student military veteran enrolled at a community college.

I have read the information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research and the process and have the chance to ask questions. All the questions have been answered, and the responses met my satisfaction. Therefore, I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Name of Participant (*Please Print*) _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date_____
Day/Month/Year

Statement by the researcher

I have accurately read the information sheet to the potential participant and the best of my ability, making sure that the participant understands that the following will be done:

1) In-depth interview
2) Live (face-to-face or virtual) interview

I confirm that the participant was allowed to ask questions about the study, and all questions have been answered correctly, accurately, and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced or forced into giving consent, and the permission has been given freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form has been provided to the participant
_____ (*initial)*

Name of Research (*Please Print*) _____

Signature of Researcher_____

Date_____
Day/Month/Year

Students participating in the interview process will complete it voluntarily. All responses are to inform the current body of research and dissertation reporting. This experience does not discriminate based on race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, age, ability, protected veteran status, or any other nondiscrimination policy applicable in state or federal law.

Appendix IV: Themes and Supporting Literature

Research Question 1 What were military veterans' perceptions and lived experiences with physical and psychological health needs regarding seeking help and utilizing college services?		**Supporting Literature**
Theme 1	A positive view of resources and asking for help	1. Veterans reported barriers to using services during the transition process for a variety of reasons that included the perception of not needing assistance, difficulty in finding a social and educational program that met their needs, not understanding the available programs, or not knowing where to gain access to programs (Aronson, Perkins, Morgan, Blesser, Davenport, & Vogt, 2019) 2. Veteran-focused research must consider the variance of identity when assessing the transition and reintegration process, as it may influence attitudes and outcomes regarding health behaviors and support (Hack,

		DeForge, & Lucksted, 2017) 3. Traditional students utilize college services at a higher rate than nontraditional students (Wardley, Belanger, & Leonard, 2013) 4. Student veterans with positive interactions with faculty and advising offices offered insight into the importance of quality of education rather than social engagement interactions (Southwell et al., 2018) 5. Veterans have lower utilization of college service due to a myriad of work, family, and other commitments (Southwell et al., 2018) 6. Southwell's (2018) study reported dissatisfaction with support offices' services about transferring military credit and understanding the GI Bill benefits, asserting that student veterans who regularly visited these offices would show significance

		regarding retention and perceived environment.
Theme 2	Feeling misunderstood	1. Veteran identity is not static but somewhat varies based on personal experience and characteristics that impact a sense of self (Hack, DeFroge, & Lucksted, 2017) 2. Student veterans may experience conflicting identities when transitioning from military life to civilian life as they try to apply military principles to curricular and co-curricular involvements (Hamrick & Rumann, 2013) 3. Compared to traditional students, veterans are less likely to participate in orientation or university support services (Southwell et al., 2018) 4. Veterans perceived receiving less emotional support from their peers and expressed difficulties navigating classroom and faculty interaction and dissatisfaction with local campus

		veterans offices (Southwell et al., 2018)
Theme 3	Seeking community	1. The military's transition experience created status and a sense of belonging accompanied by commander's respect, a culture of following orders, and a relationship with fellow servicemembers (Demers, 2011; Naphan & Elliot, 2015) 2. Generally, in direct contrast to civilian life, military training impacted individualism and pride and refocused attention on collective responsibility, group dynamics, and a superior bond with fellow service members (Tick, 2005; Lafferty, Alford, Davis, & O'Connor, 2008) 3. The expansion of resources, connection with faculty, peers, and community development contributed to increased learning and academic success (Hamrick & Rumann, 2013;

		Minnis, Bondi, & Rumann, 2013) 4. Veterans are less likely to participate in extracurricular activities, engage with faculty research, or participate in community service activities (Southwell et al., 2018)
Research Question 2 How do military veterans with physical and psychological health needs perceive their transition experiences from the military to the community college?		**Supporting Literature**
Theme 4	A challenging enrollment process	1. Veterans with eligibility for post-9/11 GI benefits reported challenges in understanding the documents and process for utilizing the services, which hindered enrollment or continued enrollment in undergraduate institutions (Steele, Salecedo, & Cole, 2017) 2. Veterans reported situations during the matriculation process that were often described as stressful and challenging to navigate (Ackerman &

		DiRamio, 2009; Wheeler, 2012) 3. There is evidence that veterans find possible dissatisfaction with experiences due to a lack of confidence in the institutions' ability to attend to the unique needs and nuances of veteran experiences (Barry et al., 2014)
Theme 5	Possessing mission-driven goals	1. Military training directed servicemembers into predetermined roles and identities with little correlation to their roles and identities as students (Reisser, 2011) 2. While military students earned lower grades, they did have higher academic preparation levels, classroom participation, interaction, and time management skills related to their military training (Durdella & Kim, 2012)
Theme 6	Pursuing ways to mitigate needs	1. The transition process for many student veterans could increase stress levels, feelings of isolation, and symptoms related

		to physical injury, PTSD, and traumatic brain injury (Church, 2009) 2. Veterans under 25 experience more vocational challenges as they have not secured jobs or an education plan upon exiting the military (Castro & Hassan, 2014) 3. Another challenge they encountered is that they account for approximately six percent of the US; however, they comprise 10 percent of the population without stable housing (Henry, Shivji, & Buck, 2014) 4. Often occurring in stages, military training is a process that removes civilian identity and replaces it with values, the integrity of duty, honor, national pride, allegiance, discipline, commitment, and unit pride (Demers, 2011) 5. Some of the common challenges experienced by post-9/11 veterans are housed within the compartments

		of vocation, employment, education, legal matters, financial burden, housing disparity, health needs, and social relationships (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2016; Tsai, El-Gabalawy, et al., 2015; Morgan et al., 2020)

Appendix V: Interview Questions Informed by Research Questions

Research Question 1	**Interview Questions**
What were military veterans' perceptions and lived experiences with physical and psychological health needs regarding seeking help and utilizing college services?	
Q4.	Let's talk about your support systems. a. Who provides support for you in your personal life? b. How do your support systems view you as a student? c. Where do you find the most support?
Q5.	Let's talk about your needs. a. Could you describe any of your emotions, mental? Or physical needs? b. Do you see this as a place to help you with your needs? Why or why not?
Q6.	How do you define success? a. What about being a successful student? b. What factors contribute to being successful? c. Is your education a part of your idea of success?
Q7.	How do you feel about asking for help? a. Who do your think of as being helpful?
Q8.	Describe your experiences with receiving help or assistance at the community college. a. Describe what services you use at the community college. b. What has been your experience with college services?

	c. What has been your experience with military services?
Q11.	Are you involved with the campus culture/community? a. In what ways have you gotten involved with the campus culture? b. Talk about your experiences with friends, teachers, clubs, office supports, etc.
Q16.	Tell me about your experiences while getting help on campus and what led you to seek help on campus.
Q17.	When you are on campus, have you experienced trauma? a. Describe your process for getting help. b. Describe your process for being successful. c. Describe how you achieve the goals you have set for yourself.
Q18.	What does resilience mean to you?
Q19.	What factors keep you here at school? What makes you come back every day?
Research Question 2	**Interview Questions**
How do military veterans with physical and psychological health needs perceive their transition experiences from the military to the community college?	
Q1.	Tell me about your decision to enroll at the community college. a. What field are you interested in pursuing? b. Why this college and not a different school?
Q2.	How long have you been a student here at the community college?
Q3.	Could you detail your experience during the enrollment process? a. What kinds of support did you receive during the process?

	b. What worked well and what didn't work well during this process?
Q9.	Describe your experience after leaving the military.
Q10.	Let's talk about your experiences in the classroom. a. Could you describe your positive experiences? b. Could you describe your negative experiences?
Q12.	Thinking about your experiences, a. How would you improve your experience at the community college?
Q13.	What does it mean to be a military veteran to you?
Q14.	What does it mean to be a military student veteran to you?
Q15.	How do you see yourself today versus when you first left the military?
Q20.	How can challenges be resolved to address your needs?

