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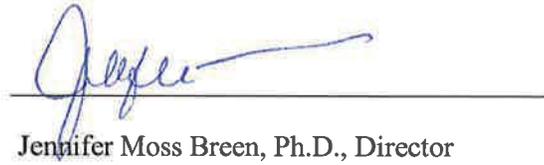_____
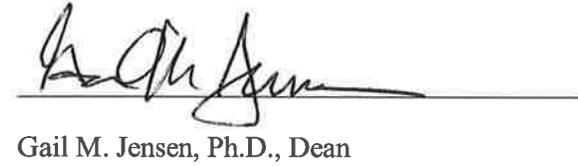
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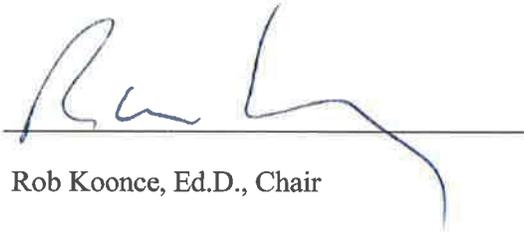
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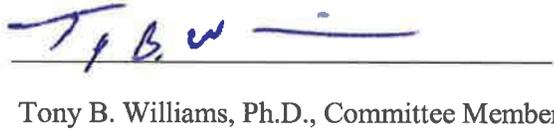
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STUDENT VETERANS AND UNIVERSITY SUPPORT SERVICES:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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By

ALTHEA SCOTT

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A DISSERTATION IN PRACTICE

Submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School of Creighton University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in
Interdisciplinary Leadership

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Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of student veterans at an institution of higher learning in Hawaii in an attempt to better assist the reintegration of veterans as students at the institution. The aim of this study was to use the study's findings to identify the disconnect, if any, between student veterans and the support services staff, enhance services offered by the institution, improve interaction between student veterans who attend the university and the support services staff at the university, and develop alliances among the federal government, private groups, and non-profit groups to improve veteran students overall experience in college. Data was collected primarily through face-to-face interviews with student veterans. Secondary data collection included field observations. The researcher generated themes for the data analysis. The significant themes were used to write a description of the student veterans lived experiences. Significant themes such as transition, perception by others, faculty and staff support, academic success, and the needs of student veterans revealed deficiencies in services offered by the institution. These findings can be used to develop alliances among governmental organizations, private groups, and non-profit groups for improving the experiences of veteran students in college.

Keywords: G.I. Bill, Institution of Higher Education, Student Veteran, Reintegration, Transition, US Department of Veterans Affairs, Veteran

Dedication

To my children Alexis, Damarion, Damion Jr., and Hazel who are the four

chambers of my heart, the driving forces in my life. I love you to the moon and back.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I must express immense gratitude to God for the unimaginable strength and perseverance I needed throughout this dissertation journey.

There are many people who have supported me through this journey. I would like to express my utmost appreciation to Dr. Rob Koonce who through this process has been a mentor, always encouraging me to steadily climb the dissertation mountain. I would like to thank Dr. Tony Williams who was also instrumental to the successful completion of my dissertation. Ascending to the peak of the mountain would not have been possible without their unwavering guidance and patience.

Lastly but certainly not least, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my family. Thanks to my mother who instilled in me that anything is possible through Christ. Thanks to my husband and children for their continuous patience and support through my dissertation journey.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction and Background

Since the reauthorization of the G.I. Bill in 2009, the number of veterans enrolled in college has increased significantly (Schiavone & Gentry, 2014). While this increase in enrollment serves as a positive indicator, various challenges also put veterans at risk of leaving college before completing their degrees. Veterans who attend college post-military may face unique obstacles while attending school. Many colleges may not have the resources to aid the unique needs of former military service members. Faculty members may struggle to understand these specific needs. DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell (2007) noted a general lack of support for college veterans both at the governmental and institutional levels. Due to the transitioning challenges of post-military veterans, many higher learning institutions offer unique support services to student veterans. Various steps taken by postsecondary institutions to assist veterans and service members in transitioning to higher education include but are not limited to completing their college programs and obtaining career-ready skills (https://www.va.gov). These support services provide assistance that creates opportunities to help veterans achieve success by providing outreach and transition services during their transition from military to college life, as well as provide the support and assistance needed to pursue their educational and employment goals.

Statement of the Problem

In a recent study, Osborne (2014) concluded that reintegration into a civilian community such as college following military life continues to be a stressful time for veterans. Many veterans use support services offered by their institution of higher

learning to alleviate or eliminate their stress; yet, veterans still encounter difficulties while transitioning to college life. Research in this area can help with understanding the disconnect, if any, between university support services and student veterans.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of student veterans at an institution of higher learning in Hawaii in an attempt to better assist the reintegration of veterans as students at the institution.

Research Question

The guiding research question for this study was the following one:

What are the lived experiences of student veterans who use university support services at an institution of higher learning in Hawaii?

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study was to use the study's findings to identify the disconnect, if any, between student veterans and the support services staff, enhance services offered by the institution, improve interaction between student veterans who attend the university and the support services staff at the university, and develop alliances among the federal government, private groups, and non-profit groups to improve veteran students overall experience in college.

Methodology Overview

A qualitative methodology was used in this study to investigate the lived experience of student veterans. The researcher used a qualitative methodology to enabled the full disclosure of the experiences of individual student veterans. Further, a phenomenological approach focused on rich descriptions of these lived experiences. It

involved attempting to explore the personal experiences of participants to include their perception or interpretation of an event, as well as the common meaning of these lived experiences (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

Two approaches to phenomenology were considered for the current study, hermeneutic phenomenology and transcendental phenomenology. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a descriptive research concerned with the interpretation of individuals lived experiences (Creswell, 2013), whereas transcendental phenomenology is the identification of a phenomenon to study and collection of data from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). First developed by Martin Heidegger, hermeneutic phenomenology applies to the subjective experiences of individuals and groups (Heidegger,1927). Largely developed by Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), transcendental phenomenology is a philosophical approach to qualitative research methodology seeking to understand human experience (Husserl, 1931; Moustakas, 1994). While Heidegger focused on the situated meaning of a human in the world, Husserl focused on understanding beings or phenomena (Heidegger,1927; Husserl, 1931). A transcendental phenomenology approach was appropriate for this research study since the intent of the research was to describe the lived experiences of student veterans on campus.

According to Creswell (2013), the data collection procedure for a phenomenological approach involves typically interviewing participants who have experienced the phenomenon. However, some phenomenological studies involve diverse sources of data such as poems (McCulliss, 2013; Prendergast, 2009), observations (Earley, 2012), and documents (Mogalakwe, 2006).

Definition of Relevant Terms

Some of the important terms in the current study were unusual and mostly used in military/veteran settings, while other terms potentially had duplicate meanings. Hence it was important to define uncommon words and words that had specific meaning within the study. The following terms were used operationally within this study.

Active Duty: The period of time when military personnel work full time for a branch of the United States military. The Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Navy, and Marines make up the five branches of the military (https://www.va.gov).

Disconnect: unidentified individual, interpersonal, community, academic and societal challenges experienced by student veterans (O'Herrin, 2011).

Forever G.I. Bill: Also known as the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017 (https://www.va.gov), the Forever G.I. Bill made significant expansion to veterans' education benefits. Most notable the act eliminated the time eligibility restriction for veterans discharged after January 1, 2013.

G.I. Bill: A federal program that was originated in 1944. First known as the Serviceman's Readjustment Act, this program provides educational benefits for veterans (Rose, 2012).

Institution of Higher Education: A facility that provides educational coursework beyond secondary education. This includes junior colleges, four-year colleges, universities, technical schools, or professional schools.

Post 9/11 G.I. Bill: The reauthorization of the G.I. Bill that went into effect August 1, 2009. To be eligible, veterans must have been on active duty after

September 10, 2001. The Post 9// G.I. Bill expires 15 years after veterans transition from the military. (Shankar, 2009).

Reintegration: A process and outcome of resuming roles in family, community, and workplace that may be influenced at different levels of an ecological system (Elnitsky, Blevins, Fisher & Magruder, 2017).

Retention rate: the percentage of a school's first-time, first-year undergraduate students who continue at that school the next year. For example, a student who studies full-time in the fall semester and keeps on studying in the program in the next fall semester is counted in this rate (https://fafsa.ed.gov).

Student Veteran: A student veteran is anyone on active duty, in reserve or National Guard status, retired from the military, or who has completed military service and participates in postsecondary education (Brown & Gross, 2011)

Transition: Any event or nonevent resulting in change in relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012)

US Department of Veterans Affairs: The government agency responsible to provide patient care and federal benefits to veterans (https://www.va.gov).

Veteran: An individual that has served in any branch of the United States military in active duty, reserve, or the National Guard (https://www.va.gov).

This list of terms was developed to gain an understanding of the terms that were used in this research. Defining important terms was essential to ensure a common understanding of key concepts and terminology.

Limitations, Delimitations, and Personal Biases

Limitations

The primary limitation of this study was that the veterans and university being interviewed were selected because of their location and the convenience of accessibility for the researcher. The secondary limitation of this study was that only veterans eligible for the G.I. Bill benefit were interviewed.

Delimitations

The researcher identified several delimitations of the current study. Only one university in Hawaii was examined. The participants of the study only included student veterans currently enrolled at the university. There may have been other veterans on campus who could have been chosen to participate in the study, but who were not eligible for the G.I. Bill benefits.

Personal Biases

The researcher is a military spouse who considers herself an insider to the military and veteran communities. Also, the researcher is an employee of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) who works with transitioning service members (https://www.va.gov/). The VA administers the G.I. Bill benefits to veterans. To avoid this bias pitfall, the researcher used a suggestion by Babbie (2014) to cultivate a deliberate awareness of her values and preferences and disclosed her relationship to the military and veteran community in the research. As an additional layer of protection, the researcher used the peer-review process in scientific research that encouraged colleagues to point out ethical concerns.

Leader's Role and Responsibility in Relation to the Problem

Leadership is a complex multidimensional concept. Interdisciplinary team work is increasingly prevalent and coordination, collaboration and partnership are now at the focal point of leadership (Negandhi et al. 2015). The need for interdisciplinary team work is increasing as a result of a number of factors including the current emphasis in many organizations' policy documents on multi-professional team work and development of shared learning (Nancarrow et al. 2012). Interdisciplinary leaders can bring diverse groups and organizations together and across business boundaries to remedy complex public problems (Crosby & Bryson, 2010). The current study will assist with developing collaboration among the federal government and stakeholders such as private and non-profit groups to further enhance veteran students experiences in college. The data collected from this study will allow leaders to improve interaction between student veterans who attend the university. The findings of this study will also provide the colleges and universities in Hawaii with data to assist student veterans.

Significance of the Study

Research in this area is important for several reasons. There is a substantial amount of literature about the challenges that student veterans experience when transitioning out of the military. There is also a wealth of research done on student veterans enrolled in colleges or universities and the challenges they experience. However, there is a lack of research on the lived experiences of veterans in college. Understanding and supporting student veterans remains a relatively unexplored field. The GI Bill offered veterans access to a college education that previously was unattainable. Accordingly, millions of veterans became college students as the federal government

invested billions of dollars. Remarkably, little research has been conducted regarding the effectiveness of support initiatives for student veterans, nor to assess the

impact of the federal government's investment (Burnett & Segoria, 2009). Much of the literature on student veterans is conceptual and difficult to assess, thus presenting opportunity for research (Kirchner, 2015).

University support services may include veteran groups. These groups provide a familiar environment for student veterans while on campus. Student veterans get to interact with their military/veteran peers (Evans, Pellegrino, & Hoggan, 2015). Although veteran groups are helpful in assisting veterans who are seeking the kind of camaraderie that they may have had while on active duty, student veterans are far more likely to achieve academic success if they are able to become involved on campus with students outside their own immediate social group. To help veteran-students move beyond these barriers, institutions must find ways to integrate student veterans into the broader campus community (Schiavone, 2014).

Recent studies revealed that reintegration into a civilian community such as college following military services continues to be a stressful time for veterans (Borsari et al., 2017; Smith, 2012). Rich qualitative data from the current research study also allowed researchers to understand the lived experienced of student veterans. Data collected from the current research also helped to identify and explain issues or disconnect, if any, between university support services and student veterans.

The aim of this study was to use the study's findings to identify the disconnect, if any, between student veterans and the support services staff, enhance services offered by the institution, improve interaction between student veterans who attend the university

and the support services staff at the university, and develop alliances among the federal government, private groups, and non-profit groups to improve veteran students overall experience in college.

Summary

The topic of the research involved the lived experiences of student veterans at an institution of higher learning in Hawaii. Many student veterans use the support services offered by the institution to alleviate or eliminate stress; yet, veterans still encounter challenges while transitioning to college life. The purpose of the current study was to describe the lived experiences of student veterans at an institution of higher learning in Hawaii in an attempt to better assist the reintegration of veterans as students at the institution. Leaders within the federal government such as the VA and university administrators in higher education can use the findings from this phenomenological study to enhance services offered by the institution to student veterans.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Student service members/veterans represent a growing population on college campuses. The experience of war makes those who fight a special group within the general population. Veterans who attend college post-military may face unique obstacles while attending school. Many colleges may not have the resources within the school to deal with the unique needs of former military service members. To effectively serve this demographic, institutions must offer opportunities and provide resources to help veterans take maximum advantage of their educational experience while also enabling them to complete a degree within the provisions of the GI Bill (Taylor, Parks, & Edwards, 2016). Institutions can provide resources such as:

- Academic Advising

- Career Advising

- Counseling Services

- Veterans Group

- Veteran Orientation Programs

- Tutoring Services

- VA Educational Benefits Assistance

- Available Internships

Military Veterans

Individuals join the military because of various reasons to include receiving education benefits. The Post 9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 or *New GI Bill* has resulted in rising enrollment and related demand for services by students in the United

States (U.S.) (Hitt et al., 2015). The Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits pay up to 100% of in-state tuition and fees at public schools. Veterans may also receive a monthly housing allowance, and a book and supply stipend (Hitt et al., 2015). Between 2000 and 2012, more than 900,000 veterans and military service members received education benefits through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (Hultin, 2015). Historically, graduation rates of veterans are considerable higher. However, recently analyst have observed that veterans' graduation rate is lower than the general population. Among the military veterans attending U.S. colleges, an estimated 88% drop out of school during their first year and only 3% graduate (Wood, 2012). Nevertheless, military veterans continue to transition from military to higher education.

