VETERANS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF

STUDENT VETERANS AT PEACH UNIVERSITY

By

Debra A. Wales

A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Education
in Curriculum and Leadership
Higher Education

Columbus State University
Columbus, GA

December 2015

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are several individuals, and one special group, which I would like to acknowledge for their assistance and support during my dissertation. First, I want to thank the men and women of the United States military for their service to our country. Your service to our nation is appreciated, and I will never forget your service. I also want to thank my three service members; Captain Derek Wales, United States Army, Lieutenant Cam Wales, United States Navy, and my husband and best friend Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Scott Wales. Their support and service to our country is what motivated me.

My Committee Chair, Dr. Margie Yates, has provided the guidance and support to make this dissertation possible. Her support and understanding of my research was overwhelming. My Methodologist, Dr. Michael Richardson provided the structure and brought his wealth of experience to my committee. I am grateful for his guidance, support, and believing in me as a student, which gave me the encouragement to finish. His passion for supporting and guiding his students is undeniable. Dr. Pamela Lemoine gave her time, energy, and continual guidance throughout my dissertation. Her dedication and commitment to detail helped me to produce quality work in my dissertation. I will forever remember her pink pen.

My dissertation was possible because of the guidance and support from my committee. They allowed me to study my passion, veterans in higher education, giving me the support and guidance to build on my learning. Thank you all, you are wonderful educators.

VITA

Debra A.Wales, earned a doctorate degree in Curriculum and Leadership, Higher Education concentration, summa cum laude from Columbus State University. She earned a Masters in Counseling and Education, with a Pupil Personnel Services credential, magna cum laude from California State University, Bakersfield. Her bachelors degree was earned in Psychology with a minor in History, magna cum laude from California State University, Bakersfield.

Debra has extensive experience working with veterans to promote and support them as they seek to earn a college degree. She has been a Site Supervisor for a college on a military base, working with over 3,000 active duty, reserve, guard, and veterans helping them reach their educational goals. She has developed strategic plans to increase services and enrollment for onsite colleges, worked with local four-year intuitions and community colleges to ease transfer requirements, and planned multiple college fairs on military bases, bringing educational opportunities to the military community.

Her teaching experience has been on-line and in the classroom, working with veterans and the military community to successfully adapt to higher education. In addition, she has taught multiple courses and seminars on issues concerning veterans, such as how to apply for GI Bill and FAFSA funds, advising strategies for counselors, and state and local regulations to advisors, administrators, and key stakeholders. Additionally, Debra has published multiple articles on veterans' issues; returning to college as an adult learner, how to use financial aid after deployments and steps to apply for GI Bill funds.

Creating opportunities and providing support for veterans and the military community will continue to be a focus, which will guide her future educational endeavors.

ABSTRACT

With the passage of the Veterans Educational Assistance Act in 2008, better known as the Post 9/11 GI Bill and with the downsizing of military forces (2011-2015) many veterans were given the incentive to start college. Since the implantation of the veterans' educational benefits, little research had been conducted to identify if documents and policies espoused by institutions of higher education, created barriers for veterans as they transition on to campuses. This qualitative study explored student veterans' perceptions of Peach University, analyzed the printed documents and policies pertaining to student veterans, and examined to what extent there were differences between what student veterans perceive is offered, and what is offered. A content analysis of 78 university documents and written policies were analyzed using an emergent design methodology, which developed eight interview questions. Twelve student veterans participated in open-ended, semi-structured interviews. The findings suggest institutional policies and practices can affect the transition of veterans onto campus both positively and negatively. Student veterans view the Veteran Center on campus as the place to resolve all academic issues and find support from fellow veterans. From the sample of veterans in this study, 67% arrived on campus with injuries, which were a direct result of their military service, an indication for increased awareness and services for student veterans. The conclusions support alignment of written documents with services delivered could ease the transition process for veterans, and increase the consistency of new student veterans receiving the same needed information. Further, instituting a unique Veteran Orientation to meet the educational needs of transitioning veterans, could contribute to increased services for student veterans.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Continuing education is a tenet of the modern military with the men and women in the Armed Services being more educated than they have ever been (Vacchi, 2012). According to Department of Defense statistics, 99% of enlistees in 2011 were high school graduates compared to 80% of the young adult population in the United States (Kapp, 2013; Steele, 2015). Advancement in the 21st Century military required a commitment to ongoing college education (Tan, 2014). The Armed Services financed education through Tuition Assistance (TA) education benefits for active duty, Reserve, and National Guard military members (ACES, 2015) and the GI Bill, deferred compensation for service members providing educational benefits in lieu of salary, indicated a culture and population in the Armed Services who understood the benefit of possessing a college degree.

As the United States armed forces downsized from two extended conflicts abroad in Iraq and Afghanistan called the Global War on Terror (GWOT), more veterans have sought post-secondary education (Tan, 2014; Vanden Brook, 2015). The combined forces; Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force, have reduced the overall numbers of their service members in record numbers. The new military policy of force reduction (2009-2015) caused some veterans to leave military service before they had planned (Dao, 2013). Many service members, according to the

National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (NCVAS, 2014) decided to pursue their college degree, using the GI Bill educational benefits earned while serving (Kirkwood, 2014).

The National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (2014) data reports over 900,000 veterans have used their GI Bill to attend colleges and universities since 2009 when the Post 9/11 GI Bill was fully implemented (NCVAS, 2014). Osborne (2014) used the term "generous" to describe the education benefits available to veterans who served in GWOT, suggesting the funds available with the Post 9/11 GI Bill were better than previous benefits. Additionally, with the drawdown of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the unemployment rates in the civilian sector being high, college campuses continued to experience an influx of veterans wanting to use their education benefits (Cole, 2013; McBain, Kim, Cook, & Snead, 2012).

As colleges and universities admit veterans to their campuses in record numbers (Kirkwood, 2014), student veterans often sought admission at a nearby college or university based on the military installation with which they were associated (Wilson, Smith, Lee, & Stevenson, 2013). Because colleges and universities were aware of the generous benefits available for veterans (Osborne, 2013), many institutions had satellite campuses on military bases, making it convenient for the service member to attend (Wilson et al., 2013). By being located in close proximity to military installations, or being an on-post college offering on-line options for active duty service members and veterans, institutions aggressively sought veteran enrollment.