References

Ackerman, R., DiRamio, D., & Garza Mitchell, R.L. (2009). Transitions: Combat veterans as college students. *New Directions for Student Services, (126),* 5-14.

Adler, J.M., Chin, E.D., Kolisetty, A.P., & Oltmanns, T.F. (2012). The distinguishing characteristics of narrative identity in adults with features of borderline personality disorder: An empirical investigation. *Journal of Personality Disorders, 26*(4), 498-512.

Ahern, J., Worthen, M., Masters, J., Lippman, S.A., Ozer, E.J., & Moos, R. (2015). The challenges of Afghanistan and Iraq veterans' and approaches to reconnection. *PLoS ONE, 10*(7). e0128599. DOI: 10.137/journal.pone.0128599.

Ahern, N.R., & Norris, A.E. (2011). Examining factors that increase and decrease stress in adolescent community college students. *Journal of Pediatric Nursing, 26*(6), 530-540.

Aikins, R.D., Golub, A., & Bennett, A.S. (2015). Readjustment of urban veterans: A mental health and substance use profile of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans in higher education. *Journal of American College Health, 63*(7), 482-494.

Albright, D.L., Fletcher, K.L., Pelts, M.D., & Taliaferro, L. (2017). Use of college mental health services among student veterans. *Best Practices in Mental Health. 13(*1), 65-79.

Algoe, S.B., & Fredrickson, B.L. (2011). Emotional fitness and the movement of affective science from lab to field. *American Psychologist, 66*, 35-42. Doi:10.1037/a0021720.

Anders, S.L., Frazier, P.A., & Shallcross, S.L. (2012). Prevalence and effects of life event exposure among undergraduate and community college students. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 59*(3), 449-457.

Anney, V.N. (2014). Ensuring the Quality of the Findings of Qualitative Research: Looking at Trustworthiness Criteria.

Aronson, K.R., Perkins, D.F., Morgan, N., Bleser, J., Davenport, K., Vogt, D., et al. (2019). Going it alone: Post-9/11 veteran non-use of healthcare and social service programs during their early transition to civilian life. *Journal of Social Service Research.* https:www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01488376.2018.143410.

Armenta, R.F., Walter, K.H., Geronimo-Hara, T.R., Porter, B., Stander, V.A., Leard Mann, C.A., & for the Millennium Cohort Study Team. (2019). Longitudinal trajectories of comorbid PTSD and depression symptoms among U.S. service members and veterans. *BMC Psychiatry, 19*(396), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-019-2375-1.

Ashby, C. M. (2006*). Higher education: More information could help education determine the extent to which eligible Servicemembers serving on active duty benefited from the relief provided by lenders and schools.* Report to congressional requesters (Report No. GAO-07-11). Washington, DC: U. S. Government Accountability Office. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED494029).

Aslan, M., Concato, J., Peduzzi, P.N., Proctor, S.P., Schnurr, P.P., Marx, B.P., & Vasterling, J.J. (2013). Design of neuropsychological and mental health outcomes of Operation Iraqi Freedom: A longitudinal cohort study. *Journal of Investigative Medicine. 61(*3), 569-577.

Astin, A. (1993). *What matters in college: Four critical years revisited*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bailey, T.R., & Alfonso, M. (2005). Paths to persistence: An analysis of research on program effectiveness at community college. *Community College Research Center, 6*(1). Retrieved from: https://folio.iupui.edu/bitstream/handle/10244/268/PathstoPersistence.pdf?sequence=6

Barnes, S.M., Walter, K.H., & Chard, K.M. (2012). Does a history of mild traumatic brain injury increase suicide risk in veterans with PTSD? *Rehabilitation Psychology, 57*(1), 18-26.

Barnham, C. (2015). Quantitative and qualitative research: Perceptual foundations. *International Journal of Market Research. 57(*6), 837-854. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.2501/IJMR-2015-070.

Barr, J. (2007). Freshmen dropouts. *Journal of Applied Research in Community Colleges, 14*(2), 19-27.

Barry, K.M., Robertson, D., & Mulders, W.H.A.M. (2021). Changes in pre-frontal cortex-thalamic circuitry after acoustic trauma. *Biomedicines, 9*(1), 77. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.3390/biomedicines9010077

Barry, A.E., Whiteman, S.D., & MacDermid Wadsworth, S.M. (2012). Implications of posttraumatic stress among military-affiliated and civilian students. *Journal of American College Health, 60*(8), 562-573.

Bauman, M.C. *Called to serve: The military mobilization of undergraduates* (unpublished doctoral dissertation). University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 2009.

Bean, J. P., & Metzner, B. S. (1985). A conceptual model of nontraditional undergraduate student attrition. *Review of Educational Research, 55*(4), 485–540. https://doi.org/10.2307/1170245

Ben-Zeev, D., Corrigan, P.W., Britt, T.W., & Langford, N. (2012) Stigma of mental illness and service use in the military. *Journal of Mental Health*, 21(3), 264–273.

Bhatnagar, V., Richard, E., Melcer, T., Walker, J., & Galarneau, M. (2015). Lower-limb amputation and effect of posttraumatic stress disorder on Department of Veterans Affairs outpatient cost trends. *Journal of Rehabilitation Research & Development, 52*(7). http://dx.doi.org/10.1682/JRRD.2014.11.0288.

Blais, R.K., Renshaw, K.D., & Jakupcak, M. (2014). Posttraumatic stress and stigma in active-duty service members related to lower likelihood of seeking support. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 27(*1), 116-119. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.21888

Blake, D., Weathers, F.W., Nagy, L.M., Kaloupek, D.G., Gusman, F.D., Charney, D.S., et al. (1995). The development of Clinician-Administered PTSD Scale. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 8*(1), 18-26.

Boerner, H. (2013). Credit where credit is due: Working with our service members to provide credit for experiential learning. *Community College Journal, 84*(1). 20-24.

Bonar, E.E., Bohnert, K.M., Walters, H.M., Ganoczy, D., & Valenstein, M. (2015). Student and nonstudent national guard services members/veterans and their use of services for mental health symptoms. *Journal of American College Health, 63*(7), 437-446.

Borowa, D., Robitschek, C., Harmon, K.M., & Shigemoto, Y. (2016). Posttraumatic stress and growth in student service members and veterans: The role of personal growth initiative. *Journal of American College Health, 64*(7), 527-534. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2016.1188395.

Bradburn, E.M., & Hurst, D.G. (2001). *Community college transfer rates to four-year institutions using alternative definitions of transfer, NCES 2001-197.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

Bragg, D. D. (2001). Community college access, mission, and outcomes: Considering intriguing intersections and challenges. *Peabody Journal of Education, 76*(1), 93-116.

Braxton, J. M., & McClendon, S. A. (2002). The fostering of social integration through institutional practice. *Journal of College Student Retention, 3(*1), 57-71.

Brint, S.G. & Karable, J. (1989). *The diverted dream: Community colleges and the promise of educational opportunity in America, 1900-1985.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Brownell, J.E., & Swaner, L. (2009). High-impact practices: Applying the learning outcomes literature to the development of successful campus programs. *Peer Review, 11*(2), 26-30.