Transition Issues

Everyone experiences transitions, whether they are events or nonevents, anticipated or unanticipated. These transitions alter our lives—our roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions (Schlossberg, 2011). It is not the transition per se that is critical, but how much it alters one's roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions. This explains why even desired transitions are upsetting. The process of leaving one set of roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions and establishing new ones takes time. For some people, the process happens easily and quickly; however, there are many people floundering, looking for the right niche, even after years (Schlossberg, 2011).

Transitioning from military life to higher education can be daunting. The structured life of the military is extraordinarily different from the sometimes chaotic and confusing higher education experience (Taylor, Parks, & Edwards, 2016). Student-veterans' roles in the military and its culture stand in sharp contrast to their roles in

higher education and its milieu, and the differences affect issues associated with

Schlossberg (2011) transition model: situation, self, supports, and strategies.

Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell (2009) noted that Participants in a study to

investigate how combat veterans who become college students make the transition to

campus described the structured life of the military and how difficult it was to move from

a strictly defined structure to a loosely configured campus where there was no chain of

command from which to get answers.

As noted in Ackerman et al. (2009), a four-year Air Force veteran stated that going from

"something that is so structured and so routine, and on task . . . then just to be released

and you have to make your own schedule, some people find that hard" (p. 12). His

suggestion, that was also heard from other veterans on campus was that campuses offer

orientation sessions for veterans by veterans (Ackerman et al., 2009).

Perception by Others

A service member's transition to college life can be hindered by the perception of

others. Previous literature has described how civilian students and faculty hold

stereotypes of service members as heroes, killers, or people with post-traumatic stress

disorder (PTSD) (Vaccaro, 2015). In a study by Elliot (2015) that investigated what

predicts student veterans' frequent reports of troubling experiences on campus such as

feeling unfairly judged by their professors or sensing that they do not fit in. Over half of

student veterans stated that they did not fit in on campus, and almost one-third felt

unfairly judged. The return to civilian culture also means that veterans are forced to learn

how to respond to veteran stereotypes and unsolicited comments about the wars (Corbin

& Torres-Cortez, 2017; Philipps, 2015). The most impassioned comments from student

veterans relay classroom experiences or interactions with professors that are upsetting or offensive (Elliott, Gonzalez, & Larsen, 2011). Student veterans also disclose that the most poignant expression of alienation relays the pain and helplessness felt by veterans whose professors put down their service in class if they are not there, or by singling them out (Elliot 2011; Love, Levin, Park, 2015). These actions have led to major lawsuits by student veterans (Abeni, 2015; Kalani, 2016)

In another study, Vaccaro (2015) explored student engagement and climate experiences of diverse adult student veterans. Overwhelmingly, the student veterans indicated that they needed practitioners to stop assuming all veterans are the same. For example, Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research conducted an online survey of a representative sample of 1,381 adult Americans nationwide. The survey revealed that more than 80 % of Americans believe that post-9/11 Veterans are more likely than civilians to suffer from a mental health issue, and over 60 % think post-9/11 veterans are more unemployed than civilians (https://www.va.gov).

Veterans described the stereotype of all being "gung-ho" combat veterans who arrived at campus as wounded warriors (Vaccaro, 2015). In a separate mixed method research, Park (2015) found that academic advisors have little understanding of either their student veteran advisees or their military experience; as a result, they often rely on stereotypes of student veterans that can negatively affect the way in which they advise student veterans. Faculty and staff support is critical to the success of student veterans. Keefe, Huitink and Donega (2016) found that veteran support programs made a number of positive impacts on veteran academic performance, access to campus and community resources, and skills training and employment opportunities, but also experienced

challenges with personnel turnover, sustainability, and integration with existing on-campus services and supports. Staffing choices are critical to the success of veterans' program. Keefe et al. (2016) recommends that program administrators ensure they budget adequate time to find, hire, and train the right candidates to ensure program success.

Faculty and Staff Support

The last few years have signified a shift in the type and amount of support services offered to student veterans. The argument that transitioning out of the military and into the classroom can be as stressful as a deployment may seem absurd. In reality, the challenge of reintegrating back into society while pursuing a college education might be the most difficult barrier a student veteran faces (Kirchner, 2015).

As noted by Osborne (2013), the findings of a study to gain insight of the transitional experiences of veterans at a university suggest that veterans require a moderate amount of assistance from university personnel during their initial transition in addition to specialized support once they are on campus. Offering faculty and staff development programs on veterans' issues, particularly in areas related to military culture and the limiting stereotypes that focus disproportionately on violence and trauma, were emphasized as essential for creating a veteran-friendly campus.

Using survey data collected from 160 instructors at a community college and four-year university, Gonzalez and Elliott (2016) estimate structural equation models to explain the associations among faculty members' prior contact with the military, their attitudes toward student veterans and willingness to help them, and their treatment of military-related issues in the classroom. The results reveal that faculty who have greater

contact with the military in their private lives discuss the military more often in class and are more willing to help student veterans because they know more about them.

In another phenomenological study, Jones (2013) documented identity development in student veterans making the transition from active military service to higher education. Interviewees expressed a need for increased or improved services for veterans at some level, whether a dedicated military admissions representative, or someone in the financial aid office who could walk through the tangled knot of constantly changing regulations related to the Post 9/11 GI Bill, or someone in student affairs who understands the life altering effect a school year combat deployment has on transitioning service members (Jones 2015). Similarly, in another study, participants offered suggestions about what campuses could do to assist veterans in their transition to college. Almost every participant spoke about efforts to identify veterans on campus and about being dependent for support on others who have had similar experiences (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009). It is worthwhile for higher education institutions to identify administrators, faculty, staff, and alumni who share this experience. They can provide an invaluable holistic perspective on how effectively an institution serves these students (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014). The level of support received influences the transition to higher education for nontraditional students, such as student-veterans (Ryan, Shawn, Kenneth, Hughey, & Brandonn, 2011). To better serve military and veteran students, colleges must provide active institutional support and faculty training (Schnoebelen, 2013). Mentorship is a significant factor that impacts student success (Nelson et al., 2018; Roberts, 2010; Summerlot, Green, & Parker, 2009). Studies show that mentorship increases student retention (Cass & Hammond, 2015; Gullan et al., 2016).

Academic Success

Although definitive information about the number of student veterans who complete their degree program is not yet known, a number of qualitative and quantitative studies show that many student veterans are facing extensive challenges in working toward their academic goals (Borsari et al., 2015; Kapell, Boersma, DeVita, & Parker, 2017; Norman et al., 2015; Phelps, 2015). Perceived policy and institutional barriers may also impede student veterans' achievement of academic goals. Persky and Oliver (2010) conducted mixed methods research with student veterans. Their participants noted that poor coordination among the various administrative processes involved in using the GI Bill including school registration, course enrollment, financial aid, and counseling, was a significant stressor. Participants also expressed that their educational experience would be more positive if faculty and staff (i.e., counselors, advisors, campus mental health) were trained in military culture and veteran-specific issues.

De La Garza et al. (2016) used structural equation modeling to confirm that action control, self-efficacy, intrinsic interest, and degree utility have direct and significant effects on college GPA which provides several key implications for community college administrators and faculty. As such, De La Garza et al. (2016). Implication for administrators is to initiate efforts by college administrators should focus on building confidence in academic ability in military and veteran students, especially since many of these students may have been away from academic settings for several years compared with nonmilitary peers.

In the study to explore student veterans' perceptions of facilitators and barriers to achieving academic goals, Norman et al. (2015) concluded that there is no one-size-fits-

all solution that would help all student veterans achieve their academic goals. Rather, a number and variety of veteran-centered programs and policies may improve the rates of student veterans achieving their academic goals. For example, easier logistics of coordinating among agencies involved in the GI Bill may help some, while a more welcoming campus culture or more opportunity to learn skills for academic success may be of more help to others.

Methods to ease transition and ensure academic success for military veterans will continue to engage college faculty and administrators (De La Garza, Manuel Wood & Harris, 2016). A need for specialized services and programs targeting the military and student veteran population will continue based on current military operations (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009).

Student Veteran Needs

With such a large number of veterans enrolling in higher education, colleges and universities are seeking to become more "veteran friendly" by improving academic resources, financial aid, and support services to meet their needs (Taylor, Parks, & Edwards, 2016).

In a systemic review of the peer-reviewed research, Barry, Whiteman, and Wadsworth (2014) found student veterans had more personal and educational difficulties and disproportionately higher rates of psychological symptoms and health risk behaviors compared to civilian peers. Student veterans may have a need for emotional support and camaraderie of their fellow veterans.

Emotional Support

In their research to examine the development and implications of emotional support received from peers among student service members/veterans and civilian students enrolled in higher education. Consistent with expectations, student service veterans reported less peer emotional support than their civilian veterans (Whiteman et al., 2013). Their findings also indicate that although emotional support from peers increased over time for student service veterans, given their initial deficit compared with civilian students, student service veterans never reached the same level of emotional support as their civilian counterparts (Whiteman et al., 2013).

In the study to described student veterans' navigation of college re-enrollment, Livingston, Havice, Cawthon, and Fleming (2011) found that fellow veterans provided the most prominent source of support, both academic and social. Participants tended to rely on military colleagues whom they already knew or faculty members to whom they were introduced. Student veterans felt more comfortable associating with one another, a byproduct of maturity and a lack of commonality with their peers. The desire to help fellow veterans was an even clearer priority because of the common military experience and challenges they shared. In addition to each other, student veterans relied on veteran faculty members at the institution. Another participant recollected his experience working with supportive faculty in the business college (Livingston, 2011).

Even though military service members or active duty members are renowned for looking out for one another on the battlefield, in the study to investigate what predicts student veterans' frequent reports of troubling experiences on campus, Elliot (2015) study did not find any lasting mental health benefits of the social support received from those

with whom the students most recently served. Camaraderie does not leave veterans'

mindsets after they leave the service. Veterans come from a culture of "having each

other's back". This bond is a powerful starting point for peer mentorship (Cass &

Hammond, 2015).

Camaraderie

As a result of their unique experiences (e.g., deployment) and different

demographic characteristics, student service members often feel disconnected in higher

education and desire interactions with other veterans on campus (Whiteman et al. 2013).

Naphan and Elliott (2015) qualitative research analyzed in-depth interviews with eleven

student veterans about transitioning from the U.S. military to civilian life and to a

midsized, public university. A theme that emerged from the narratives was that combat

veterans experienced more intense bonds with their comrades compared to student

veterans in support roles, which left them feeling more isolated when they got out

because it seemed like no one could relate to their military experiences. Put differently,

the greater the social cohesion they felt while in the military, the more difficult was their

transition into civilian life.

Academic

Student veterans may require additional support for their academic demands in

higher education. Services such as tutoring or test-taking strategies may be needed to

further ensure they are performing optimally. Additionally, academic coaching services

can further support executive functioning skills management with the goal of advising

students on techniques for successful self-management of their coursework (Dustin,

2016).

Mentzer, Black, and Spohn (2015) research described the correlation of academic, financial, and social supports to the persistence of a military student population. Results in literature on persistence confirmed the importance of academic support mechanisms and noted their positive relationship to the military student population. This study shows that the military student population exhibits stronger persistence when built on a foundation of institutional and academic support. Clear instruction, organization and course consistency from a committed university are the keys to degree completion for the military student population (Mentzer, Black, & Spohn, 2015)

Support Services Staff Perspective

Because of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, student veterans are attending postsecondary institutions in record numbers. While administrators remain concerned about student veterans' ability to transition from the military to college, most perceive student veterans as motivated and persistent in their pursuit of a college degree.

Taylor et al. (2016) examined whether college administrators have reported changes in student veterans' psychological characteristics since the Post 9/11 GI Bill's full implementation in 2009. The study concludes that administrators and staff perceived increases in happiness, confidence, and motivation among student veterans over a five-year period and observed no change in student veterans' negative emotions, such as anger, sadness, or frustration. This perception of positive change reflects no noticeable upsurge in PTSD-related behaviors among returning student veterans, such as aggression or violence, which some institutions may have feared. However, (Miller, 2015) study to determine how a graduate-level academic advisor perceives his or her role in advising military and student veterans, advisors reported identification of the students'

problems was often reported as one of the most difficult and frustrating tasks associated with the role of an advisor. Many participants stated students were not always forthcoming in discussing personal issues, especially issues pertaining to mental health (Miller, 2015).

Leadership Literature

Success of students transitioning from the military is an institutional Responsibility. A unified approach enlisting all components of the institution can be facilitated through a campus-wide collaboration directed by the highest administrative authority, such as the college president and/or the academic senate. This directive may include the formation of an interdepartmental committee charged with creating a campus climate conducive to the success of all military transition students (Burnett, 2009). Leadership is not about merely existing as a leader. It is about acting on behalf of the team's objective. If followers see that their leaders have their group's best interest, they are more likely to buy into the group's goals. Haslam, Reicher, and Platow (2011) advise that the first rule of effective leadership is that leaders should be seen as one of their followers. This aspect of leadership-followership began to attract more interest from academics when the concern for understanding the wholeness of the ''leadership'' phenomenon arose, implying to have a focus on the two main characters, "the leader" and "the follower" (Burns,1978; Hollander & Webb, 1955; Greenleaf, 1977). When this perspective is taken into consideration, the moral dimension of the process of leadership necessarily arises and attracts the attention of academics and professionals in the business world (Ruiz, Ruiz, & Martínez, 2011). One of the earliest theorists who referred to followership was Hollander (1992) who argued that leaders and followers are

interdependent and must work together in order to improve the organization's performance. Other early followership theorists asserted that the leader-follower relationship was an interdependent one with a mutual influence process and should be studied in entirety rather than as separate entities of leader and follower (Heller & Van Til, 1982; Hollander & Webb, 1955). In the 1990s a stream of research in leadership began to emerge that constitutes a follower-centered approach to leadership (Shamir & Lapidot, 2003). More recently Shamir (2007) proposes that leadership is jointly by leaders and followers when they form effective leadership relationships that help them co-produce leadership outcomes.