According to Radford (2009) very few traditional resources were allocated for recruiting and retaining the veteran population into post-secondary education; however, colleges and universities wanted to be considered a veteran friendly institution. For example, every year *Military Times* published a list called the "Top 50 Veteran Friendly Institutions" naming 50 colleges and universities in the United States who, according to Military Times (2015) were

friendlier to veterans as they transferred into higher education. The term "Veteran Friendly" had become a key word for many institutions to use in an effort to attract veterans to their campuses, although there was no formal definition of what the term means or how institutional policies were different (Steele, 2015). However, Peach University has received recognition from Victory Media (2015) for being designated a Military Friendly School, 2016. Administrators completed a survey of 100 questions from ten categories, covering military support on campus, facilities available, graduation, and employment for veterans as a requirement for the award.

Almost every college had funding and resources for programs committed to freshman retention, and there was a vast body of research concerning traditional student transition, retention, and degree completion (Habley, 2004; Murphy, 2011; Penner, 2001; Steele, 2015). On the other hand, since military veterans represented less than 3% of a typical collegiate student body (McGrevey & Kehrer, 2009) little research had been conducted on how well student veterans transition into higher education.

Attending college for a veteran was not the challenge; nearly one million attended since 2009, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs (NCVAS, 2014; Olsen, Badger, & McCuddy, 2014). However, veterans were more likely to transfer between colleges or to enroll part time (Boodman, 2011; Otter, 2012) at institutions of higher education, never completing their degree. This was a precursor for a larger issue; the transition barriers student veterans' experienced in their degree progression (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015).

Conceptual Framework-Graphic Representation
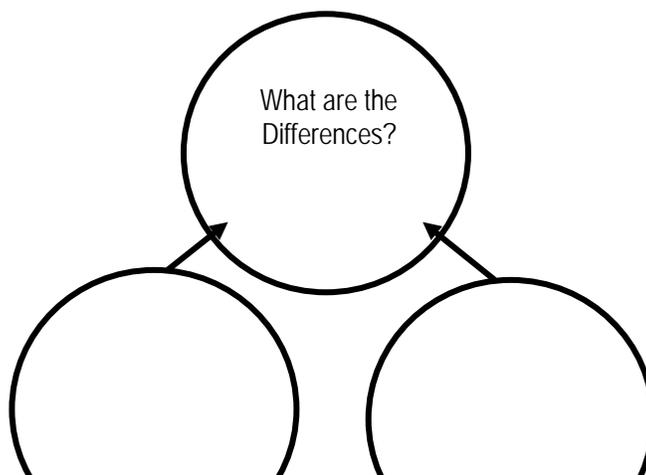
| Student Veteran Perceptions | Peach University Policy Documents |

The conceptual framework was used to structure the research, examine the literature for solutions, and better understand the limitations and potential of the research. Qualitative research methods guided the theoretical framework and analysis method of this study. The researcher's intent was to examine student veterans' perceptions of Peach University as they transition, the written documents, and policy espoused by Peach University pertaining to student veterans', and the extent of the difference between the two.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is three fold. First, to examine student veterans' experiences and perceptions towards Peach University, as they transition from active duty military service to a public 4-year institution. A second purpose is to examine the documents espousing policies, programs, and procedures relating to veterans from Peach University's written or printed material. Third, to inquire to what extent are the differences of written policy documents stated by Peach University for student veterans', and the perceptions of what student veterans perceive to be offered.

By design, the military provides support, is a structured, centralized, organization with continuous transitions for its staff. Many resources and personnel were allocated to assist the service members at every transition in their military career (Cook & Kim, 2009). Through this experience of military transition, the service member has become familiar with a supportive, structured transition process as they moved to new duty locations. Therefore, the researcher sought to explore the perceived institutional documents or policies from the student veteran

through semi-structured interviews of student veterans as they sought to enroll, progress, and complete their degree in a public, 4-year institution.

Statement of the Problem

With the passage of the Post 9/11 GI Bill, veterans were given the opportunity to earn a degree with little or no cost out of pocket (Sandler, 2013; Wilson, 2009). Since the implementation of the educational benefits in 2009, little research had been conducted to identify documents and policies espoused by institutions, which may create barriers student veterans experience in transition on to campuses, and degree completion. Additionally, even though institutions were receiving GI Bill federal funds, very few requirements were placed on the receiving institutions regarding practices when recruiting student veterans, or how student veterans were counseled on degree options (Connelly, 2012). The lack of requirements suggested inconsistent data collection, and reporting on degree completion rates for veterans by institutions. According to Connelly (2012) having guaranteed educational federal funds available for the student veteran, combined with little to no oversight on institutional policies/procures for these non-traditional students, often left the veteran lost as they navigated the transition onto a college campus.

The Research Questions guiding this study were:

1. *What are the perceptions of student veterans towards Peach University?*

2. *What are Peach University's written policies pertaining to student veterans?*

3. *To what extent are there differences between what student veterans perceive is offered and what is offered in the written documents?*

Assumptions of the Study

Several assumptions were identified. First, since World War II, men and women who joined the armed services expected the government to fund their educational experience as a benefit of service. Second, many joined specifically for the GI Bill educational benefits (Cate, 2014-Million Record Project). In addition, education remained a key tenet in the armed services, and taking college courses was expected for all service members to progress in their military career. Third, the data from the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (2014) showed over 900,000 veterans used their GI Bill to attend college since 2009 (NCVAS, 2014) emphasizing veterans enrolled into college, the first step in degree completion. From past veterans' experiences in higher education, the research indicated veterans performed comparably to their civilian counterparts, often outperforming them significantly in the classroom (Bound & Turner, 1999; Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

Veterans returning to higher education after serving in Iraq and/or Afghanistan, appeared to bring a level of maturity and were expected to maintain the high standards in the classroom (Plach & Sells, 2013). Because of their military discipline, training, and the value placed on higher education (ACE, 2009; DiRamo & Jarvis, 2011), earning a degree was extremely important to them both in their military career and in their post-military career. According to DiRamo and Jarvis (2011) as adult learners, veterans returning to higher education were less patient in dealing with institutional policies and/or institutional personnel who created barriers. Finally, with the downsizing of the military, many service members were attending institutions of higher education in record numbers, in order to take advantage of GI Bill educational benefits (Cate, 2014-Million Records Project).

Significance of the Study

Veterans have returned to higher education in record numbers. With guaranteed federal funds available for them to attend college, institutions of higher education were looking for best practices to assist veterans in transition to higher education and increase retention for student veterans. The researcher inquired of student veterans' perceptions as they transitioned from active duty military service to Peach University. From a content analysis of the stated documents, the researcher examined perceived barriers or institutional policies, which may affect transition for student veterans. As veterans transitioned to the college campus, how post-secondary institutions facilitated their transitioned service members contributed both positively and negatively, to retention and degree completion for the veteran. The intent was to examine the relationship between student veterans' perceptions and documents, to best align services delivered to this population.