Buckley, K.K., & Cleary, B. (2010). The restoration and modernization of educational benefits under the post-9/11 veterans assistance act of 2008. *Veterans Law Review* (second ed.). 185, 1-35. Retrieved from http://www.bva.va.gov/docs/VLR_VOL2/Copy6

Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment situation of veterans (2012). Retrieved from: https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/vet_03202013.pdf.

Burnett, S.E., & Segoria, J. (2009). Collaboration for military transition students from combat to college: It takes a community. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 22*(1), 53-58.

Byman, D. (2007). *The five front war: The better way to fight global jihad.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Byman, D. (2007). Veterans and colleges have a lot to offer each other. *Chronicle of Higher Education, 54*(16), B5.

Callahan, R., & Jarrat, D. (2014). Helping student servicemembers and veterans succeed. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, 46*(2). 36-41.

Carter, P. (2013). The vets we reject and ignore. *The New York Times.* Retrieved from: https://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/11/opinion/the-vets-we-reject-and-ignore.html

Cate, C.A. (2014). Million records project: *Research from Student Veterans of America*. Student Veterans of America, Washington, DC.

Cate, C. A., Gerber, M., & Holmes, D. L. (2010). *A new generation of student veterans: A pilot study.* Santa Barbara: The University of California, Santa Barbara Institute for Social, Behavioral, and Economic Research.

Cervero, R., & Wilson, A. (2006). *Working the planning table: Negotiating democratically for adult, continuing, and workplace education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Chappell, C. (2010). Veterans finding comfort on campus. *Community College Times.* Retrieved from: http://www.ccdaily.com/article.cfm?ArticleId=2724

Chartrand, J. M. (1990). A causal analysis to predict the personal and academic adjustment of nontraditional students. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 37*, 65-77.

Chase, R.P., McMahon, S.A., & Winch, P.J. (2015). Injury careers after blast exposure among combat veterans deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan. *Social Science & Medicine, 147*, 309-316. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2015.11.015.

Chaves, C. (2006). Involvement, development, involvement, and retention: Theoretical foundations and potential extensions for adult community college students. *Community College Review, 34*(2), 139-152.

Chickering, A.W. (1969). *Education and Identity.* Ann Arbor, MI: Jossey-Bass.

Childers, C. & Hux, K. (2016). Invisible injuries: The experiences of college students with histories of mild traumatic brain injury. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 29*(4), 389-405.

Choy, S. (2002). Findings from the condition of education 2002: Nontraditional undergraduates. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, NCES 2002–012.

Church, T. E. (2009). Returning veterans on Campus with war-related injuries and the long road back home. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 22*(1), 43-52.

Clark, M.E., Bair, M.J., Buckenmaier, C.C., Gironda, R.J., & Walker, R.L. (2007). Pain and combat injuries in soldiers returning from Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom: Implications for research and practice. *Journal of Rehabilitation Research & Development, 44*(2), 179-194.

Collins, J.J. (1998). The complex context of American military culture: A practitioner's view. *The Washington Quarterly, 21*(4). 213-228.

Connelly, L. (2016). Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research. MEDSURG Nursing. 25. 435-436

Cook, B. J., & Kim, Y. (2009). From soldier to student: Easing the transition of service members on campus. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.

Corley, W.B. & McNeil, J.C. (2017). Exploring nontraditional characteristics of students in a freshman engineering course. DOI: 10.18260/1-2-28331

Cornish, M. A., Thys, A., Vogel, D. L., & Wade, N. G. (2014). Post-deployment difficulties and help-seeking barriers among military veterans: Insights and intervention strategies. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 45*(6), 405–409. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0037986

Corrigan, P.W., Druss, B.G., & Perlick, D.A. (2014). The impact of mental illness stigma on seeking and participating in mental health care. *Psychological Science Public Interests. 15(*2), 37-70. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1177/1529100614531398

Corrigan, P.W., Rowan, D., Green, A., Lundin, R., & River, P. (2002). Challenging two mental illness stigmas personal responsibility and dangerousness. *Schizophrenia Bulletin. 28(*2), 293-309.

Corrigan, P. W., & Watson, A. C. (2002). The paradox of self-stigma and mental illness. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 9, 35-53.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.

Creswell, J.W. & Poth, C.N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publication, Inc.

Crisp, G., & Taggart, A. (2013). Community college student success programs: A synthesis, critique, and research agenda. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 37*(2), 114-130.

Currier, J.M., Drescher, K.D., Holland, J.M., Lisman, R., & Foy, D.W. (2016). Spirituality, forgiveness, and quality of life: Testing a mediational model with military veterans with PTSD. *The International Journal of Psychology of Religion, 26*(2). 167-179.

Currier, J. M., McDermott, R. C., & McCormick, W. H. (2017). Mental health treatment-related stigma and professional help-seeking among student veterans. *Psychological Services, 14*(4), 531–542. https://doi.org/10.1037/ser0000129

Currier, J.M., McCormick, W.H., Carroll, T.D., Sims, B.M., & Isaak, S.L. (2018). Prospective patterns of help-seeking behavior among military veterans with probable posttraumatic stress disorder and major depressive disorder. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 206*(12). DOI:10.1097/NMD.0000000000000907.

Davies, S.C., Crenshaw, M., & Bernstein, E.R. (2019). A qualitative examination of college disability services for students with traumatic brain injuries. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 32*(2), 133-146.

Deamers, A. (2010). When veterans come home: The role of community in reintegration. *Journal of Loss and Trauma, (16)* 2, 160-179. https://doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2010.519281.

Dennis, J.M., Phinney, J.S., & Chuateco, L.I. (2005). The role of motivation, parental support, and peer support in the academic success of ethnic minority first-generation college students. *Journal of College Student Development, 46*(3). 223-236.

Department of Defense, Public Affairs Office. Number of members deployed by service component and month/year (based on the contingency tracking system), 2008.

DeSawal, D. M. (2013). Contemporary student veterans and service members: Enrollment patterns and student engagement. In F. A. Hamrick, C. B., Rumann, F. A. Hamrick, C. B. Rumann (Eds.), Called to serve: A 16 handbook on student veterans and higher education (pp. 71-86). San Francisco, CA, US: Jossey-Bass.

DiRamio, D., Ackerman, R., & Mitchell, R.L. From combat to campus: Voices of student-veterans. *NASPA Journal,* 2008, *45*(1), 73-102.

Donnelly, D.T., Donnelly, J.P., Dunnam, M., et al. (2011). Reliability, sensitivity, and specificity of the VA traumatic brain injury screening tool. *Journal of Head Trauma Rehabilitation, 26*, 439-453.

Drebing, C.E., Reilly, E., Henze, K.T., Kelly, M, Russo, A., Smolinsky, J., et al. (2018). Using peer support groups to enhance community integration of veterans in transition. *Psychol Serv, 15*(2), 135-145.

Durdella, N., & Kim, Y.K. (2012). Understanding patterns of college outcomes among student veterans. *Journal of Studies in Education, 2,* 109-129. doi.10.5296/jse.v212.1469.

Elbogen, E.B., Wagner, H.R., Johnson, S.C., Kinneer, P., Kang, H., Vasterling, J.J., & Beckham, J.C. (2013). Are Iraq and Afghanistan veterans using mental health services? New data from a national random-sample survey. *Psychiatric Services*, 64(2), 134–141. DOI: 10.1176/appi.ps.004792011.

Elnitsky, C.A., Blevins, C.I., Fisher, M.P., & Magruder, K. (2017). Military service member and veteran reintegration: A critical review and adapted ecological model. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 87*, 114-128. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/ort000024.