Summary

Transitioning from military life to higher education can be daunting. The structured life of the military is extraordinarily different from the sometimes chaotic and confusing higher education experience (Taylor, Parks, & Edwards 2016). Student veterans may require additional supports for their academic demands in higher education.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The methodology and methods used in the current research study is discussed in this chapter including the research design, participants, data sources, recruitment, data collection tools, data collection procedures, and data analysis plan. The chapter concluded with a discussion on ethical considerations, the timeline of the study, and reflections of the researcher. This research described the lived experiences of student veterans at an institution of higher learning in Hawaii. Understanding the lived experiences of student veterans may help scholars and practitioners who work with them to create relevant and useful programs to assist with their university experiences. The purpose of the study was to describe the lived experiences of student veterans at an institution of higher learning in Hawaii in an attempt to better assist the reintegration of veterans as students at the institution.

Research Question

The guiding research question for this study was the following one:

What are the lived experiences of student veterans use of university support services at an institution of higher learning in Hawaii?

Research Design

A phenomenological research design was used in this study to investigate the lived experiences of student veterans. The intent of the researcher was to capture raw data to describe the lived experiences of student veterans on campus, hence a transcendental phenomenology approach was appropriate for this research study.

Data collection for the current study was obtained through interviews. The researcher employed an interview protocol based on Creswell's (2013) qualitative research approach. The interview questions were semi-structured and consisted of qualitative open ended questions. The researcher structured the questions in an effort to capture rich data of the student veterans' college experiences.

The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews during the month of July 2018. For the sake of convenience and comfort, the locations and times of the interview was determined by the participants. The universal advice in qualitative interview is to make the research participants comfortable by conducting the interview in a location of their choosing (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Minichiello, Aroni & Hays, 2008). The researcher used two iPhones 8 (www.apple.com) with the Voice Memo app (www.apple.com) to record all interviews. One iPhone served as the primary recorder and the second iPhone served as a backup recorder to ensure all the recordings were captured. Upon arrival at the interview site, the researcher went over the purpose of the study, the anticipated time, and the plans for the use of the results from the interview. Once the interviews were completed, the researcher uploaded and saved the recordings as audio files to the researcher's computer for subsequent use. The researcher used Rev (rev.com) to transcribe the audio files in a word document.

Participants/Data Sources and Recruitment

The research population of the current study was eight student veterans. The phenomenon of the study involved understanding the lived experiences of student veterans at an institution of higher learning in Hawaii. The student participants all served in the uniformed services and were matriculated from the institution of higher learning in

Hawaii. Purposive sampling was used to identify individuals within the population who met the criteria for the study. The concept of purposeful sampling as used in qualitative research means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon to the study (Creswell 2013). The criteria for participant selection for the study included:

1. Student veterans eligible for VA Education benefits.

2. Student veterans who attended the institution of higher learning in Hawaii

3. Individuals who met the selection criteria for this study and were willing to participate.

Necessary permission was needed from the participants and from the research institution of higher learning

Data Collection Tools

The main source of data collection for this research was face-to-face interviews with student veterans. Secondary data collection included field observations, and note taking. Opdenakker's (2006) study in the domain of virtual teams concludes that using face-to-face interviews for collecting information are preferred when:

- social cues of the interviewee are very important information sources for the interviewer;

- the interviewer has enough budget and time for travelling, or the interviewees live near the interviewer; and

- standardization of the interview situation is important.

A study by Magi and Mardeusz (2013) further suggests that students appreciate the richness of face-to-face communication and value the opportunity for dialogue,

collaboration, and exchange of nonverbal information, all of which efficiently steer the interaction in the most helpful direction. The research explored personal experiences of student veterans and was concerned with their perception of an event and also described the common meaning of these lived experiences. The researcher focused on thick, rich descriptions of lived experiences and meaning. Hence face-to-face interviews was an appropriate method for this research as they allowed the researcher to gather data through observations. Observing an interviewee can give researchers non-verbal cues to gain a better understanding of what the respondent is saying. Non-verbal communication plays a major role in all communication. It is crucial in a plain daily communication situation. Non-verbal cues can support or even replace verbal communications in many situations. For example, Phutela (2015) describes non-verbal communication as a silent form of communicating with a person or party without using any form of speech to grab the attention of audience or to exploit a message. Whereas as (Opdenakker, 2006; Oltmann, 2016) describe nonverbal language as cues that can be very rich, including dress, body language, mannerisms. These aspects gave the interviewer a lot of extra information that was added to the verbal answer of the interviewee. The research study also used other types of data collection methods to include Apple's voice memo app (apple.com) voice recorder.

One of the tenets of qualitative research is the emphasis and honoring of the participants' own words as generative of meaning and knowledge (Chandler, Anstey, & Ross, 2015). Ho, Tseng, Hsin, Chou and Lin (2016) conducted 18 in-depth

interviews recorded by a pen voice recorder in their study to explore the lived experiences of patients afflicted with spinal muscular atrophy.

Nonverbal cues may not be adequately captured through the use of audio-recording. Therefore, they are typically handwritten in a small notebook at the same time the interview takes place (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Wilson and Nelson (2012) used this method to gain a better understanding of genitourinary (GU) health during deployment in the context of a military culture. Field notes are also widely recommended in qualitative research as a means of documenting needed contextual information. Some consider field notes to be the very essence of a study. (Mulhall, 2003; Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017).

Audiovisual materials such as photographs, compact discs, and video tapes were not available for use in the study. However, interest has grown in performing qualitative research which focuses on the visual images themselves to explore participants' experiences and meaning (Frith, Riley, Archer, & Gleeson, 2005). The use of images is rooted in disciplines such as anthropology and sociology (Harper, 2002). Conceptualization of photographic images are diverse and depend on the values and assumptions informing one's view, as well as the type of research being carried out (Byrne, 2014).

Using these various types of data collection allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of student veterans.

Data Collection Procedures

Once IRB approval was granted from Creighton University, the researcher contacted the sponsoring faculty member at the research school to obtain the university-

approved list of student veterans. The researcher purposely selected eight individuals for

face-to-face interviews. Polkinghorn (2006) recommends that researchers interview from

5 to 25 individuals who have all experienced the same phenomenon. The point is to

gather thick and rich data for the research. A list of the interview questions for the study

is included in Appendix E.

   The main source of data collection for this research was face-to-face interviews

with student veterans. Secondary data collection included voice recording (Nelson,

Jarrahi, & Thomson, 2017). The interview questions were pre-formulated by the

researcher. The participants were initially asked two questions:

1. As a student veteran at…can you describe any situations that have influenced
   your experience with college life?

2. As a student veteran, in what specific ways has the support services at…helped
   you to transition from the military to college life?

For the sake of capturing rich data of the student veterans' college experiences, the

researcher followed these two questions with other open-ended questions. The full list of

interview questions is noted in Appendix E. Moustakas (1994) advises that the two broad

questions will focus attention on gathering data that will lead to a textual and structural

description of the experiences, and ultimately provide an understanding of the common

experience of the participants. Other forms of data were collected such as field

observations.

Ethical Considerations

   In any research, ethical issues can be a challenge. Babbie (2014) cautions that

bias and participants' privacy are ethical concerns that frequently arise in a qualitative

study. To address these potential ethical concerns, researchers should be aware of their values and adhere to established techniques for data collection and analysis. Researchers should also make efforts to conceal participants' identities and, as needed, suppress details that would let outsiders identify participants.

The primary ethical concerns for this research study were the protection of the identity of the participants who provided opinions and perception of the support services at the university they attend. As recommended by Given (2008), many ethical codes outline the importance of anonymity and confidentiality, and researchers routinely use pseudonyms as a means to this end. The researcher assigned pseudonyms to all participants in the study to protect their identity. Protecting the identity of the university or college is also an ethical concern (Heilbronner et al., 2013; Paoletti, 2014). In today's society where polling and rankings are important to colleges and universities, unfavorable remarks could be damaging to a school's reputation (Blee & Currier, 2011; Paoletti, Tomás, & Menéndez, 2013). The researcher did not directly identify the college or university in the study.

A secondary ethical concern involved being careful not to use the researcher's own values and awareness to influence the research findings and outcome. The researcher is a military spouse who considers herself an insider to the military and veteran communities. The researcher is also an employee of the VA who works with transitioning service members from day to day. The VA administers the GI Bill benefits. To avoid the ethical pitfall of being biased in my data analysis, the researcher cultivated a deliberate awareness of her values and preferences and disclosed her relationship to the military and veteran community in the research. As an additional layer of protection, the

researcher used the peer review process in scientific research that encourages colleagues to identify ethical concerns. The researcher used bracketing during the research and writing process to ensure that all personal biases are recognized, even though van Manen (1990) cautions that bracketing personal experiences may be difficult because interpretation of the data always incorporate the assumptions that the researcher brings to the topic.

The research involved human subjects. IRB approval was obtained from Creighton University, the researcher's degree-granting institution before the start of data collection. The university in which the study was conducted relied on Creighton's IRB approval and did not require the researcher to obtain IRB approval from the institution prior to interviewing student veterans on its campus. Participant invitations and informed consent letters as Participant Email are attached to the research (see Appendices A and B).

Data Analysis

Data analysis involves the examination and interpretation of observations for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships (Babbie, 2014). As noted in prior research (Gholston, Kuofie, & Hakim, 2016; Tran, Huynh, Chan, Chesla, & Park, 2017), the researcher began the data analysis process by transcribing the voice memos recordings to text using online service rev.com. Once all of the voice memos were transcribed, the researcher then examined the information and reflected on the overall meanings and patterns of relationships (Braun, & Clarke, 2008; Fournier, 1998). The researcher then hand coded the data. The process of hand coding the data was very lengthy and time consuming. However, it was more cost effective than the use of

qualitative data analysis (QDA) software such as MAXQDA (https://www.maxqda.com; Oliveira, Bitencourt, Santos, & Teixeira, 2015). Software such as MAXQDA are user-friendly and offer an intuitive interface (Humble, 2009; Mitchell & Kuczynski, 2010). However, there is a cost to use the software. During the coding process, the researcher focused on the research purpose and highlighted responses that emphasize student veterans' experiences while attending college. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) recommended that researchers keep a copy of their research concerns and central research questions to keep focused on coding decisions. The researcher used the codes identified from the coding process to generate themes for the analysis.

Reflections of the Researcher

Writing the Methodology section of this research helped the researcher hone in on the methodology and methods that are appropriate for this research. In exploring the five approaches in qualitative research, the researcher initially thought that narrative research would be appropriate for this current research because narrative research is collecting and analyzing the accounts people tell to describe experiences and offer an interpretation. This type of research also provides an option to explore personal experiences beyond the boundaries of a questionnaire (Overcash, 2003). However, narrative research focuses on individual stories told by participants and would not be appropriate for the current study. The intent of a grounded theory study is to generate or discover a theory or a unified theoretical explanation and is generated or grounded in data from 20 or so participants who have experienced the process (Creswell, 2013). If the intent of the current research study was to move beyond describing the experiences of student veterans and to make or discover a theory, then the researcher would have

employed a grounded theory approach to investigate the current topic. Ethnographic research usually involves a much larger group. In ethnographic studies, researchers also describe and interpret the shared and learned patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and language of a culture-sharing group. The intent in ethnography is to determine how the culture works. The intent of a case study is to develop an in-depth description and analysis of a case of multiple cases. Phenomenology emphasizes the common experiences for a number of individuals. Student veterans who attend an institution of higher learning in Hawaii have shared experiences, i.e., they have all served in the uniformed services and have used their VA education benefits to pursue degrees. For these reasons, a phenomenological study was chosen for the current research.

To arrive at a final decision on which type of phenomenological approach would be best for this study, the researcher used a side by side compare and contrast technique between the two approaches to phenomenology that are highlighted in Creswell (2013). After making this comparison, transcendental phenomenology was chosen as the preferred approach because it focuses on setting aside all preconceived ideas to see phenomena through unclouded glasses thereby allowing the true meaning of phenomena to naturally emerge with and within their own identity (Moustakas, 1994). The purpose of the research was not to interpret the lived experiences of student veterans, but to describe the lived experiences (as is) of student veterans at an institution of higher learning in Hawaii in an attempt to better assist the reintegration of veterans as students at the institution. Practitioners must understand the true lived experiences of student veterans to create better programs. The researcher is confident that the use of transcendental phenomenology was appropriate for this research.

Summary

This research study was the result of a perceived disconnect between student veterans and university support services. Many student veterans use the support services offered by the institution to alleviate or eliminate their stress, as students, veterans still encounter challenges while transitioning to college life. The purpose of this study was to describe the lived experiences of student veterans at an institution of higher learning in Hawaii in an attempt to better assist the reintegration of veterans as students at the institution. Phenomenological study describes the common meaning for individuals for their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Hence, a phenomenological study was the appropriate qualitative research design for this research paper.

The researcher used interviews as the primary source of data collection in addition to varied sources of data such as voice recordings and observations. The researcher identified and discussed two areas of ethical concerns that arose in the study. These concerns were biases and participant privacy. The researcher then considered ways to avoid these ethical pitfalls.