Many current and past veteran students reported the administrative bureaucracy they experienced during transition to campus caused them to struggle, or in some cases leave their institution, never completing their degree (Tomar & Stoffel, 2014). In comparison, other reports suggested institutions and the policies delivered for veterans as they transferred were highlighted because of the successful policies (Jones, 2013; Selber & Chavkin, 2013). Written and perceived institutional policies, and or procedures may have affected how service members' matriculated into a college campus, both positively and negatively. Since every veteran interacted with their institutions staff, and or administrators as transitioning students, further examination of policy documents and the transition process was needed in order to best facilitate the admission and transfer process of veterans, and increase retention and graduation rates.

Limitations

The study was limited to a public four-year institution with a student veteran population.

Only veterans using their GI Bill Education Benefits were participants. Military and

demographic data were self-reported from the student veterans'. Semi-structured, in-depth

interviews were conducted in the Veterans Center on campus. Specific degree programs and

method of delivery of instruction were not a focus of the study.

Delimitations

Due to a long history with the local military instillation, and its proximity to the higher

education institution, contact was easily made with student veterans. Support between the local

military institution and the higher education institution was established over twenty years ago.

The four-year public university was an instrument for the study with access to names of student

veterans, and access to the veterans. Confidentiality and pseudonyms were used to protect

privacy.

Definitions

- *ACE*- American Council on Education collaborates with the U.S. Department of Defense

  (DoD) to review military training and experiences and recommend appropriate college

  credit for members of the Armed Forces. ACE's credit recommendations appear in the

  Military Guide and on military transcripts. ACE is the nation's most influential,

  respected, and visible higher education association for military students (ACE, 2014).

- *ACES*- Army Continuing Education System, a source of military funding for service

  members to use to pay for college courses.

- *Adult Learner*- College student over the age of 23 years old.

- *Afghanistan*- the country, and main site of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) where United States military members were deployed to in combat operations.

- *All Volunteer Force* (AVF)- men and women of today's military that volunteer for duty. The draft is not activated at this time.

- *Armed Services*- any or all combinations of the military branches of service: Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marines, Navy.

- *Bachelors in Social Work* (BSW)- entry-level position in counseling, and mental health services working with family services, child welfare, public health and substance abuse.

- *Barriers*- an obstacle, either institutional or personal, that prevents movement or advancement to the next task, causing progression to stop.

- *Blended-mentoring*- email to student veteran, plus talking on the phone or face to face, to give support.

- *Campus Veterans Office*- a central location at the institution where the student veteran can get assistance with enrolling in courses, paying for courses, and referrals to assist with other veteran needs.

- *Canadian Occupational Performance Measure* (COPM)- is an individualized, client-centered measure designed for use by occupational therapists to detect change in a client's self-perception of occupational performance over time. It is designed to be used as an outcome measure.

- *Cognitive Behavior Therapy* (CBT)- a form of treatment focusing on examining the relationships between thoughts, feelings and behaviors.

- *Chain of Command*- the hierarchy within military organizations. Soldiers have individuals who they report to, or are commanded by. This chain goes up to the Governor in the National Guard or the President of the United States in the Active component.

- *Combat Operations*- military missions or training for military missions that involve potential or likely contact with a hostile force.

- *Company*-A military formation of approximately 150 soldiers organized around a specific function such as infantry, combat engineer, medical, or transportation. Companies are usually part of battalions and have sub-organizations called platoons.

- *Degree Completion*- to complete a course a study in education, earning a degree.

- *Department of the Army (DA)* -The federal organization, headed by the secretary of the Army which administers the Army.

- *Department of Defense*- the executive branch of the federal government charged with coordinating and supervising all agencies and functions of the government concerned directly with national security and the United States Armed Forces.

- *Deployed*- a United States military member sent overseas for an extended time period generally 3-15 months.

- *Downsizing*- a reduction in the federal government to shrink the size, total number serving, in the United States military.

- *Expiration of Term of Service (ETS)*- the date when a service members agreement or contract expires.

- *Force Reduction*- downsizing of the military.

- *GI Bill*- for education, the term refers to mandated government law for financial support at institutions of higher education, based on a veteran's service in the military; first originated in 1944 as the Serviceman's Readjustment Act.

- *Graduation rate*- a key component in discussion regarding accountability when federal funds are used in degree completion (ACE, 2014).

- *GWOT*- Global War on Terrorism, military operations undertaken to degrade or destroy unconventional forces.

- *Iraq*- the country and main site of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), and Operation New Dawn (OND) where United States military members were deployed to in combat operations.

- *Joint Services Transcript (JST)*- Joint Services Transcript provides documented evidence to colleges and universities of the professional military education, training, and occupation experiences of service members and veterans (ACE, 2014).

- *Intent to persist*- a likelihood the student veteran will continue to enroll in higher education, even through changing their college or university.

- *Masters of Social Work* (MSW)- a professional degree with licensure, enabling the holder to counsel persons with psychological needs in clinical social work.

- *Military Times*- the primary weekly periodical of the Armed Services.

- *Military Transcript*- a military service member or veterans' job duties converted into semester hours on a military transcript-Joint Services Transcript (JST) for college credits. American Council on Education (ACE) provides quality assurance and policy guidance for the Joint Services Transcript (JST) used by the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, and Coast Guard (ACE, 2014). More than 2,300 colleges and universities recognize

these transcripts as official documentation of military training and experiences and applicable ACE credit recommendations.

- *Military Retirement*- a pension plan for those who served in the armed forces.

- *National Guard (NG)*- part time military members serving under the governor of their state during peacetime conditions. NG members can be called to active duty by the President during national emergencies or tactical necessity (floods, riots).

- *OEF*- Operation Enduring Freedom, combat missions to Afghanistan.

- *Occupational Therapy*- a form of therapy for patients recuperating from physical or mental illness that encourages rehabilitation through the performance of required daily life activities.

- *OIF*- Operation Iraqi Freedom, combat missions to Iraq, 2003-2010.

- *OND*- Operation New Dawn, combat missions to Iraq, 2010-2011.

- *On-post college*- two year or four-year institutions, which bring a satellite campus to a military base, offering courses on site.

- *Persistence*- a student veteran's continual enrollment in higher education in an effort to reach degree completion.

- *Posttraumatic Stress (PTS)*- in pertaining to veterans in past wars, PTS was called shell shock or battle fatigue. Post Traumatic Stress can occur after military combat, serious accidents, natural disasters, or violent personal assaults. PTS is a serious condition which can cause problems with memory and cognition, physical issues, depression, and substance abuse.