Elnitsky, C.A. & Kilmer, R.P. (2017). Facilitating reintegration for military service personnel, veterans, and their families: An introduction to the special issue. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry Association, 87*(2), 109-113. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/ort0000252.

Ettner, S. L., Frank, R. G., & Kessler, R. C. (1997). The impact of psychiatric disorders on labor market outcomes. *Industrial and Labor Relations Review, 51,* 64-81.

Evans, J.J., Pellegrino, L., & Hoggan, C. (2015). Supporting veterans at the community college: a review of literature. *Supporting Veterans at the Community College,* 47-65.

Fain, P. (2020). New data on veterans' education benefits. *Inside Higher Ed,* Source URL**:** https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2020/02/06/new-data-veterans-education-benefits

Faurer J., & Bailie, P. Managing the re-employment of military veterans through the transition assistance program. *Journal of Business Economics Resources. 2(*1), 55-60.

Ford, D., Northrup, P., & Wiley, L. (2009). Connections, partnerships, opportunities, and programs to enhance success for military students. *New Directions for Student Services, 126,* 61-69.

Ford, K., & Vignare, K. (2015). The evolving military learner population: A review of literature. *Online Learning, 19*(1), 7-30.

Fortney, J.C., Curran, G, M., Hunt, J.B., Cheney, A.M., Lu, L., Valenstein, M., & Eisenberg, D. (2016). Prevalence of probable mental disorders and help-seeking behaviors among veterans and non-veteran community college students. *General Hospital Psychiatry, 38,* 99-104. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.genhosppsych.2015.09.007.

Frazier, P.A., Anders, S.L., Perera, S., Tomich, P., Tennen, H., Park, C., & Tashiro, T. (2009). Potentially traumatic events among undergraduate students: Prevalence and associated symptoms. *Journal of Counseling Psychology.* 56, 450–460.

Garrity, B.F. (2017). A quantitative analysis of the relationship among sources of aid and predictors of student veteran graduate and persistence. *Journal of Veterans Studies, 2*(2), 109-129.

Gailey, R., Allen, K., Castles, J., Kucharik, J., & Roeder, M. (2008). Review of secondary physical conditions associated with lower-limb amputation and long-term prosthesis use. *Journal of Rehabilitation Research and Development, 45*(1), 15-29.

Gonzalez, C.A. & Elliott, M. (2016). Faculty attitudes and behaviors toward student veterans. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 29*(1), 35-46.

Govil, H. (2011). Contemporary Student Veterans and Service Members. In F.A. Hamrick & C.B. Rumann (Eds.), *Called to Serve: A Handbook on Student Veterans and Higher Education* (71-88). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Graf, N.M., Noel, A.Y., & Marini, I. (2015). Assessment of military viewpoints regarding post-secondary education: Classroom preference and experiences. *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin, 59*(1), https://doi.org/10.1177/0034355214558937.

Grossman, P. (2009). Forward with a challenge: Leading our campuses away from the perfect storm. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, (22)*1, 4–9.

Hack, S.M., DeForge, B.R., & Lucksted, A. (2017). Variation in veteran identity as a factor in veteran-targeted interventions. *National Library of Medicine: National Center for Biotechnical Information. 68*(7), 727-729. Retrieved from DOI: 10.1176/appi.ps.201600237

Hamblen, J.L., Grubaugh, A.L., Davidson, T.M., Borkman, A.L., Bunnell, B.E., & Ruggiero, K.J. (2018). An online peer educational campaign to reduce stigma and improve help seeking in veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder. *Telemed E-Health. 25(*1), 41-47.

Hamrick, F.A., & Rumann, C.B. (Eds.). (2013). *Called to serve: A handbook on student veterans and higher education.* San Francisco, CA: Josses-Bass.

Hatch, D. K. (2016). A brief history and a framework for understanding commonalities and differences of community college student success programs. *New Directions for Community Colleges, 2016*(175), 19–31. DOI:10.1002/cc.20209.

Haugen, P.T., McCrillis, A.M., Smid, G.E., & Nijdam, M.J. (2017). Mental health stigma and barriers to mental health care for first responders: A systematic review of meta-analysis. *Journal of Psychiatric Research, 94,* 218-229. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016.jpsychires.2017.08.001.

Hays, D.G., & Singh, A.A. (2012). *Qualitative inquiry in clinical and educational settings.* New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Hefner, J., & Eisenberg, D. (2009). Social support and mental health among college students. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 79*(4), 491 499. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0016918

Higher Education State Funding Trends and Policies on Affordability. United States Government Accountability Office (2014). Retrieved from: https://www.gao.gov/assets/670/667557.pdf.

Hoge, C.W., Auchterlonie, J.L., & Milliken, C.S. (2006). Mental health problems, use of mental health services, and attrition from military service after returning from deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan. *JAMA, 295*(9), 1023-1032.

Hoge, C.W., Castro, C.A., Messer, S.C., McGurk, D., Cotting, D.I., & Koffman, R.L. (2004). Combat duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, mental health problems, and barriers to care. *The New England Journal of Medicine, 351,* 13-22.

Holian, L. & Adam, T. (2020). Veterans' education benefits: A profile of military students who received federal veterans' education benefits in 2015-16. *Stats in Brief U.S. Department of Education, NCES 2020-488rev.*

Horn, L. (2009). *On track to complete? A taxonomy of beginning community college students and their outcomes 3 years after enrolling: 2003-04 through 2006 (NCES 2009).* Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Science, U.S. Department of Education.

Horn, L., & Berger, R. (2004). *College persistence on the rise? Changes in 5-year degree completion and postsecondary persistence rates between 1994 and 2000 (NCES 2005-156).* Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences.

Horn, L.J., & Premo, M.D. (1995). *Profile of undergraduates in U.S. postsecondary education institutions: 1992-93, with an essay on undergraduates at risk (NCES 96-237).* Washington, DC: National Center for Educational Statistics, U.S. Department of Education.

Horn, L. (1996). Nontraditional undergraduates: Trends in enrollment from 1986 to 1992 and persistence and attainment among 1989-90 beginning postsecondary students. [NCES No. 97–578]. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

Humes, E. (2006). *Over here: How the GI Bill transformed the American dream*. Orlando, FL: Harcour, Inc.

Ingala, A., Softas-Nall, L., & Peters, A. (2013). The role of social support in veteran's college adjustment. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 3*(11), 14-21. Retrieved from http://www.ijhssnet.com/

Institute of Medicine (2013). Returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan assessment of readjustment needs of veterans, service members, and their families. The National Academic Press: Washington, DC.

Iverson, S. V., & Anderson, R. (2013). The complexity of veteran identity: Understanding the role of gender, race, and sexuality. In F. A. Hamrick & C. B. Rumann (Eds.), *Called to serve: A handbook on student veterans and higher education* (p. 89–113). Jossey-Bass.

Jackson, T. Jr., Fey, C. J., & Ewing Ross, L. (2013). Institutional leadership on serving student Veterans and service members. In F. A. Hamrick & C. B. Rumann (Eds.), *Called to Serve: A handbook on student veterans and higher education* (pp. 255-275). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Janoff-Bulman R. Shattered assumptions: Towards a new psychology of trauma. New York: Free Press; 1992.

Jones, K.C. (2013). Understanding student veterans in transition. *The Qualitative Report, 18*(37), 1-14. http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol18/iss37/2.

Karmarkar, A.M., Collins, D.M., Wichman, T., Franklin, A., Fitzgerald, S.G., Pasquina, P.F., & Cooper, R.A. (2009). Prosthesis and wheelchair use in veterans with lower-limb amputation. *Journal of Rehabilitation Research & Development, 46*(5), 567-576.