The aim of this study was to use the study's findings to identify the disconnect, if any, between student veterans and the support services staff, enhance services offered by the institution, improve interaction between student veterans who attend the university and the support services staff at the university, and develop alliances among the federal government, private groups, and non-profit groups to improve veteran students overall experience in college.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

Many veterans use support services offered by their institution of higher learning to alleviate or eliminate their stress; yet, veterans still encounter difficulties while transitioning to college life (Osborne, 2014). The guiding research question of the current study stated: What are the lived experiences of student veterans who use university support services at an institution of higher learning in Hawaii? The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of student veterans at an institution of higher learning in Hawaii in an attempt to better assist the reintegration of veterans as students at the institution. Data were obtained from face-to face interviews with eight student veterans who attend an institution of higher learning in Hawaii. Field notes were also taken by the researcher during the interview. Prior to asking specific questions about the veteran's lived experience, the researcher asked participants to tell the researcher about themselves. This initial question was used as an icebreaker and allowed the participants to talk freely about themselves. This question was also used to capture other important data that may not have been captured by other questions used in each interview. As noted by Jacob and Furgerson (2012), the phrase "tell me about…" tactfully instructs research participants to begin talking and leaves room for ideas, impressions, and concepts to emerge from the data. The researcher then used the following two broad questions to understand the lived experiences of the participants:

1. As a student veteran at…can you describe any situations that have influenced your experience with college life?

2. As a student veteran, in what specific ways has the support services at…helped

   you to transition from the military to college life?

The researcher proceeded with other open-ended questions. The full list of the interview

questions is noted in Appendix E. This chapter begins with a brief description of the

demographic characteristics of the participants in the current study. The findings are then

presented based on the themes identified by the participants in the face-to-face

interviews. Next, an analysis and synthesis of the findings is provided, followed by a

summary of the findings.

Description of the Participants

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the eight participants who took

part in this study. At the beginning of the interview, each participant completed a paper-

and-pencil questionnaire that was used to gather demographic information (see Appendix

D). Each of the participants was assigned a pseudonym to be used to describe their

responses and behaviors during the face-to-face interviews. A pseudonym was assigned

to each participant to protect their identities. Of the eight people who took part in the

study, six of them were men and two were women. In addition, six of the participants

had separated from the military, while one participant was a retiree and one was on active

duty. The retiree was discharged from the military more than five years ago. Three of

the participants were discharged three or more years, and the other three were recently

discharged less than a year ago. Six of the participants had been in the Army, while one

had been in the Air Force, and the active duty participant was in the Navy. With the

exception of Alex who was an officer in the Navy, the other participants had been

enlisted members of their respective branches of the military. The only participant to

have more than 10 years of military service was John who retired from the Army with 22 years of service.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Participant Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Military Status	Branch of Service	Rank	Years of Military Service	Combat Vet	Time from Separation / Retirement	Disabled Veteran	Class	Plan of Study
Mark	Male	26	Seperatee	Army	E3	4	Yes	More than 4 years	Yes	Junior	Business Administration
Stephanie	Female	31	Seperatee	Army	E5	8	No	More than 3 years	No	Sophomore	Human Resource Management
John	Male	43	Retiree	Army	E9	22	Yes	More than 5 years	No	Senior	Marketing
Steve	Male	28	Seperatee	Army	E4	8	No	Less than 1 year	No	Freshman	Undecided
Dan	Male	29	Seperatee	Air Force	E4	8	Yes	More than 4 years	Yes	Sophomore	Business Administration
Robert	Male	23	Seperatee	Army	E2	4	Yes	Less than 1 year	No	Freshman	Finance
Emily	Female	28	Seperatee	Army	E5	8	Yes	Less than 1 year	Yes	Freshman	Undecided
Alex	Male	34	Active	Navy	O3	10	No	Active	No	Graduate	Public Administration

The areas of study for the participants varied with two of the participants being undecided and not having a declared major. Two of the participants were majoring in business administration, with another participant studying marketing and another studying finance. One participant was majoring in human resource management. Alex, a Naval officer, was a graduate student working toward his Master's Degree in Public Administration.

Presentation of the Findings

Transition

One of the themes that all of the participants seemed adamant about when being interviewed was the problems and issues that they faced in transitioning from military life to higher education. All of the participants had stories about the difficulties with what they perceived to be the lack of structure that existed in higher education. For example, Mark explained that he was only a few weeks out of the Army when he decided to begin

college. He stated that he quickly became angry, and almost considered not attending

college, because he found that there were few strict rules and guidelines about how to

choose classes, and which classes should be taken for his major as a freshman. He

explained that it seemed that students were free to choose any classes they wanted even if

those classes were not necessarily needed to complete their majors.

The lack of specific rules about which classes should be taken in a given

academic year was raised by several of the participants. As a freshman, Steve stated that

he went to meet his advisor with the expectation that he would be given a list of general

classes that he needed to complete during his first year of college. Instead, his advisor

had the attitude that he should take a few classes to determine what he might be interested

in as a major. Steve explained that the fact that he had not declared a specific major may

have been the reason that his advisor suggested taking a variety of classes, but he would

have appreciated having a list of general classes that he would need to take regardless of

the major he might declare.

John, the Army retiree, was much more vocal, and seemed to be angry when

discussing his freshman experience. He stated that his academic advisor handed him a

sheet of paper with course requirements and seemed to have the attitude that no further

explanation was necessary. He perceived his advisor as having an arrogant attitude that

he should simply know which classes he needed to take. John explained that he became

openly angry with the advisor and informed the advisor that he was a military veteran

who was accustomed to receiving specific information and expected to be given

information during the advising session. According to John, the advisor finally provided

a specific list of classes, but acted as though it was an inconvenience.

Dan, who had separated from the Air Force, explained that his freshman transition to the lack of structure of college life was made easier because his academic advisor had been in the military and seemed to understand the difficulties that people face when they leave the military and begin attending college. His advisor actually provided specific information about the courses that he needed to take to prepare him for his junior and senior years. In addition, Dan explained that his advisor provided information about groups and clubs for people who had been in the military that existed on campus. He stated that having an academic advisor who understood the transition from the military to college and could provide specific information that was relevant to his situation made him feel more comfortable as he spent his first few days acclimating to college life.

Robert also stated that his freshman advisor was very helpful because he provided specific advice about leaving the military and entering college. Robert explained that his advisor had worked with former military personnel who were transitioning to civilian life, so he understood the problems they face as they realize that civilian life is not as structured and regimented as military life. He said having an academic advisor his freshman year who understood the issues and concerns that he faced made the transition into college much easier, and may have been the reason why he actually stuck with college rather than dropping out.

Another issue involving the transition of the participants from military life to higher education that created difficulty was accessing their military benefits. Emily stated that dealing with the financial aid office at the university was problematic because the staff seemed to be confused about how to handle receiving payments from the federal government. She became frustrated because she knew that she was far from the only

student attending college on the G.I. Bill, so she expected that financial aid staff to know what they needed to do to ensure that the funds were available for her to enroll.

Mark also explained the problems he faced in ensuring that his financial aid from the G.I. Bill was properly handled so that he could attend classes. He explained that he had to make several calls to his school's financial aid office and actually help them navigate the process of receiving his financial aid. He wondered why the financial aid personnel were not more knowledgeable about receiving financial aid for students using the G.I. Bill, particularly given that this was an easy source of revenue for colleges and universities. A similar sentiment was expressed by Stephanie who stated that she would have thought that there were people in her school's financial aid office who did nothing but handle financial aid for students using the G.I. Bill given the largest number of people leaving the military and attending school.

John, the Army retiree, once again indicated that he had to become angry to receive the assistance and support that he expected when interacting with his school's financial aid office. He stated that some of the people in the financial aid office were very nice and helpful, but some of the personnel seemed that he was causing an inconvenience, or that he should do their jobs for them. He stated that after making several calls to the financial aid office, he physically went to the office and explained that if he did not receive help with his financial aid, he was going to contact his senator and the media, and let the public know that a veteran who had served his country could not attend school because it was just too much of an inconvenience for the school. He explained that after his threat to contact his senator and the media, the financial aid office

became much more helpful and the funds from the federal government were placed into his account at the school without any problems.

It is interesting to note that the one participant who seemed to indicate a lack of problems enrolling in college was Alex, the active duty Naval officer who was attending graduate school. Alex explained that his transition to graduate school was made easier because he had been to college and was accustomed to the lack of structure of college life. He stated that he felt bad for people who were leaving the military and immediately entering college with the expectation that there would be a lot of support and guidance because he realized that this was not the case for most people. He explained that colleges and universities should do more to support students who are in the military or who have recently left the military, such as pairing them with advisors who understand the fears and concerns of military personnel who are transitioning to civilian life.

Perceptions by Others

Another theme that arose from the responses provided by the participants was the perceptions and stereotypes that they faced from college personnel and faculty. It should be noted that the participants did not emphasize how they were perceived by other students as being former members of the military. Instead, they discussed the issues they faced regarding how they were perceived by faculty and staff. Dan explained that he was talking to a professor after class about something that was discussed in that day's lecture. When he mentioned that he had served in the Air Force and had been in combat, the professor seemed to become uneasy and uncomfortable. Dan stated that the ease with which they had been talking previously disappeared, and it was as though the professor was choosing his words more carefully.

Mark explained that one specific situation stood out for him about how college students who have been in the military are sometimes perceived as having mental health issues regardless of their mental health conditions. He stated that after writing about his experience in the military for a writing course, he went to ask his professor a question in his office and the professor almost seemed afraid to be alone with him. Mark said he had the perception that the professor thought that he would become violent. Mark also explained that his one interaction made him afraid to disclose his status as a veteran for fear that other faculty would not want to interact with him outside of class.

John, the Army retiree, stated that he perceived that professors believed that all people who had been in the military were the same in terms of their likes, dislikes, and behaviors. He explained that after learning of his military service, one professor would constantly refer to him when discussing political or military issues in class as though he could speak for all service members. John stated that after a couple of weeks of this behavior, he finally told the professor in front of the class that not all members of the military hold the sample political or social views. John said that the professor seemed taken aback by the idea that not all members of the military agree on all issues.

John mentioned that he had a similar experience with a secretary who worked in the marketing department of the university with whom he often had to interact. He stated that the secretary constantly talked about political issues when he was in the office, and assumed that he agreed with her political opinions because he had served in the military. He stated that this was irritating because she would want to discuss politics with him when it seemed inappropriate, and then assumed that he automatically agreed with her

because of his military service. He finally had to tell her that he did not agree with her political opinions, and that it was inappropriate to discuss politics in the workplace.

Mark explained that he experienced the idea that all former military service members are the same when interacting with the career services office at the university. He stated that he went to meet with a counselor about intern opportunities. When the counselor saw that he had been in the Army, the counselor immediately started discussing internship opportunities working for military contractors. Even after Mark told the counselor that he did not want to pursue a career working for a military contractor, the counselor brought up the idea of interning with a military contractor several more times. Mark stated that it felt as though the counselor was more interesting in providing information based on stereotypes rather than providing information to an individual who might not fit a stereotype.

Stephanie shared a similar experience when she sought tutoring from the academic support services at her college. She said that when she casually mentioned that she had been in the Army, the staff in academic support services suggested that she get a note from a physician about needing extra time to complete tests as though she was mentally or psychologically challenged. She stated that for several weeks, the staff would suggest that she get a note from a physician about having lingering issues related to her military service as a way of receiving additional time to complete assignments and to take tests. Stephanie explained that this was irritating and depressing at the same time because her desire to receive tutoring in a class to ensure that she made a good grade resulted in people assuming that she had mental or emotional issues because of her military service.

Robert more broadly stated that it seemed that in every interaction with faculty and staff at the university, his status as a service member influenced how they treated him. He explained that secretaries at the university seemed to want to treat him as an object to put on display for other students rather than simply treating him as just another student. He stated that in one situation, a secretary actually went as far to tell other students who were in an office filing forms that they should view him as a hero who served his country. When telling this story, Robert visibly rolled his eyes. He also shook his head and stated that it was these people who seemed to want to demonstrate their patriotism by calling out his military service at the most inappropriate times that annoyed him. He further explained that he had professors who seemed to want to use him as an expert on anything to do with military or government operations even when he had no personal experience in most areas of military or government operations.

One of the sentiments that was expressed by several of the participants was the idea that the faculty and staff who draw attention to their military service should know better. Emily stated that as a freshman, she did not want to constantly have to explain her military service or feel that she was put on the spot for other students because of her military service. John also stated that he often just wanted to go unnoticed in classes, but instead found himself being put in the spotlight because faculty members lacked the understanding that constantly being called out as a former service member can actually make people feel alienated rather than helping them better navigate college life. Dan also explained that he had avoided certain situations such as meetings of student groups that were not military related because faculty advisors had wanted to use his military service as an indication that he should be in a leadership role in the groups or act as a mentor for

her students when he simply wanted to sample the student groups to see if he wanted to

join and become a full-time member.

Faculty and Staff Support

The participants indicated that while some faculty and staff advertised their

military service, actual support from faculty and staff was often lacking. The participants

stated that real support to help them transition into the routines and norms of college life

were generally not available. Stephanie explained that she had initially hoped that there

was an active student group on campus of former military personnel that she could access

to help make the transition to college life easier. However, she found that while such a

group existed in theory, it did not regularly meet, and the advisor for the group had no

real experience in the military or working with military students. The result was that the

group provided no real benefit to the campus community. She stated that she thought that

the college should do more to encourage active participation in the group, and assign a

faculty advisor to the group who would take the group seriously as a support mechanism

for students transitioning from military life to college.

All of the participants expressed similar sentiments that they wished that there

was some type of group of students and faculty members who could provide support and

information to help those transitioning from the military to college life better handle this

process. Mark explained that he asked several professors if there were any faculty or

staff at his school who were knowledgeable about the issues and problems facing service

members who were attending school. He found that the faculty and staff were either not

aware of any such group, and some even referred him to the school's counseling center as

though he needed mental health counseling. Mark went on to explain that he even

suggested to the university that a representative to meet with students who were transitioning from the military would be helpful, but nothing had been implemented.

As a freshman, Steve stated that having a faculty mentor who had been in the military or at least understood the issues facing people who were transitioning from the military to college would have made his own transition easier. He explained that he felt that he did not fit in with most of the other students because they were traditional students who had entered college immediately after high school. The other students in most of his classes were about a decade younger, and had different life experiences. Furthermore, he felt as though he did not understand the customs and norms of college, such as how to interact with professors or how to participate in activities outside of classes. He stated that having a mentor or a regular group of other students who had transitioned from the military would have been helpful as a way to feel comfortable asking questions and obtaining advise.