- *Reserves (R)-* military members from all branches of service who serve one weekend a month, and two weeks a year with their designated unit. They can be activated to full time status as needed (war, civil unrest).

- *Retention-* continued enrollment in higher education, leading to graduation.

- *Schlossberg's Transition Theory-* Four S's of transition: Situation, self, support, and strategies. (*Transition*: Any event, or non-event, resulting in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles.) The Four S's are a guide for advisors/counselors to assist adults during transitions in their life.

- *Service Member-* a person serving in one of the branches of the United States Military: Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marines, Navy.

- *Student Veteran-* s student attending college using federal funds (GI Bill) they earned while serving in the military for a specific period.

- *Student Veteran Center-* an on campus center where student veterans can go to get their financial, registration or academic issues resolved.

- *Traditional Student-* first time college student between the ages of 18-22 years of age.

- *Transition-* any event or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles (Schlossberg, 1998).

- *Tinto's Integration Theory-* (1993) states students need integration into formal (academic performance) and informal (faculty/staff interactions) academic systems and formal (extracurricular activities) and informal (peer-group interactions) social systems at colleges and universities in order to persist.

- *Veteran-* a person who has served or who is serving in any branch of the military forces: Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marines, Navy.

- *VA Clinic*- medical clinic where service members receive counseling, therapy, and medications from federal government medical staff working with veterans.

- *Veterans Advisory Council* (VAC)- a council of veteran students attending the institution who meet regularly to discuss student veterans needs on campus. The council then report's findings/suggestions back to the administration.

- *Veterans Affairs Department*- a government-run military veteran benefit system with Cabinet level status.

- *Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008*- Congressionally approved federal funds for education under the United States Code to include a new Chapter 33, which expands the educational benefits for military veterans who have served since September 11, 2001(referred to as the Post 9/11 GI Bill).

- *Veteran Friendly Institution*- a higher education campus that is sensitive to student veterans needs with trained, educated staff to assist in the transition to a college campus.

- *Veterans Initiative Model* (VIM)- used to assist, and support veterans in transition to higher education.

- *World War II Veteran*- men and women who served in the United States military during the World War II conflict from 1941-1945.

Summary

The review of study includes five chapters. Chapter I introduced the study and the topic of veterans attending institutions of higher education in record numbers. A brief historical background and significant of the GI Bill was given. The researcher discussed the deficiencies in the literature pertaining to transition, progression, and degree completion of student veterans using their GI Bill to attend post-secondary institutions. The purpose of the study was to identify

student veterans' perceptions of Peach University as they transitioned from military service, and compare the policies espoused by the institution to examine the differences. The research questions were formulated to be analyzed using a qualitative conceptual framework to gain insight, and understanding of the student veterans' experiences. Through inquiry of student veterans at Peach University the researcher's intent was to gain insight, and better understand veterans' progression at a public four-year southeastern university. Finally, the author addressed assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and definition of terms of the study.

Chapter II established the literature, and existing research surrounding the topic of veterans in higher education. Chapter III provided the research design and methodology used to conduct this study, describing in precise order the qualitative steps in collecting the data. Chapter IV focused on results, and analysis of the research study. Chapter V, the final chapter, reported summary, conclusions, and implications to the educational leadership field, and contributed to the body of knowledge in the literature, which pertained to veterans in higher education.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In the summer of 2008, education benefits for veterans increased when Congress approved

and President George W. Bush signed into law the Veterans Educational Assistance Act, better

known as the Post-9/11 GI Bill (Sander, 2013). With this passage, veterans gained additional

financial support to attend college with housing and book stipends. According to Osborne

(2013), this robust education benefit given to veterans, along with the downsizing of the military

operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, gave many veterans the incentive to start college. In many

cases, due to the changes in military structure, some veterans were forced to leave the armed

service before they had planned (Dao, 2013; Vander Brook, 2015). The National Center for

Veterans Analysis and Statistics (NCVAS) 2014 showed over 900,000 veterans have used their GI Bill to attend college since 2009. While there was ample evidence veterans were attending institutions of higher education in record numbers, there were little and inconsistent data on veterans' progression and graduation rates compared to their counterparts, the traditional student (Steele, 2015).

Since the Post-9/11 GI Bill, deferred compensation for service members providing educational benefits in lieu of salary, was enacted in 2009, over 900,000 veterans entered higher education to earn a degree, yet there was insufficient data on retention and graduation rates of those veterans using GI Bill funds (Fain, 2013; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Steele, 2015). Additionally, very few research studies were conducted to examine how institutional policies or procedures affect veterans' progression at four-year institutions. Various challenges such as admission policies, campus culture, or view of military service, and transfer credit awarded put veterans at risk of leaving college before completing their degree. Previous discourse and research on returning veterans focused on academic performance and mental health challenges rather than offering a comprehensive understanding of their college transition (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015).

Prior to their enrollment in higher education, most veterans received training in highly technical skills, leadership skills, teamwork strategies, and necessary communication skills to effectively do their job in any environment (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). The military culture developed a strong sense of discipline and teamwork among its veterans, giving them opportunities to apply their training in real world situations to resolve conflicts and complete tasks (Jones, 2013). While most veterans' were experienced in military tactics, training, and transitions in a structured military environment, the process of entering into institutions of higher

education for some veterans was challenging (Napan & Elliot, 2015). Barriers arose for veterans as they transitioned due to the different levels of support offered by colleges, compared to the support offered by the military. Napan and Elliot (2015) cited examples where support was lacking from some institutions such as; academic advising for student veterans, transferring credits from previous institutions, and providing a dedicated veterans gathering place. Also, the lack of emphasis on teamwork, the less structured environment, and the focus on the student as an individual added challenges for the veteran as they transitioned. According to Napan and Elliot (2015) how the institutional purpose was organized and implemented affected support services for student veterans.

According to Cole (2013) student veterans faced challenges and barriers while transitioning into colleges and universities due to, in part, the institutions not being prepared for the influx of veterans on campus. The move from military service, which was highly structured to the college campus, which lacked clear rules, was more challenging for some veterans if the institution was lacking in support services (Cole 2013; Sander 2014). Leaving the Armed Forces to transition into civilian life was considered a significant life event (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015), adding the new environment of the college campus compounded the transition. For veterans, navigating through the higher education system was challenging if they did not understand the structure, policies, or expectations of the institution. Santovec (2015) suggested when veteran transition services were not available and the veterans were grouped with traditional students for orientation, and student services issues such as registration, scheduling, or financial issues, the institutional policy, which combines these two different groups of students together for orientation purposes, can affect the retention of the student veterans. Furthermore, the Millions Record Project (Cate, 2014)

examined over 700,000 records of veterans in higher education since 2009, noting inconsistent data collection and reporting by institutions regarding veterans progress and graduation rates.