Katznelson, I. (2005). *Preferences and situations: points of intersection between historical and rational choice institutionalism*. Katznelson, I. & Weingast, B.R. (Eds.). New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

Kenner, C., & Weinerman, J. (2011). Adult learning theory: Applications to non-traditional college students. *Journal of College Reading and Learning, 41*(2), 87-96.

Kessler, R.C., Foster, C.L., Saunders, W.B., & Stang, P.E. (1995). Social consequences of psychiatric disorders, I: Educational attainment. *American Journal of Psychiatry 152*(7), 1026-1032.

Kessler, R.C., Sonnega, A., Bromet, E. Hughes, M., & Nelson, C.B. (1995). Posttraumatic stress disorder in the national comorbidity survey. *Arch General Psychiatry, 52*(12), 1048-1060.

Kim, P. Y., Britt, T. W., Klocko, R. P., Riviere, L. A., & Adler, A. B. (2011). Stigma, negative attitudes about treatment, and utilization of mental health care among soldiers. *Military Psychology, 23*(1), 65–81. https://doi.org/10.1080/08995605.2011.534415

King, L.A., & Vogt, D.S. (2003). Manual for the deployment risk and resilience inventory (DRRI): A collection of measures for studying deployment related experience of military veterans. *National Center for PTSD*.

King, L. A., King, D. W., Vogt, D. S., Knight, J., & Samper, R. E. (2006). Deployment risk and resilience inventory: A collection of measures for studying deployment-related experiences of military personnel and Veterans. *Military Psychology, 18*(2), 89−120.

Kisker, C.B., Weintraub, D.S., & Newell, M.A. (2016). The community colleges' role in developing students' civic outcomes: Results of a national pilot. *Community College Review*. https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552116662117.

Knowles, M.S. (1974). Human resources development in OD. *Public Administration Review, 34*(2), 115-123.

Knowles, M.S. (1984). *Andragogy in action.* San Francisco, CAL Josey-Bass Publishers.

Kopacz, M.S., & Karras, E. (2015). Student service members and veterans who access pastoral care for the purpose of mental health support. *Journal of American College Health, 63*(7), 496-501. Doi: 10.1080/07448481.2014.

Kraus, A. (2010). Disability dynamics within the student veteran community. NASPA NetResults. Retrieved from http://www.naspa.org/

Kraus, A., & Rattray, N. A. (2013). Understanding disability in the student veteran community. In F. A. Hamrick & C. B. Rumann (Eds.), *Called to serve: A handbook on student veterans and higher education* (p. 116–137). Jossey-Bass.

Kratochvil, B. (2014). *Assessing student success efforts for military students in a California community college* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from http://scholarworks.csustan.edu/handle/011235813/799

Kukla, M., Rattray, N.A., & Salyers, M.P. (2015). Mixed methods study examining work reintegration experiences from perspectives of veterans with mental health disorders. *JRRD, 52*(4), 477-490.

Lafferty, C.L., Alford, K.L., Davis, M.K., & O'Connor, R. (2008). Did you shoot anyone? A practitioner's guide to combat veteran workplace and classroom reintegration. *SAM Advanced Management Journal, 73*, 4-18.

Lang, W.A., & Powers, J.T. (2011). *Completing the mission: A pilot study of veteran student progress toward degree attainment in the Post 9/11 era*. Pat Tillman Foundation.

Linares Rendón, L.I. & Muñoz, S.M. (2011). Revisiting validation theory: Theoretical foundations, applications, and extensions. *Enrollment Management Journal.*

Lindquist, L.K., Love, H.C., & Elbogen, E.B. (2017). Traumatic brain injury in Iraq and Afghanistan veterans: New results from a national random sample study. *Journal of Neuropsychiatry Clinical Neuroscience, 29*(3), 254-259. DOI:10.1176/appi.neuropsych.16050100.

Livingston, W. (2009). *Discovering the academic and social transition of re-enrolling student veterans at one institution: A grounded theory*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Clemson University, Clemson, SC.

Livingston, W.G., Havice, P.A., Cawthon, T.W., & Flaming, D.S. (2011). Coming home: Student veterans' articulation of college re-enrollment. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 48*(3), 15-31. http://dx.doi.org/10.2202/1949-6605.6292.

Lokken, J.M., Pfeffer, D.S., McAuley, J., & Strong, C. (2009). A statewide approach to creating veteran-friendly campuses. *New Direction for Student Services, 2009*(126), 45-54.

Mattox, T. & Pollard, M. (2016). Ongoing survey research on post-9/11 veterans. *Rand Corporation.*

McBain, L., Kim, Y., Cook, B., & Snead, K. (2012). *From soldier to student II: Assessing campus programs for veterans and service members.* (No. 2). Washington, DC: American Council on Education.

McCaslin, S., Thiede, J., Vinatieri, T., Passi, H., Bull, L.K., Ahern, D.A., Armstrong, K., & Chitaphong, K. (2014). Facilitating veterans' academic success: Veterans integration to academic leadership. *Career Planning and Adult Development, 30,* 191-209.

McMenanmin, R. & Kurzynski, K. (2016). How are institutions of higher education implementing first-year transition courses for veterans? *Journal of Veterans Studies,* 1, 33-51.

Measuring the success of student veterans and active-duty military students the NASPA research and policy institute (2013). Retrieved from https://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/main/NASPA_vets_13(1).pdf

Medley, J., Cheney, A.M., Abraham, T., Grubbs, K., Hunt, J., Lu, L., Fortney, J.C., & Curran, G.M. (2017). The impact of the psychological sequela of trauma on veterans seeking higher education. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 30*(1), 83-96.

Melillo, C., Downs, K., Dillahunt-Aspillaga, C., Lind, J., Besterman-Dahan, K., Hahm, B., Antinori, N., Elnitsky, C., Sander, A.M., Belanger, H.G., Toyinbo, P., & Powell-Cope, G. (2019). Action ethnography of community reintegration for veterans and military service members with traumatic brain injury: Protocol for a mixed methods study. *JMIR Research Protocols. 8*(11). DOI: 10.2196/14170.

Merriam, S.B., (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. Jossey-Bass. San Francisco, CA.

Merriam, S.B., & Tisdell, E.D. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation (4th ed.).* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Metzner, B.S., & Bean, J.P. (1987). The estimation of conceptual model of nontraditional undergraduate student attrition. *Research in Higher Education, 27*(1), 15-38.

Mikelson, J. D., & Saunders, K. P. (2013). Enrollment, transfers, and degree completion. In F. A. Hamrick & C. B. Rumann (Eds.), *Called to serve: A handbook on student veterans and higher education* (pp. 140-164). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Misra-Hebert, A.D., Santurri, L., DeChant, R., Watts, B., Rothberg, M., Sehgal, A.R., & Aron, D.C. (2015). Understanding the health needs and barriers to seeking health care of veteran students in the community. *The Southern Medical Journal, 108*(8), 488-493.

Mittal, D., Drummond, K.L., Blevins, D., Curran, G., Corrigan, P., & Sullivan, G. (2013). Stigma associated with PTSD: Perceptions of treatment seeking combat veterans. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation, 36*(2), 86-92.

Molina, D., & Morse, A. (2015). Military-connected undergraduates: Exploring differences between national guard, reserve, active duty, and veterans in higher

education. *Higher Education Policy for Minorities in the United States.* Retrieved from: http://hdl.handle.net/10919/97787

Monahan, J., Bonnie, R.J., Davis, S.M., & Flynn, C. (2011) Interventions by Virginia's colleges to respond to student mental health crises. *Psychiatric Service, 62*(12), 1439-1442.