Robert also stated that he had hoped to receive some type of support from faculty or staff to help him better acclimate to being a college student. He explained that he was unsure about even something that might have seemed like common sense to other students such as whether to call a professor's office with a question or to formally submit an email. He stated that he would see his fellow students emailing professors in almost the same way that they might email a personal friend while he was trying to be very formal. The result was often that he felt isolated, particularly when a professor would state that he did not have to be so formal or make it seem that he was overthinking an easy task. Robert stated that it seemed that faculty did not understand his military training, and how that training had impacted his more formal nature when interacting

with faculty. He indicated that if faculty received even a little training about the norms and customs of service members, and how that impacts their behaviors as students, he would have felt less isolated.

John once again expressed anger at the lack of support from faculty and staff that he had experienced during his time as a college student. John explained that for the first three of four semesters, he did not understand why certain forms had to be submitted every semester to the university if the information did not change. Furthermore, he stated that as someone who was accustomed to the regimented lifestyle of the Army, he believed that if a class was listed as full during registration, there was no way for him to get into the class that semester. However, only after talking to other students did he realize that for some of his classes, he only had to get permission from the professor to be able to enter a class even if it was indicated as closed during registration.

John also explained that for the first few semesters, he believed that if a professor listed his or her office hours, those were the hours during which to visit the professor to ask questions. However, after trying to visit professors during stated office hours and the professors not being in their offices, he realized that some professors did not mind students dropping in any time if they were in their offices. He said that for his first two years of college, he did not understand how stated times and places for certain activities such as office hours could be so relaxed and treated as being optional. While telling this story, he constantly shook his head and his face showed the look of annoyance. He went on to state that new students, particularly those from the military, need to receive orientation about how laid back a lot of rules and guidelines in college seem to be treated.

Emily also expressed frustration over what she perceived as the lack of general support that students received when they entered college. She expressed that this frustration probably exists for most students, but it is compounded for those who come from the military because they are not accustomed to the lack of structure. She said that she thought that having seminars or classes in which people from the military are taught about college culture and about the ways in which professors and staff perform their duties would be very helpful. At the same time, she thought that if colleges and universities are going to actively recruit students from the military, they should educate faculty and staff on the needs of people in the military or who have left the military and are going to college.

Dan explained that while it seemed that people were quick to brag about the presence of former military on campus, there was no support to help those who had left the military and were entering college. He once again explained that his transition to higher education was better because his freshman academic advisor had been in the military. However, beyond that freshman academic advisor, Dan stated that he found very few faculty or staff who had experience working with people who transitioned from the military to higher education, and he believed that this lack of support made it difficult for service members to truly be successful in higher education. He stated that he believed that colleges and universities actively recruit people from the military as students, but then forget about providing support to them once they have enrolled and paid their tuition.

Alex, the Naval officer, once again expressed how going back to school as a graduate student was not as difficult a transition for him because he had previously been

an undergraduate student. However, he explained that he suspected for people

transitioning from military life to college for the first time, the lack of support from

faculty and staff to help them learn the norms and customs of higher education was

probably very frustrating. He stated that he had heard some of his subordinates in the

Navy talk about taking college classes and being frustrated at not having people to help

them navigate a world that was greatly different from that of the military.

Academic Success

Some of the participants in the study raised the issue of how the lack of support

that they received from their university negatively impacted their academic success. One

of the issues that some of the participants raised regarding academic success was what

they perceived to be poor coordination between departments and offices at their

university that made the academic process more difficult than was necessary. Stephanie

explained that while the military has a reputation for being unorganized and requiring

people to submit the same forms three times before they are received, she felt it was even

worse in college because it seemed that departments and offices did not feel the need to

work with each other at all. She told a story of how she needed a prerequisite course

from one department to take a course in another department the next semester. The

problem she encountered was that the pre-requisite course was only offered in the fall

semester, and was very limited in terms of the number of students allowed to take the

course. She found this to be irritating and frustrating given that it was a course that was

clearly a prerequisite for many students. She did not understand why the two

departments did not work together to ensure that students were able to take the course

each semester. Stephanie stated that this impacted her academic success because she had

to wait a semester to take the pre-requisite, which, in turn, resulted in having to wait another semester to take the course that she needed that was in her major.

Mark also believed that his freshman year of school was less academically successful than might have otherwise been the case because he felt that he was not welcomed on campus. He explained that he constantly felt like an outcast among students and even with some of his professors. He stated that he avoided some of the student study groups for some of his courses because he felt isolated from the more traditional students who were younger and had come to college directly from high school. The lack of support that he received caused him to make lower grades during his first semester because of not feeling as though he belonged in the student study groups.

John, who had been quite vocal and seemed angry throughout the interview, shared a similar experience of making lower grades that he thought should have occurred during his first semester in college because of the lack of support that he received from many areas of the college. He explained that even after classes began, he was still trying to make sure that the school received his tuition from the federal government, and was trying to coordinate the processes of dropping a class that he had taken that he did not need while adding a class that he needed. He said it was frustrating dealing with offices and departments that seemed to have little sense of urgency about deadlines even though not adhering to the deadlines meant that he would not be able to complete his first semester. He said it was as though the college cared less about whether he succeeded, than ensuring that they received his tuition payment.

John was asked if some of his frustration may have also been due to the fact that he was an older student who returned to college in his late thirties. He stated that he

believed his age did play a factor in the frustration that he felt along with the lack of structure to which he was accustomed in the Army. John said that as an older adult who had faced more than one combat tour and years of leading other people, the lack of strong leadership and the lack of structure made college seem like a chaotic world. He also stated that the lack of definitive information and guidance when he entered college made the place seem like every person was for himself rather than being part of an organization that was focused on ensuring that students successfully graduated.

Emily expressed the idea that colleges and universities actively recruit people who have been in the military because they know that these people have access to the G.I. Bill. The colleges and universities know that students from the military have a guaranteed source of financial aid. However, once the students are on campus, it seems that their specific needs are ignored. She perceived that there is no desire among professors and staff to help students who have transitioned from the military succeed in college. Instead, once the financial aid money is transferred to the college, the military students are ignored and expected to take care of themselves.

Steve also expressed the sentiment that some type of seminar for incoming students from the military would be helpful as a way to teach them about college culture. He stated that the Army provides seminars and briefings to recruits to teach them about Army culture and customs. He found it odd that colleges and universities that have their own cultures and customs would not provide the same training to help students quickly acclimate to their new environments. He went on to say that such a seminar for incoming freshman who had separated from the military would be particularly helpful because the world of the military is far different from college life.

Steve also said that he found it odd that students were expected to immediately declare a major upon entering college without receiving any support about job opportunities in specific fields, or the broad skills needed to be successful in a particular academic area. He stated that as someone from the Army, he constantly wanted to know the big picture. He felt that his lack of a declared major as a freshman was actually looked down upon by some professors because they perceived the lack of a declared major as him not taking college seriously. He explained that he was not going to declare a major without understanding college life, and without understanding the skills that were needed in a particular discipline to be successful.

Student Veteran Needs

One other theme that was identified from the responses provided by some of the participants involved the needs of student veterans that were not necessarily related to academic support, but that was related to emotional support. Throughout the interviews, some of the participants stated that they felt a general lack of camaraderie with their fellow classmates that would have been helpful given the camaraderie that exists in the military. John, who was very vocal and seemed angry throughout the interview, was adamant that a major problem facing veterans when they enter college is that they cannot find the camaraderie that they had in the military. He stated that for veterans who take a full course load, several hours a day is spent on a college campus. However, between classes, there is no way to easily have the same camaraderie with other students and especially other veterans that occurred in the military. He explained that having the ability to talk to other veterans on campus would have made his college life more

enjoyable and easier because he would have had a way to replicate the camaraderie that

he felt in the military.

Robert, who was the youngest of the participants at 23 years old, stated that he

was surprised at how emotionally disconnect he felt from most other students, even

though those students were only three or four years younger. He explained that he

thought that he could replicate that same camaraderie that he felt in the military by taking

part in extracurricular activities and student groups. However, he found that the

camaraderie was not the same because the students were often focused on their own goals

and desires rather than a single goal or objective as was the case in the military. In

addition, even when taking part in in extracurricular activities, Robert found that he often

could not relate to the experiences of his teammates because they were in different places

in life even though they were around his age. Robert said that having been in combat

made certain things that were important to his colleagues seem petty to him. The result

was that he could not feel the emotional connection and camaraderie that he had desired

to replace the camaraderie that he had felt while in the Army.

Emily also expressed how she felt a lack of emotional connection to other

students even though they were attending the same university. She explained that she

worried about whether she would actually complete an undergraduate degree because she

felt so isolated in her freshman year. She stated that she was trying to find a sense of

connection and camaraderie with other students through student organizations, but it

seemed that the camaraderie was very weak at best. She indicated that the age difference

may have been one problem with feeling camaraderie with other students. However, she

also said that even when watching other students who interacted with each other, the

emotional bonds and connections sometimes seemed superficial. Emily shared a similar

sentiment as Robert in indicating that it seemed that the non-veteran college students

bonded over petty things.

Mark also used the word *petty* to describe the bonds that he witnessed among

other people that prevented him from experiencing the same camaraderie that he had

experienced in the Army. Mark explained that he saw students who had the same major

having lunch with each other while discussing their professors or class activities, but the

discussions seemed to lack any real meaning. He further explained that he wanted to

have a real connection with other people on campus, similar to the connections that he

had in the Army when every member of a platoon was expected to work together to

achieve a singular goal. He stated that even among students who shared similar

experiences in college, there was a lack of a shared goal. The students may have had

shared experiences, but they were focused on their own goals and desires rather than

working together to achieve a shared goal.

Robert, John, Mark, and Emily also expressed the idea that colleges and

universities should have some type of program in place to help veterans achieve the

camaraderie that they felt in the military in their college lives. Robert stated that

something as simple as a group for veterans that was active and that met on a regular

basis on campus would provide the emotional support that veterans were looking for as

part of the campus community. Mark also expressed the idea that it would not take much

effort on the part of a university to assign a counselor or faculty member, particularly one

with a military background, to run a student group for veterans. However, he noted that

the group would have to be active and meet on a regular basis. He stated that if the group

existed in name only, then it would provide no real benefit to student veterans. Similarly,

Emily asked how difficult would it be for a university to have a student group for

veterans? She stated that there are student groups for all types of interests and activities.

Having a student group for veterans that was active and actively supported by the

university would benefit the emotional needs of veterans.

Analysis and Synthesis of Findings

The following research question was the basis for the current study: What are the

lived experiences of student veterans who use university support services at an institution

of higher learning in Hawaii? The results of this study were similar to the existing

literature regarding the issues and problems that veterans faced as they transitioned to

higher education and attempted to access support services (Taylor, Parks, & Edwards,

2016). The participants in this study seemed to indicate that strong university support

services for veterans were limited or even non-existent at the university that they attended

in Hawaii. The single most important finding of this study is that the institution of higher

learning lack strong, structured support to help student veterans transition into higher

education. Instead, the support that is available is limited to those faculty and staff who

have experience working with student veterans and individually understand the specific

needs of student veterans.

The participants repeatedly expressed the idea that they felt disconnected from the

culture of higher education, and that they received little support to help them transition

from military life to college life. The participants who did have support at the university

indicated that the support came unexpectedly. One of the participants explained that he

received the support that he needed as he transitioned from military service to college life

because his freshman academic advisor had served in the military. Most of the other participants did not have advisors who understand the specific needs of student veterans. Some of the participants indicated that upon asking about advisors or groups that could help them become acclimated to college life, they were referred to psychological counseling services or advised to get a note from a physician so that they could have more time to complete classwork and tests. It was as though there was a belief among some faculty and staff that being a veteran meant that there was an automatic need to receive mental health services rather than help transitioning from the regimented and structured life of the military to the often unstructured life of college.

Researchers have found that the process of transitioning from military life to higher education can be difficult because military roles are different from the roles that veterans play in college (Schlossberg, 2011). The participants in this study provided more evidence for the findings of previous studies regarding the difficulty of student veterans taking on the role of college student as they found a lack of camaraderie with fellow students (Whiteman et al., 2013). The participants in this study indicated that the lack of perceived camaraderie with other students on their campus was increased by the lack of student groups designed for veterans. The presence of active student groups designed for student veterans might have served as an important source of information and guidance, particularly for incoming student veterans. However, the lack of such groups according to the participants in this study meant that there was both a lack of a way to receive support from other student veterans and a lack of ability to feel the same camaraderie and emotional connections as they felt in the military.

The information obtained from the participants in this study also mirrored previous studies regarding the fact that student veterans often felt isolated from faculty and students, and felt unfairly judged or singled out (Elliot, 2011, 2015; Love, Levin, & Park, 2015). The participants indicated that they were often singled out for their military service. Some staff even treated them as heroes because of their military service while others, particularly faculty, seemed unsure about how to interact with the participants once it was known that they were veterans.

The overriding issue that was evident from the information and perceptions provided by the participants was that a lack of support services targeted toward veterans made the transition to college life difficult, especially during the freshman year. An important issue that was discovered about the lived experiences of the student veterans in this study was that they often felt lost during their freshman years on campus. They faced the problem of having to navigate a system that they perceived to lack structure, while also having to learn the customs and norms of college life without any guidance. The participants had received orientation and training about military life when they entered the military, but had to learn about college life through trial and error.

Researchers have found that student veterans face challenges regarding academic success (Borsari et al., 2015; Kapell, Boersma, DeVita, & Parker, 2017; Norman et al., 2015; Phelps, 2015). Several of the participants in this study indicated that their grades were not as good during their first years of college because of having to learn how to navigate different offices and departments at the university, as well as having to learn how to interact with professors and other students. Once again, they stated that having specific support services for veteran students, such as seminars and classes that taught

college culture and college norms and customs would have made their transitions to college life easier and allowed them to have had higher grades during their first semesters in college.