Theoretical Perspective

Qualitative research guided the theoretical framework of this research. When examining the theoretical framework for adults in transition, Schlossberg's (1995) theory provides a model for analysis. Schlossberg's Theory of Transition was a psychosocial model of development, which examined life events through the social and societal roles. The perception of the transition by the person transitioning was equally important in understanding how they were affected by their changing life events such as, contact and impact of the transition (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). Transition was any event or non-event resulting in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles.

Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman (1995) outlined three types of transition; anticipated, unanticipated, and non-event. Anticipated transition was when an individual was expecting change, such as getting married or starting a new job. An unanticipated transition was an event not expected to happen such as your home being hit by lightning, been fired from a job, or unplanned removal from military service. Finally, a non-event transition was preparing for and counting on a transition, which did not occur, such as expecting a promotion, but not receiving it. A veteran who was starting college would be classified as an anticipated transition. However, since some veterans were still on active duty or in the Reserves or National Guard when they applied, the student veteran could potentially experience all three types of transitions.

According to Schlossberg et al. (1989) methods for coping with transition, both negatively and positively, came from assessing a person's assets and liabilities in the 4 S': Situation, self, support, and strategies. Situation referred to how the individual assessed transition and their

sense of control of the situation. Self, examined the internal resources and personal characteristics of the persons' coping skills, specifically how they influenced coping in transition. Support, suggested caring, affirmation, and positive feedback positively influenced transition, reinforcing the concept support was largely social, but important in transition. Strategies, suggested the ability to manage transition through one's own behavior was a key factor in how successfully a person can adjust to transition. Schlossberg's 4 S' Theory were used to assist transitioning veterans into post secondary education, facilitating all stages of college progression.

History of the GI Bill

The United States government had a history of providing service members financial and educational benefits in return for military service as a way to show appreciation for service (Mettler, 2005). In 1944, Congress passed the Serviceman's Readjustment Act, better known as the GI Bill. This piece of legislation created opportunities for veterans returning home from war. Benefits included low-interest loans for business start up, low-cost mortgages, cash payments for college tuition and living expenses, payments to complete high school or vocational education, and one year of unemployment compensation. Every veteran, regardless of race or gender, who had served on active duty during World War II (WWII) for at least 120 days, and had been honorably discharged, became eligible for the benefits; combat experience was not required as long as the veteran met the criteria (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2008).

In 1944 as World War II was ending, President Roosevelt wanted a postwar transition assistance program to assist change from the wartime economy; his vision provided means tested benefits for poor people, not just veterans. Veterans' organizations mobilized support, putting pressure on their elected representatives and ultimately Congress rejected President Roosevelt's

means tested approach, providing benefits only to men and women veterans of military service and without regard to financial status of the veteran (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2008). Congressional members realized with 16 million men and women having served during the war from 1941-1945, the branches of the armed services would return to pre-war size, leaving most veterans without employment (Mettler, 2005).

There were practical issues addressed in this transition; millions of mostly male veterans would be returning home to jobs/positions women were currently working at (Bound & Turner, 1999). With the large numbers of men being drafted or volunteering for military service after the start of World War II, many factories and companies hired women to fill the void so businesses could continue to produce goods (Bond & Turner, 1999). By working with Congress and veterans organizations, Roosevelt helped create a college opportunity for veterans with the GI Bill, while not overthrowing the civilian workforce, specifically women (Mettler, 2005). Women had a significant role on the home front in the workforce, and serving during the war in the medical service corps. Approximately 350,000 women served with 2.9% or roughly 10,000 women using their GI Bill education benefits (Bound & Turner, 1999).

The GI Bill created a flood of veterans enrolling in higher education (1945-1949), contributing to the largest increase in enrollment in higher education history (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). According to Cohen and Kisker (2010) the education benefits offered by the GI Bill to veterans allowed them to attend institutions of higher education, enhancing their lives and future opportunities which gave veterans the opportunity to move out of the social class they were born into, expanding the middle class (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). The GI Bill made higher education more accessible by providing a financial incentive for veterans to attend college, and to institutions who supported veterans from World War II to attend college. Some historians of

higher education suggested higher education was more accessible to all in the 21st century, not only veterans, due to the implementation of the GI Bill (Cohen & Kisker , 2010; Loss, 2012). This accessibility to higher education was reflected in institutions today, some 70 years later.

Significance of the GI Bill for Higher Education

Historically, higher education was the privilege of only a small percentage of the population. The Harvard graduate of 1940, regardless of degree, almost always had a job already lined up because of family social connections (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). According to the US Census Bureau, in 1940 only 4% of adults over the age of 25 had a bachelor's degree. By 2013, the percentage had risen to 31% of adults over the age of 25 (US Census Bureau, Educational Attainment in the United States, 2013). This was a dramatic increase in the size and role of higher education institutions, and this increase in accessibility to a college education can be traced back to the inception of the GI Bill after World War II (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

Cohen and Kisker (2010) named this period (1945-1975) the Mass Higher Education Era, where a timeline paralleled American history and significant events not only shaping a developing country, but the higher education system as well. The context for this expansion was a country, which had come out of World War II as the most powerful nation on earth (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). The Mass Higher Education Era (1945-1975) started with millions of returning veterans coming home from World War II (WWII) to a post-war economy. New college campuses were opening, new curriculum and degree options were being offered, and a new type of student began attending college (Mettler, 2005).

The new type of student on campus, a returning World War II veteran, transitioned to the higher education institutions with life experience, military service, and the expectation the degree earned would help them in their professional career after their military service (Mettler, 2005).

According to Radford (2009), veterans were motivated and grateful for the opportunity to attend college to earn a degree they could use in civilian life. In contrast, the majority of college students on campus prior to veterans attending after WWII were social elites (Loss, 2012).

The G.I. Bill from World War II changed higher education and the economic structure of the United States (Loss, 2012). By creating access to colleges and universities for millions of Americans through education, the modern middle class grew (Bond & Turner, 1999; Cohen & Kisker, 2010). This growth along with the success veterans reached in the classroom on college campuses, opened doors for significant growth in what Cohen and Kisker (2010) called the Mass Higher Education Era (Loss, 2012; Sander, 2013). Additionally, Wilson, Smith, Lee, and Stevenson (2013) suggest other economic benefits for World War II veterans included higher occupational status, access to more income than their civilian counterparts, and thus overall improving the lives of returning veterans.