Moore, L.V., & Upcraft, M.L. (1990). Theory in student affairs: Evolving perspectives. *New Directions for Student Services, 1990*(51), 3-23.

Morgan, N.R., Aronson, K.R., Perkins, D.F., Bleser, J.A., Davenport, K., Vogt, D., Copeland, L.A., Finley, E.P., & Gilman, C.L. (2020). Reducing barriers to post-9/11 veterans' use of programs and services as they transition to civilian life. *BMC Health Services Research, 20*(525). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-020-05320-4.

Morgan, N.R., Davis, K.D., Richardson, C., & Perkins, D.F. (2018). Common components analysis: An adapted approach for evaluation programs. *Evaluation Program Planning. 67,* 1-9. Retrieved from: http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0149718916301392.

Morreale, C. (2011). *Academic motivation and academic self-concept* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). State University of New York, Buffalo, NY.

Nakajima, M.A., Dembo, M., & Mossler, R. (2012). Student persistence in community colleges. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 36*(8), 591-613.

Naphan, D., & Elliot, M. (2015). Role exit from the military: Student veterans' perceptions of transitioning from the U.S. military to higher education. *The*

Quarterly Report, 20(2). Retrieved from: https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol20/iss2/4/

Nash, W. P., Vasterling, J., Ewing-Cobbs, L., Horn, S., Gaskin, T., Golden, J., et al. (2010). Consensus recommendations for common data elements for operational stress research and surveillance: Report of a Federal Interagency Working Group. *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, 91*, 1673–1683.

Nora, A., Crisp, G., & Matthews, C. (2011). A reconceptualization of CCSSE's benchmarks of student engagement. *The Review of Higher Education, 35*(1), 105-130. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2011.0036.

Norman, S.B., Rosen, J., Himmerich, S., Myers, U.S., Davis, B., Browne, K.C., & Piland, N. (2015). Student veteran perceptions of facilitators and barriers to achieving academic goals. *Journal of Rehabilitation Research & Development, 52* (6), 701-712.

O'Connor, A.A., Graham, B., Herbst, E., Leach, B., Armstrong, K., Jersky, B., & McCasliln, S.E. (2018). Student veterans with posttraumatic stress symptoms: Perceived preferences for on-campus psychoeducation. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal, 41*(4), 351-355. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/prj000036.

O'Herrin, E. (2011). Enhancing veteran success in higher education. *Peer Review, 13*(1).

Okie, S. (2005). Traumatic brain injury in the war zone. *New England Journal of Medicine, 352*(20), 2043-2047.

Ortiz, A.A., & Garcia, S. (1995). Serving Hispanic students with learning disabilities: Recommended policies and practices. *Sage Journals Urban Education, 29*(4), 471-481.

Olsen, T., Badger, K, & McCuddy, M.D. (2014). Understanding the student veterans' college experience: An exploratory study. *US Army Medical Department Journal,* 101-108.

Osborne, N.J. (2014). Veterans ally: Practical strategies for closing the military-civilian gap on campus. *Innovations in Higher Education, 39,* 247-260. Retrieved from DOI 10.1007/s10755-013-9274-z

Parker, E.T. (2018). College success. In B.B. Frey (Ed.), *Sage encyclopedia of educational research measurement, and evaluation* (pp. 328-329). Sage.

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). How college affects students (Vol. 2): A third decade of research. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Pelletier, S.G. (2010). Success for adult students. *Public Purpose,* 2-6. Retrieved from: https://www.aascu.org/uploadedFiles/AASCU/Content/Root/MediaAndPublications/PublicPurposeMagazines/Issue/10fall_adultstudents.pdf

Perkins, D.F., Aronson, K.R., Morgan, N.R., Bleser, J.A., Vogt, D., Copeland, L.A. et al. (2019). Veterans' use of programs and services as they transition to civilian life: Baseline assessment for the veteran metrics initiative. *Journal of Social Services Resources. 10,* 1-15. Retrieved from: https://doi/org/10.1080/01488376.2018.1546259.

Pietrzak, R., Johnson, D., Goldstein, M.M., & Southwick, S. (2009). Perceived stigma and barriers to mental health care utilization among OEF-OIF. *Psychiatric Services. 60(*8), 1118-1122.

Pogoda, T.K., Hendricks, A.M., Iverson, K.M., Stolzmann, K.L., Kregnel, M.H., Baker, E., Meterko, M., Lew, H.L. (2012). Multisensory impairment reported by veterans

with and without mild traumatic brain injury history. *Journal of Rehabilitation Research & Development, 49*(7), 971-983. http://dx.doi.org/10.1682/JRRD.2011.06.0099.

Porcari, C., Koch, E.I., Rauch, S.A.M., Hoodin, F., Ellison, G., & McSweeney, L. (2017). Predictors of help-seeking intentions in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans and service members. *Military Medicine, 182*(5). 6:e1640.

Prager, K. J. (1983). Educational aspirations and self-esteem in returning and traditional community college students. *Journal of College Student Personnel, **24**,* 144–147.

Provasnik, S., & Planty, M. (2008). Community colleges special supplement to the condition of education 2008. National Center for Educational Statistics, U.S. Department of Education retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2008/2008033.pdf.

Queen, B., & Lewis, L. (2014). Services and support programs for military service members and veterans at post-secondary institutions, 2012-13. *National Center for Education Statistics.* Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014017.pdf

Radford, W.A., Berkner, L., Wheeless, S.C., & Shepherd, B. (2010). Persistence and attainment of 2003–04 beginning postsecondary students: After 6 years (NCES 2011-151). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Science, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC.

Radford, A.W., & Wun, J. (2009). Issue tables: A profile of military service-members and veterans in postsecondary education in 2007–08 (NCES 2009-182). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC.

Radford, A. W. (2010). *Military service members and veterans in higher education: What the new GI Bill may mean for postsecondary institutions.* Washington, DC: American Council on Education.

Ragsdale, K.A., Neer, S.M., Beidel, D.C., Frueh, B.C., & Stout, J.W. (2013). Posttraumatic stress disorder in OEF/OIF veterans with and without traumatic brain injury. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders,* 420-426. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.janxdis.2013.04.003.

Rattray, N.A., Natividad, D.M., Frankel, F.M., True, G., Salyers, M.P., & Kukla, M. (2019). The long and winding road to postsecondary education for U.S. veterans with invisible injuries. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal, 42* (3), 284-295. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/prj0000375.

Resnik, L., Plow, M., & Jette, A. (2009). Development of CRIS: Measure of community reintegration of injured service members. *Journal of Rehabilitation Research & Development, 46* (4), 469-480.

Resnik, L., Bradford, D.W., Glynn, S.M., Jette, A.M., Hernandez, C., & Wills, S. (2012). Issues in defining and measuring veteran community reintegration: Proceedings of the Workshop on Community Reintegration. VA Rehabilitation Outcomes Conference, Miami, Florida. *J Rehabil Res Dev 49*(1), 87-100. DOI: 10.1682/JRRD.2010.06.0107.

Resnik, L., Ekerholm, S. Borgia, M., & Clark, M.A. (2019). A national study of veterans with major upper limb amputation: Survey methods, participants, and summary findings. *PLOS ONE, 14*(3). https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0213578.

Reyes, A.T., Muthukumar, V., Bhatta, T.R., Bombard, J.N., & Gangozo, W.J. (2020). Promoting resilience among college student veterans through an acceptance-and-commitment-therapy app: An intervention refinement study. *Community Mental Health Journal, 56,* 1206-1214. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1007/s10597-020-00617-4

Riegel, D. J. (2013). Closing the 90/10 loophole in the Higher Education Act: How to stop the exploitation of veterans, protect American taxpayers, and restore market incentives to the for-profit college industry. *The George Washington Law Review, 81*, 259 –292.