Based on the findings of previous studies, the results of this study were not surprising. The participants in this study provided more evidence that the lived experience of student veterans regarding university support services at an institution of higher learning in Hawaii are similar to other places, which is that support services are severely lacking and ineffective. Veterans are given little assistance to understand college life and college culture often to their detriments in terms of academic performance and their desires to complete their degrees. Even more, faculty and staff seemed to be untrained about how to engage with student veterans in ways that are likely to help the transition from military life to college life as opposed to adding to the feelings of isolation.

Finally, one other important finding from this study is that the participants indicated that they would be helped by the availability of student support services targeted at student veterans. The participants questioned why their university would make an effort to recruit student veterans while providing little or no resources to ensure their success once they are on the campus. The student veterans in this study indicated that they would utilize support services aimed at student veterans because such services would improve their college lives, as well as improve their academic outcomes. Figure 1 lists the most important findings of the study.

Figure 1. Important Findings of the Study

Summary

The responses obtained from the student veterans who participated in this study revealed that their lived experiences with student support services at an institution of higher learning in Hawaii were limited or non-existent because such services aimed at student veterans were limited or non-existent. The participants indicated that they received little formalized support to help them make the transition from military life to college life as effective as possible. Instead, any support that was received was informally from academic advisors or other staff who had been in the military or who had worked with student veterans in the past. The student veterans indicated that the lack of support services was problematic for them, and made their transition into college life difficult. The participants also indicated that they would have utilized support services such as academic advisors who understand veteran issues and student groups aimed at student veterans if such programs and groups had existed on their university campus. The lack of formal student support services at the institution of higher education in Hawaii combined with the desire for such services among student veterans provides an important point from which to make recommendations about improving the experiences

of student veterans as they enter and progress through higher education. There is clearly

an unmet need that exists, and there are student veterans who would like to see their

needs to receive support and guidance as they enter higher education to be met through

formalized and structured support services.

FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter was to discuss the findings of this study in relation to how the problem that has been identified regarding the lived experiences of student veterans at an institution of higher learning in Hawaii could be addressed and overcome. There has been little research to date regarding the effectiveness of support services for student veterans in an institution of higher learning (Burnett & Segoria, 2009). The student veterans who took part in this study provide specific examples of the problems that they faced in transitioning from the military to college life, and the solutions that they think would have helped to make that transition easier. This chapter began with a review of the purpose and aims of the study, followed by a discussion of the proposed solution to improve the university support services that were offered to student veterans who attended the institution of higher learning. An implementation plan for the proposed solution was also provided. Finally, the broader implications of this study were discussed.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of student veterans at an institution of higher learning in Hawaii in an attempt to better assist the reintegration of veterans as students at the institution.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study was to use the study's findings to identify the disconnect, if any, between student veterans and the support services staff, enhance services offered by the institution, improve interaction between student veterans who attend the university

and the support services staff at the university, and develop alliances among the federal government, private groups, and non-profit groups to improve veteran students overall experience in college.
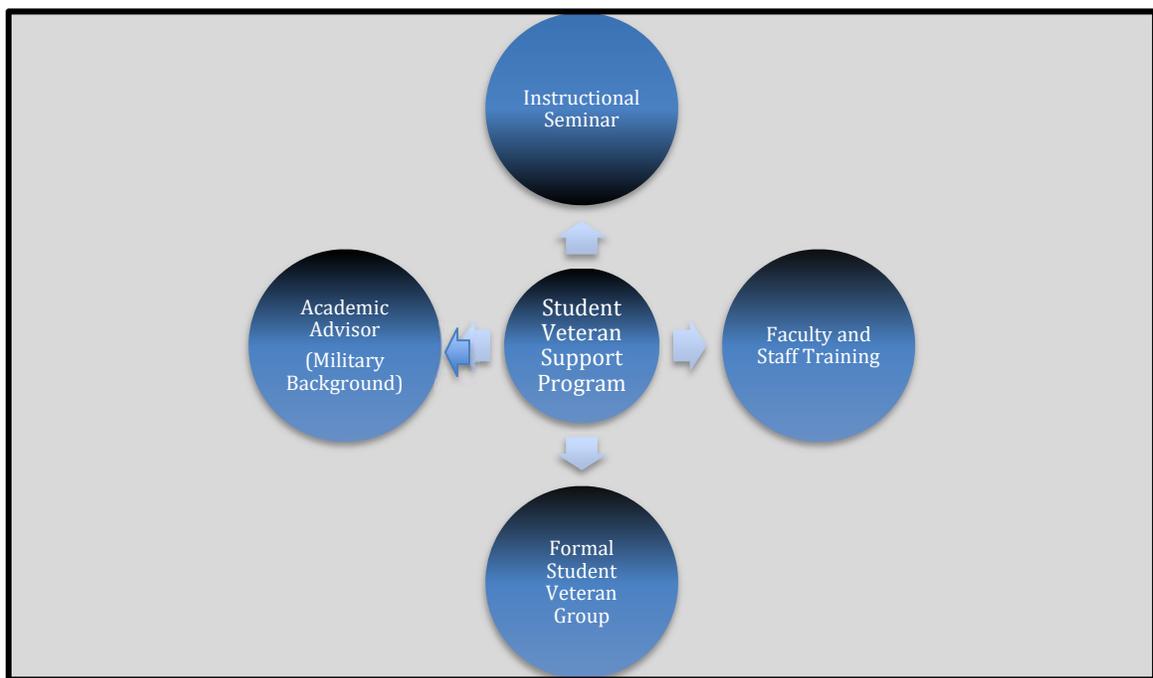
Proposed Solution

Based on these findings, the proposed solution is that a formal and structured student veteran support program should be implemented. The formalized program should involve several aspects of college life. First, incoming student veterans should be offered an instructional seminar in which they are taught about the various departments and offices of the university, the various student groups that exist on campus, and the norms and customs of higher education, such as interacting with professors and other students. The formalized program should also consist of training for faculty and staff. The training should include information about how to make student veterans feel more connected to campus life, as well as how to avoid bringing potentially unwanted attention to student veterans that might make them feel alienated from other students.

The formal support program for student veterans should also consist of training personnel who will work directly with student veterans, such as financial aid personnel, about the issues and challenges that student veterans face in completing university requirements. For example, financial aid personnel would receive specialized training in handling financial aid received through the G.I. Bill. Personnel would also receive training about how to help student veterans understand the necessary steps and actions that are required in using military benefits to attend university.

Another aspect of the formalized support program should be the implementation of an academic advisor position that is staffed by a faculty or staff member who has a

military background and experience providing academic guidance and support for student veterans. The person in this position should meet with each student veteran at least once during their incoming semester, and should be available to provide on-going academic support and guidance as desired by the student veterans. In addition, a formal student veteran student group should be formed on campus and led by a faculty member who will ensure active participation of the group, and active recruitment of new members. Figure 2 illustrates the proposed solution to improve support services offered to student veterans at the institution of higher learning.

Figure 2. Proposed Solution to Improve Support Services Offered to Student Veterans.

Support for the Solution

The solution that has been proposed regarding a formalized support services for student veterans is based on the data that were collected from the student veterans who took part in this study. The student veterans who took part in this study indicated that there was a lack of support services for student veterans to help them transition to college

life. In this regard, a formalized support program for student veterans is needed. It is not just that the existing support services are inadequate. Instead, the student veterans indicated that support services were non-existent beyond faculty and staff suggesting that student veterans pursue mental health services through the university counseling services.

In addition, the student veterans who took part in this study indicated that their transition to college life and their first few semesters were more difficult that they believed was necessary because they were not aware of the customs and norms of higher education. The student veterans indicated that they were not accustomed to what they perceived was the lack of formal structures and rules, such as the ability to generally visit with professors anytime they were in their offices as opposed to only during stated office hours. Even more, the student veterans explained that a lack of assistance in the form of orientation for student veterans meant that they had to spend several weeks learning the norms and customs of higher education, which were perceived to be significantly different from the norms and customs of the military.

The student veterans also explained that faculty and staff did not know how to interact with student veterans, and often make them feel alienated and isolated from other students. The student veterans explained that faculty and staff needed to receive training about how to help student veterans acclimate to college life, while also not making them unnecessarily stand out from other students by calling special attention to their military service. The student veterans also explained that some university staff members wanted to call attention to their military service, but lacked training about how to deal with important issues such as ensuring that financial aid was received through the G.I. Bill.

Finally, the student veterans who took part in this study explained that an active student veteran groups would have helped them to connect with other student veterans and have a place in which they could talk about the issues and problems they encountered at students. The student veterans explained that when a veterans or military student group existed on campus, it was often not active in terms of holding meetings and events or even recruiting new members. There is a clear desire for an active student veterans organization, and student veterans indicate that such a group would help them as part of their larger transition to college life.

Factors and Stakeholders Related to the Solution

An important issue that must be discussed is whether the institution of higher education as the stakeholders, support, and resources that would be needed to make the proposed solution practical. In terms of stakeholders, it seems appropriate to conclude that there are a large number of student veterans in Hawaii who are students in higher education who would find such services helpful. In this regard, there are stakeholders who would benefit from the proposed solution. Furthermore, the student veterans who took part in this study explained that they found it troubling that their institution of higher learning in Hawaii actively recruited student veterans, but lacked support services to help those student veterans once they enrolled in the institution of higher learning.

The fact that the institution of higher learning in Hawaii is actively recruiting student veterans would also indicate that there would be support for the implementation of veteran support services within the institution. The ability to promote the University to student veterans by demonstrating the support services that are offered to student veterans and the training that faculty and staff receive to assist student veterans would be

beneficial in recruiting larger numbers of student veterans who would bring with them

the financial aid that is available through the G.I. Bill. In this regard, the university

stands to benefit in terms of increased student enrollment and increased tuitions through

the ability to encourage more student veterans to enroll because of the support services

that are targeted at student veterans.

The final issue to consider in order to determine if the proposed solution is

feasible is the resources that are available at the university to be committed to

implementing a student veterans support program. The university will have to make

financial resources available in order to hire the people who will be needed to run the

student veterans support program, as well as pay for the training and counseling that will

be provided to student veterans and to faculty and staff. However, the argument could be

made that the financial resources that would be used to implement and operate support

services for student veterans is necessary if the university is actively recruiting student

veterans.

- **Policies Influencing the Proposed Solution -** Overall, it seems that the proposed

  solution will not substantially change the day-to-day policies of the university.

  Student veterans will complete the same procedures as other students in terms of

  registering for classes, ensuring that their financial aid is in order, and generally

  completely required courses. The proposed solution is not intended to change the

  academic policies and procedures of the university. Instead, this solution is about

  helping student veterans receive support and guidance through a process of

  training faculty and staff to identify with the special needs of student veterans,

  and helping student veterans receive support and guidance from other veterans

and from faculty and staff who are knowledgeable about the needs of student

veterans (Miller, 2015).

The specific policies that will be impacted by the proposed solution will be those

that involve academic advising and counseling for incoming students. Incoming

student veterans would receive the same academic advising as other students, but

would also receive additional support through the incoming seminar designed for

student veterans and the ability to meet with a specialized advisor who would

work directly with student veterans. In addition, the training that faculty and staff

already receive regarding how to work with students will be augmented by

training involving the needs of student veterans and how to interact with student

veterans in a way that makes them feel as though they are part of the university

community rather than feeling alienating from the university community.

- **Potential Barriers and Obstacles to Proposed Solution -** The primary barrier

  that may arise in implementing the proposed solution is that faculty and staff may

  believe that the additional training they will receive and the assistance that they

  will be asked to provide to student veterans is unnecessary, or is simply too much

  additional work for them. Faculty and staff may also indicate that additional

  training is simply unnecessary as they are expected to provide the same support

  and information to all students regardless of the individual backgrounds of the

  students. Even more, some faculty and staff may indicate that if student veterans

  need specialized support, the counseling services of the university might be better

  equipped to provide such support.

In addition, if faculty and staff are asked to be part of departmental or university committees to help plan assistance and support for student veterans, there may be a lack of desire to serve on such committees (Burnett, 2009). Once again, the issue of the time required to actively participate in the proposed solution may be treated as too much work or even a waste of time by some faculty and staff. Furthermore, faculty and staff may believe that university leaders think that the proposed solution is important, but are placing the burden on lower-level faculty and staff who are already busy. The disconnect and distrust between leaders and subordinates is an obstacle that often arises within organizations when new plans or initiatives are implemented (Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011).

- **Financial Issues Related to the Proposed Solution.** University leaders will have to consider the costs that will be associated with implementing the proposed solution, and the source of the funding. At a time when most institutions of higher learning are facing budget constraints, university leaders will have to demonstrate the need for implementing support services for student veterans. Some people within the university community may attempt to argue that there is simply not enough money for the proposed solution, or that using money to implement the proposed solution will result in other programs that might benefit a larger number of students from not receiving needed funding. In this regard, Leaders will need to explain the academic problems that student veterans face in higher education, as well as the fact that student veterans are more likely to succeed in academia when support services that are based on the specific needs of student veterans are in place (Mentzer, Black, & Spohn, 2015). The results of this

study can certainly be helpful in that regard as the student veterans who were interviewed for this study indicated that specialized support services related to academic counseling, training about the culture of higher education, and student groups directed at student veterans would have made their transition to higher education easier and improved their academic performance during their first few semesters.