The Student Veteran & Downsizing of the Military 2011-2015

Military service members returning from previous wars, using their education benefits to earn a college degree, have a rich history going back to World War II (McGrevey & Kehrer, 2009; Mettler, 2005). Mettler (2005) points out these men and women from World War II with their excellent record in higher education set the stage for what is now the Post-9/11 GI Bill (enacted 2008). Many young men and women join the armed services for the new educational benefits under the Post 9/11 GI Bill; up to 36 months of tuition, and paid fees for college, plus housing and book stipends to offset the cost of higher education (Kirkwood, 2014). Under the Post-9/11 GI Bill a military member earns their full benefits after reaching three years of service. Before three years of service, a percentage of benefits were earned on a sliding scale based on time in service.

With the downsizing of the armed services as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq ended, many service members were leaving the military before reaching retirement status (Tan, 2014; Vanden Brook, 2015). This created financial stress for some (Dao, 2013; Vanden Brook, 2015). As a way to increase financial and career options, many choose to use their Post 9/11 GI Bill to attend college (Kirkwood, 2014). Some studies suggest due to the downsizing, veterans will continue to arrive on college campus in growing numbers with an increase in enrollment of up to 20% (Cole, 2013; Sander, 2014).

Military Culture

The life experiences of Global War on Terror (GWOT) generation veterans (2001-2015), with multiple deployments in a high tech military, are vastly different from those experiences of the average 18 to 29 year-old non-veteran (DiRamo & Jarvis, 2011; Plach & Sells, 2013). According to DiRamo and Jarvis (2011) the technical training, strong sense of discipline, and emphases placed on teamwork by the military creates a mature person who can resolve real world situations. Service members, by the nature of their jobs and experiences, have a strong bond with the military community, which has well developed internal cultural norms and values (Osborne, 2013). Student veterans' self reported the strict and hierarchical structure of the military lifestyle they were exposed to contributed to their maturity. Additionally, the military structure provided a sense of community and belonging for the veteran (Osborne, 2013).

Transition from Military Service to Higher Education

Wilson, Smith, Lee, and, Stevenson (2013) examined higher education experiences of veterans as a larger community social system. Using Tinto's theory, the researchers suggested the military community could replace the college community in terms of integration into the

student experience, and those soldiers, even though they were not affiliated with the college in traditional ways, could persist (Wilson et al., 2013). By understanding these integration needs of military members such as sense of community and teamwork, institutions could strengthen retention and graduation rates. Wilson et al. (2013) applied Tinto's (1987) persistent integration theory, allowing soldiers to have the benefits of the connection and social support, and thus strengthen their persistence. Wilson et al. (2013) used a qualitative method of semi-structured interviews and surveys to explore Tinto's Theory. Thirteen soldiers and five education counselors participated in a study with the aim to gain insight into how service members are experiencing college work, and how they described their transition in the higher education structure and who it affected their transition.

Wilson, Smith, Lee, and, Stevenson (2013) explained a constructivist approach which had roots from sociological institutions (kinships, education, religion) as the most effective way to apply a new or revised version of the previous theoretical model to assist veterans with transition. For the military members who participated in Wilson et al. (2013) research the findings suggested: First, military community could replace the college campus community as it refers to Tinto's Integration Model, embracing the value system and norms of the military community. Second, when the military chain of command promoted education, the veteran participated at a higher percentage, viewing education as an expectation and incentive. Third, flexible online and hybrid classes were preferred. Fourth, instructors and advisors were the face of the institution; quality instructors or advisors made a difference (Wilson, et al. 2013). Researchers attributed the results of the study to the military communities' structure, well established norms and customs and overall value the military institution places on higher education.

With over 4,000 colleges and universities in the United States, and over 50 million students (Bok, 2013; Loss, 2012) the structure and purpose of higher education is vastly different from military structure. Institutions of higher education served individual needs more than a specific societal need such as national defense (McGrevey & Kehrer, 2009). Higher education institutions were decentralized, focused more on the individual, and were a series of large-scale public bureaucracies (Loss, 2012). In contrast, Loss (2012) explained the military used a centralized structure, with a primary goal of national security. A lot of effort and training was given to military members in developing standard procedures, little innovation was developed at the local level, and an emphasis on "team" effort was expected (DiRamo & Jarvis, 2011). The structure of higher education was different and placed more emphasis on the individual compared to military structure with its emphasis on teamwork; suggesting the transition to higher education may be challenging for some veterans (O'Herrin, 2011).

McBain, Kim, Cook, and Snead (2012) examined institutional support and practices for veterans in higher education through qualitative data collected by surveys from 690 institutions with the ACE Soldier to Student II survey. Three key themes emerged: (1) Only 37% of colleges had formal transition services for veterans, (2) raising faculty & staff sensitivity to unique issues faced by student veterans, (3) streamline the admission/administrative processes for student veterans. According to McBain et al (2012) providing support to veterans with a designated transition, training to faculty and staff, and streamlining services could provide the needed support for student veterans as they matriculate to campus.

Tomar and Stoffel (2014) used phenomenological research through photovoice methods to understand the experiences of two student veterans as they transitioned into institutions of higher education. Photovoice is a process where individuals can identify, represent, and enhance their

experiences through photographic technique. The analysis revealed the participants reminisced positively about past military duty and reflected on their past military life, as they began to transition into a new stage. The photovoice research from the veterans own life experiences displayed a strong sense of military culture, such as discipline, pride and competency in their job, was still present in the quest to adapt to their new role as college students (Tomar & Stoffel, 2014). Additionally, the influence of the university environment through social attitudes on campus from other students, and faculty/staff on campus, affected how the veteran perceived the university as being either supportive or prejudicial (Tomar & Stoffel, 2014). Participants stated some non-veteran students and some faculty/staff members displayed some misconceptions about military service, making it harder for the veteran to integrate. On the other hand, some non-veteran, and faculty/staff members made encouraging comments, and thanked the student veteran for their service. The type of support such as, access to resources and university outreach the institution made available for transitioning veterans, was also expressed by student veterans in their photovoice experience as influence from the institution, affecting progression both positively and negatively (Livingston, Havice, Cawthon, & Fleming, 2011; Tomar & Stoffel, 2014).

Another theme addressed how post-secondary institutions facilitate transition of veterans into higher education was, using a task completion model. Napan and Elliot (2015) research examined the emphasis the military places on task completion and task cohesion, where completing the mission and supporting the team were repeatedly emphasized. Napan and Elliot (2015) interviewed 11 student veterans from a medium sized public university, with the intent of understanding factors, which affected renegotiation transition into civilian life. The researchers explained soldiers from day one of entry into military service were trained to work together and

to complete their task together, which the veteran calls, the mission. The concept of military members being given responsibility, with the expectation every soldier will complete their role in the specific task, is something all service members are trained in from the beginning of their enlistment, and this experience with task cohesion served them in their role as college students (Napan & Elliot, 2015; Radford, 2009). Veterans look for the military structure, cohesiveness, and teamwork as they navigate their way through transition into higher education (Napan & Elliot, 2015). The research findings also suggest institutional purpose or level of support for veterans affected how well the student veteran transitioned onto campus.