Rotheram-Borus, M.J., Swenderman, D., Flannery, D., Rice, E., Adamson, D.M., & Ingram, B. (2009). Common factors in effective H.I.V. prevention program. *AIDS Behavior. 13*(3), 399-408.

Rudd, M. D., Goulding, J., & Bryan, C. J. (2011). Student veterans: A national survey exploring psychological symptoms and suicide risk. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 42*(5), 354–360. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025164

Rumann, C.B. *Student veterans returning to a community college: Understanding their transitions (unpublished doctoral dissertation),* 2010. Ames: Iowa State University.

Rumann, C.B., & Hamrick, F.A. Student veterans in transition: Re-enrolling after war zone deployments. *Journal of Higher Education,* 2010, *81*(4), 431-458.

Rumann, C., Rivera, M., & Hernandez, I. (2011). Student veterans and community colleges. *Special Issue: Marginalized Students, (2011)* 155. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.457.

Sander, L. (2012). At half a million and counting, veterans cash in on post-9/11 GI bill. (cover story). *Chronicle of Higher Education, 58*(28), A1-A11.

Sander, L. (2012). Female veterans on campuses can be hard to spot and to help — *Chronicle of Higher Education, 58*(42), A14-A15.

Sander, L. (2012). With GI bill's billions at stake, colleges compete to lure veterans. (cover story). *Chronicle of Higher Education, 58*(35), A1-A8.

Sander, L. (2013). Veterans tell elite colleges: 'We belong.' (cover story). *Chronicle of Higher Education, 59*(18), A1-A7.

Sansone, V.A. & Tucker Segura, J.S. (2020). Exploring factors contributing to college success among student veteran transfers at a four-year university. *The Review of Higher Education, 43*(3), 888-916. Retrieved from DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2020.001

Saunders, G.H., & Griest, S.E. (2009). Hearing loss in veterans and the need for hearing loss prevention programs. *Noise Health, 42*, 14-21.

Saxe, J. M., Janson, S. L., Dennehy, P. M., Stringari, J., Murray, S., Hirsch, J. E., & Waters, C. M. (2007). Meeting a primary care challenge in the United States: Chronic illness care. *Advances in Contemporary General Practice Nursing, 26*(1), 99e103.

Sayer, N.A., Frazier, P., Orazem, R.J., Murdoch, M., Gravely, A., Carlson, K.F., Hintz, S., & Noorbaloochi, S. (2011). Military to civilian questionnaire: A measure of

post-employment community reintegration difficulty among veterans using Department of Veterans Affairs medical care. *Journal of Trauma Stress, 24*(6), 660-670. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/jts.20706.

Schiavone, V., & Gentry, D. (2014). Veteran-students in transition at a midwestern university. *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education, 62*(1), 29-38.

Schinka, J.A., Schinka, K.C., Casey, R.J., Kasprow, W., &Bossarte, R.M. (2012). Suicidal behavior in a national sample of older homeless veterans. *AM Public Health, 102.* DOI:102105/AJPH.2011.300436.

Servicemembers opportunity colleges. (2012, Sept 24). Retrieved from http://www.soc.aascu.org/Default.html.

Seal, K.H., Cohen, G., Bertenthal, D., Cohen, B.E., Maguen, S., & Daley, A. (2011). Reducing barriers to mental health and social services for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans: Outcomes of an integrated primary care clinic. *Journal of Internal Medicine. 26(*10), 1160-1167. DOI: 10.1007/s11606-011-1746-1

Sewall, M. (2010). Veterans use the new GI bill largely at for-profit and 2-year colleges. Chronicle of Higher Education, 56(38), A20-A21.

Shackelford, A. L. (2009). Documenting the needs of student veterans with disabilities: Intersection roadblocks, solutions, and legal realities. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 22*(1), 36-42.

Sharp, M., Fear, N.T., Rona, R.J., Wessley, S., Greenberg, N., Jones, N., & Goodwin, L. (2015). Stigma as a barrier to seeking health care among military personnel with mental health problems. *Epidemiologic Reviews, 37*(1), 144-162.

Silverman, D. (2017). *Doing Qualitative Research.* Sage. Los Angeles, California.

Sikes, D.L., Duran, M.G., & Armstrong, M.L. (2020). Shared lessons from serving military-connected students. *College Students Affairs Journal. 38(*2), 186-197.

Skinner, K. M., Kressin, N., Frayne, S., Tripp, T. J., Hankin, C. S., Miller, D. R., & Sullivan L. M. (2000). The prevalence of military sexual assault among female Veterans Administration outpatients. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence.* 15(3), 291–310.

Smith, J.G., Vihauer, R.P., &Chafos, V. (2017). Do military veteran and civilian students function differently in college? *Journal of American College Health, 65*(1). 76-79.

Sorey, K.C., & Duggan, M.H. (2008). Differential predictors of persistence between community college adult and traditional-aged students. Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 32(2), 75-100. DOI: 10.1080/10668920701380967.

Southwell, K.H., Whiteman, S.D., Wadsworth, S.M., & Barry, A.E. (2018). The use of university services and student retention: Differential links for student service members or veteran and civilian students. Journal of College Student Retention, 19(4), 394-412. DOI:10.1177/521025116636133.

Southwell, K.H., Whiteman, S.D., MacDermid Wadsworth, S.M., & Barry, A.E. (2018). The use of university services and student retention: Differential links for student service members or veterans and civilian students. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory, & Practice. 19(*4), 394-412. Retrieved from: DOI: 10.1177/1521025116636133

Spady, W. G. (1970). Dropouts from higher education: An interdisciplinary review and synthesis. *Interchange, 1*(1), 64-85.

Spady, W. G. (1971). Dropouts from higher education: Toward an empirical model. *Interchange, 2*(3), 38-62.

Stahl, V.V., & Pavel, D.M. (April 1992). Assessing the Bean and Metzner model with community college student data. *AREA annual conference.* Talk conducted at the AREA, San Francisco, CA.

Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Stecker, T., Fortney, J.C., Hamilton, F., & Azjen, E. (2007). An assessment of beliefs about mental healthcare among veterans who served in Iraq. *Psychiatric Services.* 58, (1358).

Steele, B. (2015). Postsecondary preparatory programs for veterans: A federal reporting chasm. *Planning for Higher Education Journal,* 63-70.

Steele, J., Salcedo, N., & Coley, J. (2010). Service members in school: Military veterans' experience using the Post-9/11 GI Bill and pursuing postsecondary education. Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education.

Stiglitz, J., & Bilmes, L. (2008, September). The true cost of the Iraq war: $3 trillion and beyond. *The Washington Post.* Retrieved from: https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/09/03/AR2010090302200.html

Summerlot, J., Green, S., & Parker, D. (2009). Student veteran organizations. *New Direction for Student Services, 2009*(126), 71-79. https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.318

Summers, M.D. (2003). ERIC review: Attrition research at community colleges. *Community College Review, 30*(4). https://doi.org/10.1177/009155210303000404

Tanielian, T. & Jaycox, L.H. (2008). *Invisible wounds of war: psychological and cognitive injuries, their consequences, and services to recovery.* Tanielian, T. & Jaycox, L.H. (Eds.). Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

Taylor, S., Miller., B.L., Tallapragada, M., & Vogel, M. (2020). Veterans' transition out of the military and knowledge of mental health disorders. *Journal of Veterans Studies 6*(1), 85-95. DOI: https://doi.org/10.21061/jvs.v6i.131.