Specific figures about the cost of implementing the proposed solution might be desirable. However, attempting to provide an estimate about the cost of implementing support services for student veterans is difficult without fully knowing the budget of the university and the support services that may already exist even if they are not fully utilized. It is possible that the university may have support programs for student veterans that are simply not actively carried out. Some of the participants in this study indicated that student groups for student veterans seemed to exist, but were not active in terms of holding meetings and recruiting members. It is possible that other aspects of the proposed solution may already be in place and budgeted, but are not utilized in the best manner possible to actively assist student veterans. In this regard, the full cost of implementing the proposed solution may be lower than estimated without fully knowing the university's budget because existing programs and resources may be utilized in a more direct and active manner to fill some of the aspects of the proposed solution. University leaders will also need to consider whether resources might be available from the federal government or other agencies to fund academic programs that are targeted to student veterans. The university may not have to endure the full cost

of implementing the proposed solution because of monies that may be obtained

from other sources. In this way, the university's cost of implementing the

proposed solution might be very little once the time and effort are made to find

external funding sources. Once again, a more thorough examination of the

specific programs that are already budgeted for the university and potential

sources of outside funding for specific programs targeted at veterans would be

needed before determining the final cost of the proposed solution for the

university. Otherwise, incorrect and invalid assumptions might be made about the

total cost of the proposed solution and the total cost that would have to come

directly from the university.

- **Legal Issues Related to the Proposed Solution -** It is unlikely that the proposed

  solution will face any major legal issues. The only legal issue that may arise

  involves the privacy of the students who take part in the support services.

  However, this is not a change from current laws and regulations that require

  student information to remain private and only to be used for appropriate purposes

  within the university. Institutions of higher learning are already required to

  maintain student privacy, so adhering to these rules will have no impact on the

  ability to provide support services to student veterans.

  Furthermore, the fact that a student is a veteran does not mean that the student

  must take part in the support services that are part of the proposed solution.

  Instead, the support services that have been outlined would be available to student

  veterans who wish to participate in those services. Some student veterans may

  not want to take part in the incoming seminar or receive academic advising from

the adviser who would be trained to provide academic guidance to student

veterans. As with any service available from the university, students would have

the choice as to whether to utilize those services. Students who reveal their

statuses as veterans would likely be notified of the presence of the support

services for student veterans so that they could make a decision about whether

they would find those services to be helpful. However, incoming student veterans

would not be required to utilize those services, and would certainly not face

penalties for refusing to utilize the services.

- **Other Issues Related to the Proposed Solution -** It seems appropriate to iterate

  that one of the major problems in implementing the proposed solution is the

  leadership that will be required for the proposed solution to be implemented in an

  effective manner. Implementing what is likely to be a major program for the

  university that includes working to change ideas and beliefs of faculty and staff

  regarding student veterans will require effective leadership. University leaders

  will have to demonstrate the ability to work directly with faculty and staff in order

  for the program to be implemented in an effective and efficient manner (Haslam,

  Reicher, & Platow, 2011). University leaders cannot simply pass off all of the

  work of implementing the proposed solution to faculty and staff while taking

  credit for the program. Instead, university leaders will have to be involved in all

  aspects of implanting the program in direct relation and contract with faculty and

  staff. If university leaders attempt to remain distant from faculty and staff, and

  only become involved in the program to announce its implementation or to take

credit for future successes of the program, then it is likely that the proposed

solution will not be fully implemented or will be implemented with little success.

Leadership and oversight for the proposed solution will need to be a joint effort

between institutional leaders and faculty and staff at all levels of the university

(Shamir, 2007). The solution that has been proposed to improve the experiences

of student veterans in higher education involves faculty and staff and all levels of

the university. In this regard, faculty and staff at all levels should be involved in

providing input and information to make implementation as successful as

possible. Researchers have explained that leaders and followers impact each

other and can influence each other with regards to the outcomes of tasks

(Hollander & Webb, 1995). The faculty and staff of the university should have

the ability to influence specific aspects of the support services that are offered to

student veterans in the same way that university leaders will certainly influence

the actions and behaviors of faculty and staff in relation to the support services.

Through this mutual interaction and influence, the proposed solution can become

a normal part of the culture and services that are offered to students to improve

academic outcomes and performance and overall student life on campus.

- **Change Theory -** Change theory will be an important foundation in

  implementing the proposed solution regarding support services for student

  veterans. Change theory is based on the idea that in order for changes in

  organizational processes to occur, a sense of urgency must be created, support

  among stakeholders must be obtained, a vision and strategy that must be created,

  the vision for the change must be communicated, people must be empowered to

take action to implement the change, short-term benefits from the change must

occur, and new approaches related to the culture of the organization must be

encouraged (Cooney, Pernick, Rice, & Monago, 2016). In terms of implementing

the proposed solution, university leaders and others in the organization must

communicate that student veterans have indicated that their transition to college

life would be easier and more successful if specific support services were offered.

The results of this study have shown that student veterans want specialized

support services to help them make the transition. There is clearly a need for the

support services that have been proposed, and a desire among student veterans to

utilize those services. From this information, university leaders will have to

communicate a vision for an institution of higher learning in which student

veterans feel welcomed and supported as they move from the regimented culture

of the military to the culture of higher education that is generally less regimented.

University leaders will also have to empower faculty and staff to serve as leaders

to help guide the implementation of the proposed solution.

However, a vital part of change theory is addressing the norms and values of an

organization, and how those impact the change that is desired (Al-Haddad &

Kotnour, 2015). The student veterans who took part in this study explained that

their professors often seemed to not know how to engage with veterans. In

addition, the student veterans perceived that they were expected to simply figure

out college norms and customs. Based on this information, the norms and

customs of higher education, which often seem to be about freedom and expecting

students to determine for themselves how to navigate college life without explicit

rules, will have to be changed. Faculty and staff will have to be taught that student veterans come from a more formalized and rigid environment. Rather than believing that the student veterans have to learn about the culture of higher education on their own, faculty and staff will have to be encouraged to take the time to work with student veterans to help them acclimate to a new culture. Furthermore, faculty and staff will have to be helped to overcome their own biases and ideas about student veterans. The student veterans who participated in this study explained that faculty and staff often seemed unsure how to interact with them, and sometimes became more distant in conversations and interactions upon learning that they were interacting with student veterans. The process of changing the university to be more helpful and supportive of student veterans will need to involve training and support to help faculty and staff adjust their views and attitudes of student veterans.

As benefits are achieved from implemented the proposed solution, such as increased perceptions of support on the part of student veterans and increased satisfaction with the university, leaders can use those short-term outcomes to make the change permanent and adjust the larger culture of the university (Cooney, Pernick, Rice, & Monago, 2016). The process of implementing the proposed solution will not occur in one semester or even one academic year. Instead, a period of several years will be needed to implement the proposed support program for veterans, to change the beliefs and ideas of faculty and staff, and to make the changes permanent so that a new culture awaits student veterans at the university.

Implementation of Proposed Solution

Factors and Stakeholders Related to the Implementation of the Solution

The integral factor that is necessary to implement the proposed solution is gaining the support of faculty and staff who will be asked to be part of the implementation of the solution, as well as receive training about how to interact with student veterans and make them feel part of the larger campus community. In this regard, the faculty and staff at the university will be vital stakeholders in implementing the proposed solution. If the faculty and staff do not take the solution seriously or believe that it is not their responsibilities to be part of the implementation effort, then the likelihood of the solution being implemented successfully will decrease.

Similarly, the leaders of the university, which would include the administration, also have to think that implementing support services for student veterans is important and be willing to take an active role in the implementation process. Furthermore, administrators must be willing to gain the support of faculty and staff by demonstrating to them how implementing support services for student veterans will increase the likelihood of student veterans successfully completing their degrees while being actively engaged in campus life (De La Garza et al., 2016). Administrators will have to take the time to gain the support of faculty and staff who may few the proposed solution as merely another directive that will be forgotten in a few months rather than a program that is intended to change how the university helps student veterans acclimate to college life.

Finally, the importance of student veterans cannot be overlooked with regards to the implementation of the proposed solution. The existing student veterans will be an important source of information about how the solution can be implemented to best

receive the attention and support of other student veterans. The university should utilize

information and feedback from student veterans to learn how best to contact incoming

student veterans about the availability of support services, as well as the presence of

student groups directed at student veterans. The willingness of existing student veterans

on campus to take part in the support services and to be active members in the student

group for veterans will be vital to creating initial interest in the services and encouraging

future incoming student veterans to utilize the services that are being made available to

them. If the initial interest and usage of the solution is weak, then future incoming

student veterans may view the lack of participation by other veterans as an indication that

the support services are not useful. In other words, a lack of initial interest may create a

situation in which utilization for the services offered to student veterans decreases to the

point that their presence on campus is ignored. In contrast, initial interest and utilization

of the services offered to student veterans may build upon itself as future incoming

student veterans recognize that there is an active student veteran community in which

they want to be active participants.

- **Leaders' Role in Implementing Proposed Solution -** The role that university

    leaders will play in implementing the proposed solution will be to create interest

    and support among faculty, staff, and students, and working with faculty and staff

    to ensure that the solution is fully implemented (Burnett, 2009). University

    leaders will have to consider the need to gain the support of faculty and staff, as

    well as encourage faculty and staff to accept leadership roles and responsibilities

    as part of the overall effort to implement the solution (Haslam, Reicher, & Platow,

    2011). During implementation, university leaders will have to maintain faculty

and staff interest and involvement so that initial support for the solution is not

lost. This can be achieved through a process of university leaders sharing

leadership responsibilities with faculty and staff (Shamir, 2007). Following

implementation, the role of university leaders will change slightly to being one of

oversight and monitoring. It will be important for university leaders to ensure that

the solution continues over time, and that outcomes are monitored to ensure that

the solution is achieving the desired goals.

It must be reiterated that the leadership aspect that must be overtly addressed in

order to implement the solution is shared leadership responsibilities (Shamir &

Lapidot, 2003). University leaders must make it clear that the implementation of

the support services for student veterans is not merely their responsibility or the

responsibility of faculty and staff. It must be communicated that implementation

of the solution is a shared responsibility that will involve university leaders,

faculty, and staff working together.

- **Building Support for the Proposed Solution -** The main obstacle that may arise

  among faculty and staff regarding the proposed solution is personal biases and

  opinions about student veterans. Faculty and staff may believe that student

  veterans are not an important part of the campus community. Even more, faculty

  and staff may believe that student veterans already have access to the same

  support services as other students, and even access to more support services that

  can be accessed through the Veterans Administration. Faculty and staff may

  believe it is not the role of the university to provide additional support services to

student veterans who already have access to similar services through the federal government.

The way in which university leaders can overcome this obstacle and gain the support of faculty and staff is to communicate the research that is available about the needs and problems that student veterans face as they transition to college life. Faculty and staff will need to be educated that student veterans often face a culture shock as they transition from the structured world of the military to the often unstructured world of higher education (Taylor, Parks, & Edwards, 2016). Furthermore, university leaders will need to explain that the way in which faculty and staff interact with student veterans, and the way in which faculty and staff express opinions about military service, can either make student veterans feel like they are part of the campus community or make them feel alienated from the campus community (Elliot, 2011; Love, Levin, & Park, 2015).

University leaders will have to demonstrate, particularly to faculty who are accustomed to evidence-based research, that the proposed solution has been created from evidence obtained from academic research regarding the needs of student veterans. The solution was not created based on the idea that support services for student veterans are necessary. Instead, the solution was derived from the body of existing scientific research indicating that student veterans need assistance and support as they transition into higher education. Demonstrating that the solution was created from scientific studies should help to overcome most of the objections that might be raised by university faculty.

- **Additional Considerations for Implementation and Assessment -** Full

  implementation and assessment of the solution will require the involvement of

  faculty, staff, and students, as has already been thoroughly discussed. In addition,

  financial resources will be needed if additional personnel must be hired, as well as

  to allow for assessments to be conducted about how student veterans perceive the

  support services that are offered to them. Once again, the need for financial

  resources has already been discussed. However, what has not been discussed is

  that university leader's will need to ensure that the resources and personnel that

  are needed for implementation are available at the same time. What is meant by

  this is that university leaders cannot announce that the program is being

  implemented if the financial and personnel resources are not available.

  Announcing that the program will be implemented without having all of the

  resources and personnel to fully implement the program will reduce the likelihood

  of a successful implementation.

  While university leaders are working to gain the internal support of faculty and

  staff, they should be working to ensure that the financial resources are available.

  External sources of funding should be investigated, as well as sources of internal

  funding. Once internal support for the solution has been obtained and both

  internal and external sources of funding for the solution have been obtained, then

  the program should be officially announced as being implemented. Attempting to

  implement the program as resources and personnel become available will only

  communicate to stakeholders that the university is not taking the idea of

  implementing support services for student veterans seriously. Even more,

attempting to implement the program without the full availability of resources may communicate that the university is only trying to provide support services with the lowest level of effort possible as a marketing stunt designed to encourage more student veterans to enroll.

Global/external Implications for the Organization - The political implication from implementing the proposed solution may be that the university will be viewed as a more hospitable place for veterans. In some studies, more than 50% of student veterans have indicated that they do not feel as though they fit in in higher education, and about one-third of student veterans felt that they were unfairly judged on college campuses (Elliot, 2015). The idea that is held by some that colleges and universities are not welcoming to student veterans, and that some faculty and students wish that veterans were not present on college campuses at all, might be changed.

The ability to make higher education seem more hospitable and welcoming to veterans could also have the financial implication of bringing in more tuition. While it may not seem appropriate to focus on the financial benefits associated with making a university more welcoming to veterans, the reality is that colleges and universities are able to operate because of the number of students they enroll and the funding they receive based on enrollment figures. If a college or university can attract larger numbers of veterans as students who have an available source of financial aid, which is the G.I. Bill, then the result is increased tuition and financial funding. Greater attention to the needs of student veterans

can make a university more appealing to veterans over other universities that lack

active veteran support services.

From a personnel perspective, the implication of implementing the proposed

solution may be that faculty and staff will be less likely to engage in interactions

with student veterans in ways that make the student veterans feel disrespected or

unfairly singled out from other students (Elliot, Gonzalez, & Larsen, 2011).

Researchers have noted that student veterans perceive that faculty and staff in

colleges and universities believe that all veterans are the same, meaning that they

all suffer from PTSD and other mental health issues (Vaccaro, 2015). The

training that faculty and staff receive as part of the proposed solution should

change how faculty and staff view student veterans, and help them to see each

student veteran as an individual rather than as part of a larger population of people

who are all assumed to suffer from mental health problems due to their military

service.