Institutional purpose, which refers to whether the institution had a culture of military acceptance and valued the role military members played in society according to Napan and Elliot (2015), influenced the transition of student veterans through support services available and the role exit process. Support services include educating student veterans about academic advising, university processes (timelines/due dates), and the securing of their GI Bill education benefits. Role exit referred to student veterans losing or replacing a significant role (military job) where their identity was embedded, and replacing it with a new role as a college student. The researchers reported challenges may arise- even though 57% of the public reports knowing a veteran, their direct contact with a veteran from Global War on Terror (GWOT) is more limited, possibly leading to misconceptions and stereotypes of GWOT veterans (Napan & Elliot, 2015). Thus, the institutional purpose may affect the role exit of the student veteran from the military to the college campus.

Osborne (2013) research examined how institutions facilitate transition, and how the student veteran perceived documents and/or policies from the institution may affect degree completion. Connection to the institution, support, and veteran stigma were overarching themes emerging in

Osborne (2013) research. The goal was to gain insight into transition experiences of veterans in

higher education, and adjustments made to a new culture of being student veterans on campus.

Osborne interviewed fourteen student veterans, ten men, and four women ranging in age from

22-30 years of age. Osborne (2013) suggested transitioning from the highly structured military

environment, to the evolving college campus environment can be overwhelming to some

veterans. At each transition, or change point in the veterans' military career, the move or

location change is very structured and regimented, with ample support along the way (Cook &

Kim, 2009). Veterans in Osborne's research reported military structure contributed to their

maturation, helping them better navigate transition. At the same time, their military experience

made it harder for them to relate to younger peers, who were not familiar with military service,

calling their younger peers "out of touch" and concerned with trivial issues (Osborne, 2013).

Veteran stigma emerged as an additional overarching theme from Osborne's (2013) study. It

was suggested, some administrations at institutions have accepted the narrative that all veterans

suffer from war experiences, leaving them unstable and unable to interact with other college

students (Osborne, 2013; Vacchi, 2012). Vacchi believed some administrators in higher

education exaggerated news reports of returning veterans' injuries and wrongfully mislabeled all

into the same category. The label, and stigma of unstable and potentially dangerous veterans on

campus, which some institutions, according to Osborne (2013) believed is not only ethically

dangerous, but goes against the military warrior culture the veteran was used to. The warrior

culture, symbolized strength and the ability to complete a task successfully was used as a

positive connection to the institution, which brought a strong sense of discipline and teamwork to

the college campus (DiRamo & Jarvis, 2011; Osborne, 2013). When support services such as

advising/counseling are available on campus, and student veterans know the processes to obtain

such services, the research suggests student veterans in need of assistance are more likely to use the services, which may reduce some of the stigma and stereotypes of student veterans on campus (Napan & Elliot, 2015; Vacchi, 2012).

Influence of the University Environment

Anderson (2013) researched the biography and social class of veterans before they entered the military. Twenty-two student veterans were interviewed and participated in focus groups. The inquiry was to examine the effects institutions have on the transition to college campuses. Two aspects of the research posed potential challenges to identify; the social class of the veteran prior to enlistment in the military, and military service misaligned with the institution (Anderson, 2013). Social class affiliation was not considered important in the military (Anderson, 2013); thus, the veterans' work experience, deployment experience, and rank is used to determine experience and confidence. The social class discussion from Anderson's (2013) research revealed two reoccurring themes. Enlisted soldiers were from the working class society, which the first GI Bill (1945), was credited with the move up in social class of veterans from the working class, to the middle class. Some institutional practices or culture viewed military service as a negative, which created a misalignment with the veteran, and presented potential barriers for some student veterans (Anderson, 2013).

According to Anderson (2013) misalignment represented how the institution viewed military service, and how that view was perceived by the student veteran. Misalignment can occur when the student veteran was proud of their service, and enjoyed their job in the military, but perceived administrative policy makers at the institution viewed military service as a negative or as a less rewarding career. This misalignment was due to the different value and respect placed on military service by the veteran and the institution they chose to attend (Anderson, 2013). The

findings suggested any institution may have some faculty, and fellow students who view the veteran/military experiences as negative, but Anderson's (2013) research suggested the more institutionalized, or higher up in the administration the misalignment occurs, the more challenging it was for student veterans to transfer, affecting their progression.

Mentoring and a student veteran organization supported by the university were two additional findings in Anderson's (2013) research. Benefits of mentoring increased a sense of belonging on campus of student veterans, academic competencies were increased, greater progression towards degree completion was reported, and improved health (Selber & Chavkin, 2014). Additionally student veteran organizations on campus implied to the veteran a sense the institution values them, providing opportunities to better centralize services, maintained communication with institutional administrators and key stake holders, and sensitized faculty to student veteran concerns (Anderson, 2013)

DiMaria, (2006) looked specifically at the effects of residency requirements as a barrier for Hispanic military members as they transferred into colleges. A mixed method design was used. Test scores of student veterans were analyzed, and twenty-two soldiers and six Army education staff were interviewed. In addition, 1800 college surveys were sent out in an effort to understand how institutions of higher education residency requirements affected military students. For a traditional student who attended one or two institutions, residency requirements are not the significant barrier experienced by a veteran who attended colleges at multiple duty stations. Credit earned at previous institutions, but not awarded/applied to the veterans' current institution, was perceived as a barrier. One of the findings from DiMaria's (2006) research discovered lower income high school students looked to the military as an opportunity to go to college to earn their degree. For the participants, having the military provide the opportunity to attend

college was a benefit, but when the higher education transfer and residency requirements system required a re-take of previous courses or new courses in order to receive institutional credit, the veterans viewed those policies as a barrier (DiMaria, 2006).

Furthermore, DiMaria (2006) research findings highlighted the need for students who have low-test scores to be granted the opportunity to enroll in institutions of higher education, despite the low scores. DiMaria (2006) suggested some Hispanic high school students were drawn to the military specifically for the educational opportunities, creating a new group of future college students who may not have gone to college if not for the military support, and educational benefits.