Thomas, J.L., Britt, T.W., Odel-Dusseau, H., & Bliese, P.D. (2010). Dispositional optimism buffers combat veterans from the negative effects of warzone stress on mental health symptoms and work impairment. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 67*(9), 886-890.

Tick, E. (2005). *War and the soul: Healing our nation's veterans from post-traumatic stress disorder.* Wheaton, IL: Quest Books.

Tinto, V. (1975). Dropouts from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent literature. *A Review of Educational Research, 45*, 89-125.

Tinto, V. (1982). Limits of theory and practice in student attrition. *Journal of Higher Education, 53*(6), 687-700.

Tinto, V., & Russo, P. (1994). Coordinated studies programs: Their effect on student involvement at a community college. Community College Review, 22(2), 16-25.

True, G., Rigg, K.K., & Butler, A. (2014). Understanding barriers to mental health care for recent war veterans through photovoice. Qualitative Health Research, 1-13. DOI: 10.1177/1049732314562894.

Tsai, J., El-Gabalawy, R., Sledge, W.H., Southwick, S.M., & Pietrazak, R.H. (2015). Post-traumatic growth among veterans in the USA: Results from the National Health and Resilience in Veterans Study. Psychol Med, 45(1), 165-169. https://doi.org/10.1017/S003329174001202.

Tseng, C., Sambamoorthi, U., Helmer, D., Tiwari, A., Rosen, A.K., Rajan, M., & Pogach, L. (2007). The association between mental health functioning and nontraumatic lower extremity amputations in veterans with diabetes. General Hospital Psychiatry, 29, 537-546. DOI:10.1016/j.genhosppsych.2007.08.001.

U.S. Department of Defense. (2011). Reintegration of recovered Department of Defense personnel: Post-isolation support activities for other recovered personnel. Retrieved from: https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/USCODE-2011-title10/USCODE-2011-title10-subtitleA-partII-chap53-sec1056a

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2014). *Operation Enduring Freedom Veterans Health Issues.* Retrieved from: https://www.va.gov/health-care/health-needs-conditions/health-issues-related-to-service-era/operation-enduring-freedom/

U.S. Government Accountability Office. Military and Veteran Support: D.O.D. and V.A. Programs That Address the effects of combat and transition to civilian life. Retrieved from http://www.gao.gov/assets/670/666801.pdf

VA (Department of Veterans Affairs). 2006. *Department of Veterans Affairs strategic plan, FY 2006-2011. https://nepis.epa.gov/*

Vacchi D.T. (2012). Considering Student Veterans on the Twenty-First-Century College Campus. *About Campus*.17(2):15-21. doi:10.1002/aca.21075

Vacchi, D., & Berger, J. (2014). *Student veterans in higher education: Higher education handbook of theory and research.* New York, NY: Springer Publishing.

Vagle, M. D. (2018). *Crafting Phenomenological Research (Second Ed.).* Routledge Publishing:

Vance, M. L., & Miller, W. K. (2009). Serving wounded warriors: Current practices in postsecondary education. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, (22)1, 18–35.

Van Gennep, A. (1960). *The rites of passage.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Vogt, D. (2011). Mental health-related beliefs as a barrier to service use for military personnel and veterans: A review. *Psychiatric Services, 62*(2), 135-142.

Vogt, D., Di Leone, B.A., & Fox, A.B. (2014). Mental health beliefs and their relationship with treatment seeking among U.S. OEF/OIF veterans. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 27*(3), 307-313. doi: 10.1002/jts.21919.

Vogt, D., Perkins, D.F., Copeland, L.A., Finley, E.P., Jamieson, C.S., & Booth, B et al. (2018). The veterans' metrics initiative study of US veterans' experiences during their transition from military service. *BMJ Open. 8(*6). Retrieved from: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29895650

Wade, N.G., Vogl, D.L., Armistead-Jehle, P., Scott, M. (2015). Modeling stigma, help-seeking attitudes, and intentions to seek behavioral healthcare in a clinical military sample. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal. 38*(2). Retrieved from: DOI:10.1037/prj0000131

Walton-Radford, A. (2009). *Military service members and veterans in higher education: What the new GI Bill may mean for postsecondary institutions*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.

Walton-Radford, A., Wun, J., & Weko, T. (2009). *Issue tables: A profile of military service members and veterans in higher education.* Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

Wampold, B. E. (2001). *The great psychotherapy debate: Models, methods, and findings*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Wardley, L.J., Belanger, C.H., & Leonard, V.M. (2013). Institutional commitment of traditional and nontraditional aged students: A potential brand measurement? *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, 23*, 90-112. DOI: 10.1080/08841241.2013.810691.

Weiner-Levey, N., & Popper-Giveon, A. (2013). The absent the hidden and the obscured: Reflections on "dark matter" in qualitative research. *Quality & Quantity, 47*, 2177-2190. Doi:10.1007/s11135-011-9650-7

Weitzman, E.R. (2004). Poor mental health, depression, and association with alcohol consumption, harm, and abuse in a national sample of young adults in college. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 192*(4), 269-277.

Wheeler, H.A. (2012). Veterans' transitions to community college: A case study. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 36*(10), 775-792.

Whiteman, S.D., Barry, A.E., Mroczek, D.K., & Wadsworth, S.M. (2013). The development and implications of peer emotional support for student service

members/veterans and civilian college students. *Journal of Counseling and Psychology, 60*(2), 265-278.

Williams, D.N. (2013). *Transition survey for students with military experience.* Unpublished report. Iowa State University. Ames, Iowa.

Williams-Klotz, D.N. & Gansemer-Topf, A.M. (2017). Identifying the camouflage: Uncovering and supporting the transition experiences of military and veteran students. *Journal of First-Year Experience & Students in Transition, 29*(1), 83-98.

Willy, C., Steinmann, R., Engelhardt, M. (2006). Most military medicine challenges: Patterns of injury in war surgery—Update 2006. *Medical Corps International, 1*, 10–18.

Wimbish, J. (1995). Evolving theory, informing practice. In J. Wimbish, W.G. Bumphus, & S.K. Helfgot (Eds). *New Directions for Student Services, 69.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Windome, R., Kehle, S.M., Carlson, K.F., Laska, M.N., Gulden, A., & Lust, K. (2011). Post-traumatic stress disorder and health risk behaviors among Afghanistan and Iraq war veterans attending college. *American Journal of Health Behavior, 35*(4), 387-392.

Wood, D. (2012, Oct 25). Veterans' college drop-out rate soars. Retrieved from https://www.huffpost.com/entry/veterans-college-drop-out_n_2016926?guccounter=1.

Xue, C., Ge, Y., Tang, B., Liu, Y., Kang, P., Wang., & Zhang, L. (2015). A meta-analysis of risk factors for combat-related PTSD among military personnel and veterans. *PLOS ONE, 10*(3), 1-21. DOI:10.1371/journal.pone.0120270.

Yates, J. & Leggett, T. (2016). Qualitative research: An introduction. *Radiological Technology. 88(*2), 225-231.

Yilmaz, K. (2013). Comparing quantitative and qualitative research tradition: Epistemological, theoretical, and methodological differences. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12014

Yin, R.K. (2016). *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish (Second Ed.).* The Guilford Press: New York, New York.

Zhang, L. (2017). Veterans going to college: Evaluating the impact of the post-9/11 GI Bill on college enrollment. *Education Evaluation Policy Analysis. 40(*1), 82-102

Zmeyov, S.I. (1998). Andragogy: Origins, developments, and trends. *International Review of Education, 44*(1), 103-108.