Evaluation and Timeline for Implementation and Assessment

The implementation of the proposed solution should occur at once rather than in

phases. This might seem to be ambitious considering that the proposed solution consists

of several different aspects, such as training for faculty and staff, the availability of an

academic advisor with a military background, providing an introductory seminar to

incoming student veterans, and the creation of a student group for student veterans.

However, the reason that each aspect of the proposed solution should be implemented at

the same time, is because each part of the solution works in relation with the other parts

of the solution. In this regard, implementing the introductory seminar for incoming

student veterans is not likely to be as effective as it might be if the incoming student

veterans are not able to join a student group for student veterans or seek academic advisor

from an academic advisor who understand the unique issues and challenges faced by

student veterans.   Every aspect of the proposed solution needs to be available to student

veterans so that they can receive the full support and assistance that they need and desire

to make their transition to college life as easy as possible.

It is understood that time will be required for university leaders to obtain the

financial resources needed to fully implement the proposed solution. It is expected that at

least one calendar year will be needed for the planning process to implement the

proposed solution. The planning process will involve determine when to implement the

proposed solution, communicating with stakeholders that the university has the desire to

implement support services for student veterans, and determining how the solution will

be funded. Then, two academic semesters will likely be needed in order to create the

committees that will be responsible for overseeing implementation, including the process

of hiring the new academic advisor for the student veterans, determining who will

oversee the student group for student veterans, and determining the initial process of

assessing the effectiveness of the solution. Overall, it is expected that about 18 months

will be needed for the initial planning and funding process for full implementation of the

proposed solution to occur.

The assessment process for determining whether the proposed solution has

achieved the goal of making the transition of student veterans into college life easier will

occur by obtaining data and feedback from the student veterans on campus. However,

the assessment process cannot simply involve those student veterans who utilize the

support services. Instead, it will also be important to understand why some student

veterans may choose not to take part in the support services that are offered to them. In

this regard, student veterans, regardless of whether they take advantage of the support

services that are offered, will receive a survey asking them to provide feedback about

their perceptions of usefulness of each aspect services that are offered, whether those

services have been helpful in their academic performance and social interactions on

campus, as well as why they have chosen not to utilize some or all of the services offered

to them.

The survey will be sent to student veterans at the end of each semester. The data

will be collected by the university and distributed to the members of the committees that

are working on the implementation and oversight of the program. It will then be the job

of the committees to examine the data collected from the student veterans and to evaluate

whether changes should be made in the way that services are offered or even the specific

services that are offered. It should be recognized that an important aspect of the

assessment process will be to examine student perception of the support services over

time. In this regard, major changes should not be made to the services that are offered for

the first few semesters. Instead, the initial assessment process should be about

understanding the perceptions of the student veterans regarding the individual aspects of

the services that are offered, and making decisions about whether small changes may be

needed in terms of the times of day when services are offered, where services are offered

on campus, and whether the services are being offered as the committees have intended.

Another way of thinking about this is that the assessment process for the first few

semesters will be more about monitoring and oversight than about making major

changes.

Over time as more data are collected that can be compared against each other,

then the assessment process should be focused on determining whether major changes are

necessary in the support services that are offered. For example, if student veterans

indicate that the academic advising that is offered to them is not helpful because it is

difficult to make an appointment with the academic advisor, this would be an indication

that a single academic advisor may not be able to meet the needs of the student veterans

and additional academic advisors need to be hired to meet with student veterans. It is

projected that the evaluation process would not move from oversight and monitoring to

actual determinations about whether major changes in the support services are needed for

at least the first two years of the program.

Implications

Practical Implications

One of the practical implications of this study is the increased knowledge that

universities in general, and more specifically the research university in Hawaii, need to

implement better support services for student veterans. The results of this study showed

that student veterans faced several difficulties in transitioning from military life to college

life, and believed that better support services designed to help them acclimate to higher

education would benefit them socially and academically. The findings of this study in

conjunction with the findings of previous studies should inform University leaders that

there is a need to provide active support services to student veterans. If universities are

going to actively recruit veterans, then the support services need to be present to help them make a successful transition into higher education.

Another practical implication of this study is the need for faculty and staff in higher education to be trained about how to interact with student veterans, and how to avoid causing student veterans to feel isolated and alienated from other students. The student veterans who took part in this study explained that they often felt alienated from other students and faculty due to the way in which faculty and staff would talk about their military service, and in terms of the perceptions and biases that faculty and staff held about veterans. In this regard, providing training to faculty and staff can also help to make the transition from military life to college life easier for student veterans.

One other practical implication gained from this study is that student veterans actually want support services in the form of seminars to help them understand the culture and norms of their university, as well as specialized advising from academic advisors who understand veterans and veteran student groups. Student veterans have explained the type of support services that they think would benefit them socially and academically. The types of services they desire are not based on mental health treatment. Instead, they want services that are designed to help them acclimate to college life and college culture.

Implications for Future Research

While the participants in this study indicated that they would utilize specific types of support services offered to student veterans on a university campus, the larger question that deserves more attention is what is the outcome of participating in those support services. Future research should focus on following student veterans who have

participated in support services designed to help them transition to college life and to

acclimate to the culture and norms of university. By following student veterans who

have received the type of support services that have been recommended in this study, it

would be possible to determine the real-world impact of such services on both the

academic and social outcomes of student veterans.

The student veterans in this study provided specific recommendations for the type

of services that they would like for a university to provide. However, the desire to take

part in the type of services that were recommended may not yield improved academic

outcomes or reduced feelings of alienation and isolation from faculty and other students.

Furthermore, large numbers of student veterans may not actively participate in support

services that are offered to help their transition to college life. Future research needs to

be conducted to understand the outcomes of university support services for veterans who

take part in them, as well as to understand why some student veterans might avoid

participating in such services.

Implications for Leadership Theory and Practice

The findings of this study also have implications for leadership theory and

practice. An important implication of the findings of this study is that all areas of a

university need to be involved in helping veterans transition to college life. The

participants in this study talked about the problems and difficulties they faced in

interacting with faculty, staff, and other students. An important theory of leadership is

that leadership must be shared between leaders and followers (Heller & Van Til, 1982;

Hollander & Webb, 1955; Shamir & Lapidot, 2003). The results of this study provide

evidence for the need for the leaders of the research university, as well as for those that

might be considered followers, such as faculty and staff, to work together to help student veterans transition to college life.

University administrators could certainly impose the directive that support services for student veterans will be implemented, and that faculty and staff will be expected to receive training to better interact and assist student veterans. However, it seems likely that such a directive will not result in a cultural change in which student veterans are not seen as people suffering from PTSD or whose military service should be called out as a means of differentiating them and even isolating them from other students. Instead, the process of achieving a cultural change in higher education must involve all areas of a university, which means that personnel from all areas of a university must be involved in the planning, implementation, and oversight of the effort to help student veterans more effectively transition to college life.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the lived experiences of student veterans at an institution of higher learning in Hawaii in order to understand how to better assist student veterans in the process of integrating to college life. The results of this study showed that student veterans wanted specific types of support services, such as an introductory seminar to college norms and customs, assistance in navigating issues of class registration and financial aid, access to academic advisors with military backgrounds and knowledge, active student groups for student veterans, and training for faculty and staff on the issues facing student veterans The solution that has been proposed from these findings is to implement a formal support services program that includes all of the recommendations made by the student veterans in this study.

The results of this study provide additional evidence that student veterans feel isolated and alienated in higher education because the norms and customs of their university are different from those of the military. Student veterans also feel alienated because of how they are treated by faculty and staff. The results of this study contributes to professional practice by showing that specialized support services are needed for veterans to help them succeed academically and socially as they transition to higher education.

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Appendix A

Participants Invitation

Dear Sir or Madam:

My name is Althea Scott and you are invited to take part in a research study. I am a doctoral student at Creighton University in the department of Interdisciplinary Studies. As part of the requirements for earning my degree, I am doing a research project.

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. You may stop participating at any time. If you stop being in the study, there will be no penalty or loss to you.

The purpose of this study is to describe the lived experiences of student veterans at an institution of higher learning in Hawaii in an attempt to better assist the reintegration of veterans as students at the institution.

The interview will consist of 10-12 open ended questions. It will take about 10-15 minutes.

I believe there is less than minimal risk to you for participating in this research project. If you become stressed or uncomfortable, you can skip the question or take a break. You can also stop the interview or you can withdraw from the project altogether.

All research data, including audio-recordings and any notes will be encrypted. Any hard copies of data (including any handwritten notes or USB keys) will be kept in a locked cabinet in a locked office. Research data will only be accessible by me.

As a token of appreciation You will receive a $5 gift certificate to either Starbucks or Jamba Juice for your time and effort in participating in this research project. Compensation is not based on completing the study.

If you would like to participate in this research project, or have any questions, please contact me at (516) 325-0916 or altheascott@creighton.com

Please provide your information and I will contact you to set up a date and time that is convenient for you.

Name _____

Phone# _____

Sincerely,

Althea Scott

Appendix B

Participants Letter

<Date>

Dear Participant,

My name is Althea Scott and you are invited to take part in a research study. I am a doctoral candidate at Creighton University in the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies. As part of the requirements for earning my doctoral degree, I am doing a research project.

What is the research topic?
Student Veterans and University Support Services: A Phenomenological Study

What am I being asked to do?
If you participate in this project, I will meet with you for an interview on your campus at a time convenient for you.

Taking part in this study is your choice.
Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. You may stop participating at any time. If you stop being in the study, there will be no penalty or loss to you.

Why is this study being done?
The purpose of this study is to describe the lived experiences of student veterans at an institution of higher learning in Hawaii in an attempt to better assist the reintegration of veterans as students at the institution.

What will happen if I decide to take part in this study?
The interview will consist of 10-12 open ended questions. It will take 10-15 minutes.

Only you and I will be present during the interview. With your permission, I will audio-record the interview so that I can later transcribe the interview and analyze the responses. You will be one of eight people I will interview for this study.

What are the risks and benefits of taking part in this study?
I believe there is less than minimal risk to you for participating in this research project. You may become stressed or uncomfortable answering any of the interview questions or discussing topics with me during the interview. If you do become stressed or uncomfortable, you can skip the question or take a break. You can also stop the interview or you can withdraw from the project altogether.

There will be no direct benefit to you for participating in this interview. The results of this project may help improve the university support services offered to student veterans.

Privacy and Confidentiality

I will keep all study data secure in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office /encrypted on a password protected computer. Only I will have access to the information.

After I write a copy of the interviews, I will erase or destroy the audio-recordings. When I report the results of my research project, I will not use your name. I will not use any other personal identifying information that can identify you. I will use pseudonyms (fake names) and report my findings in a way that protects your privacy and confidentiality.

Compensation
You will receive a $5 gift certificate to either Starbucks or Jamba Juice for your time and effort in participating in this research project. Compensation is not based on completing the study.

Questions
If you have any questions about this study, please call or email me:

Mobile: (516) 325-0916
altheascott@creighton.edu

If you have questions about your rights, please contact the Institutional Review Board at 402-280-2126.

Sincerely,

Althea Scott

Appendix C

Bill of Rights for Research Participants

As a participant in a research study, you have the right:

1. To have enough time to decide whether or not to be in the research study, and to make that decision without any pressure from the people who are conducting the research.

2. To refuse to be in the study at all, or to stop participating at any time after you begin the study.

3. To be told what the study is trying to find out, what will happen to you, and what you will be asked to do if you are in the study.

4. To be told about the reasonably foreseeable risks of being in the study.

5. To be told about the possible benefits of being in the study.

6. To be told whether there are any costs associated with being in the study and whether you will be compensated for participating in the study.

7. To be told who will have access to information collected about you and how your confidentiality will be protected.

8. To be told whom to contact with questions about the research, about research-related injury, and about your rights as a research subject.

9. If the study involves treatment or therapy:

   a. To be told about the other non-research treatment choices you have.

   b. To be told where treatment is available should you have a research-related injury, and who will pay for research-related treatment.

Appendix D

Participants Demographic Questionnaire Your responses will be used to capture population demographics used in this research study. **Please Check the appropriate response**	
Gender	___Male ___Female
Combat Veteran	___Yes ___No
Disabled Veteran	___Yes ___No
Brank of Service	___Air Force ___Army ___Coast Guard ___Navy ___Marines
Military Status	___Active Duty ___Seperatee ___Retiree
Estimated Time Since Separation/Retirement	___Active Duty ___Less than one year ___More than one year ___More than two years ___More than three years ___More than four years ___More than five years
Class	___Freshman ___Sophomore ___Junior ___Senior ___Graduate

Please provide the appropriate responses	
Age	
Rank	
Years of Military Service	
Plan of Study	

Appendix E

Interview Protocol: Student Veterans and University Support Services: A Phenomenological
                 Study
Time of interview: TBD
Date: TBD
Place: TBD
Interviewer: Student Veterans at an Institution of Higher Learning in Hawaii
Interviewee   Althea Scott

The purpose of this study is to describe the lived experiences of student veterans at an institution of higher learning in Hawaii in an attempt to better assist the reintegration of veterans as students at the institution.

Questions:

A. Please tell me about yourself
B. As a student veteran at…can you describe any situations that have influenced your experience with college life?
C. As a student veteran, in what specific ways has the support services at…helped you to transition from the military to college life?
D. Can you share your transition journey from military to college life?
E. What have you experienced in terms of using your university support services to help you transition to college life?
F. What situations have influenced your experiences of college life.
G. What circumstances have affected your experiences of college life?
H. Which of the following do you believe represent your needs in college?
   a. educational needs
   b. psychological needs
   c. emotional needs
   d. employment needs

(Based on their responses, the researcher asked for specifics for each response identified. For example, if they say educational, then ask, "Can you tell me more about what you believe to be student veterans' educational needs?")

I. How well do you believe that your university support services are meeting the needs of student veterans?
J. What services are being provided by your institution of higher learning?
   How accessible are the services offered by your institution?
K. If you were to suggest ways in which your institution could improve its support services for student veterans, what would they be and why?