Veterans sought social support from fellow veterans in lieu of academic support from faculty members as they transitioned into higher education (Livingston, Havice, Cawthon, & Fleming, 2011). Fifteen student veterans were interviewed to determine whether military students sought academic support or social support from their college or university. Livingston, et al. (2011) research suggested veterans chose support from their fellow veterans instead of faculty in part because of the perception the institution did not understand their military experience.
In addition, student veterans in this research reported they minimize or conceal their military service from non-veterans. Two areas institutions can best facilitate transition to college campuses were improved transfer and support services. These services included advising/counseling, outreach to facilitate transition on to campus, better identification, and tracking through data management, and assessing resources allocated for student veterans needs. Additionally, when faculty and staff on campus have a better understanding and acknowledgement of military service, veterans expressed experiencing a more inclusive environment on campus.

According to Cook & Kim, (2009) upwards of as many as two million veterans will use their educational benefits to attend institutions of higher education by the year 2020. Despite being involved in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, since 2001, more than a decade ago, many colleges and universities are unfamiliar with student veterans' needs (Jones, 2013). According to Jones (2013) many colleges are woefully unprepared to assist student veterans with transitioning into the college campus, providing the veteran with the same type of service as they do traditional freshmen. For most service members, their military duty forced them into a series of pre-assigned identities, varying in experience and responsibilities depending on their rank, level of experience, and job skill set. Jones (2013) examined how established pre-assigned military identities conflicted with the process of transitioning to a college campus when the veteran left the military service to become a student.

Jones (2013) research used a qualitative, phenomenological study concentrating on the lived experiences of three student veterans as they transitioned out of the military to a college campus. Phenomenological studies assume that shared experiences have value; they are effable, being able to describe in detailed words their experiences. Through in-depth personal interviews, three themes emerged: (1) Adapting to civilian identity, or re-adapting to civilian identity for National Guard members and Reservists can be challenging, (2) higher education's role in supporting veterans, and (3) the need for comprehensive services for student veterans when they transition into higher education (Jones, 2013). Comprehensive services were delivered at admission, progression, and graduation. They included advising/counseling in degree options and courses, through evaluation of transfer credits, on site combined institutional resources, and an inclusive campus environment.

When veterans leave active duty military service one of the biggest challenges they may face is the processes of adapting back to civilian life (DiRamo & Jarvis, 2011). The military culture was a distinctly hierarchal environment, which can create challenges when veterans leave to return to the civilian lifestyle. According to Jones (2013) whether the service member left civilian life years ago, or just a few months ago, the transition can still be difficult. Veterans were used to the decision making process involving a chain of command, and following rules supported by outside forces (Vacchi, 2012). However, the previous education level and military rank (job responsibilities) reached by the student veteran, placing more experience/emphasis on self-regulation, may suggest a key to a more successful transition (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Jones' (2013) research suggested all three of the veterans interviewed for the study experienced difficulty adapting to the civilian world, and gaining the ability to self-regulate in a college environment.

Higher education tended to be thought of as an acculturation process; students absorb mannerisms, shared knowledge, the thinking process of the institution, and cultures of other students (Jones, 2013). The acculturation process on college campuses can be intangible, varying from campus to campus, and difficult to navigate even for a traditional student. According to Jones' (2013) research, the veteran arrived on campus with a well-established military culture, defined identification, and job purpose of their military experience. This established culture and experience from the military instantly created transition barriers for the student veteran as they transitioned from a well-established military culture to the intangible acculturation campus culture.

Veterans With Injuries Attending College

After more than a decade of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan (2002-2015), 2.4 million service members are coming home from war (NCVAS, 2014). Many veterans leave active duty due to injuries they experienced while serving (Selber & Chavkin, 2014). With the number of veterans who have returned home, the nation faces long-term challenges in how to care for and assist veterans as they transition back to civilian life. According to Griffin & Gilbert (2015) research conducted since the drawdown of the Global War on Terror (GWOT) suggests as many as one in every five veterans entering higher education experience some form of disability. Transition demands for veterans as they navigated to campuses included; understanding their new role as students, negotiating campus bureaucracy, learning to interact with faculty and students who may not understand their past military experiences, and a variety of academic challenges (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). The researchers suggest these reports reveal some veterans may be at risk for health and behavioral issues, highlighting the need for supportive services and trained staff on campuses.

Selber and Chavkin (2014) assessed the need for, and services of a campus-based faculty supervised field unit for training social workers to address the influx of veterans with potential disabilities entering higher education. In responding to the challenges a Veterans Advisory Council (VAC), was established (2008), initiated by a faculty member from the social work department. The newly developed VAC guided the university through developing services for veterans and their families for all student related services (Selber & Chavkin, 2014). They used a veteran centered approach with emphases on transitional services, with an active outreach to veteran students, often before their first class began.

From this service model, Selber and Chavkin (2014) next developed a Veterans Initiative Model (VIM) to address academic support, health and behavioral health support, career

guidance, training and research for social work. In 2010, after running the VIM for two years, a campus-based faculty-supervised field unit for training social workers was developed: "Training the next generation of social workers to work in veteran-serving organizations requires schools of social work to have not only classroom resources but also field experiences" (Selber & Chavkin, p.14).

Providing field experience, with hands on relevant training for students in seeking certification for BSW or MSW, according to Selber and Chavkin (2014) extend social work services to areas where few resources are available, specifically in working with returning veterans. In addition to being a needed service for veterans, the researchers suggested the model was transferable to other populations such as criminal justice, juvenile justice, and school settings. A mixed method approach was used, surveying 300 student veterans with a satisfaction survey, and statistical analysis of graduation rates for veterans at the institution. The data analysis of graduation rates went from 53% to 61% in two years, rising to 65% in three years. Additionally, 16 interns participated in the model of training, logging over 900 hours of service/training with veterans, and their family members. According to exit data collected by the research, 100% of BSW and MSW interns would work with veterans in the future.

With the challenge of millions of veterans returning home from war, the traditional services alone such as the VA clinics will struggle to meet the needs for services of the returning veterans, according to Selber and Chavkin (2014). Data from their research using the inside/outside model to address the challenges in social work suggested a faculty-supervised, campus-based field unit training approach to assist/work with student veterans on campus, can then be used outside campus to better serve the needs of the community. Results from Selber and Chavkin's (2014) research indicated the inside/outside model provided a training laboratory

for BSW and MSW students, who when they graduated were better prepared to work with the veteran population after their certification.

Plach and Sells (2013) research examined the occupation performance challenges of 30 young veterans returning home from Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). Using a mixed method approach to capture the lived experiences and statistical data from health screening, 26 male, and 4 female veterans aged 20-29, were given the Canadian Occupational Performance Measure (COPM), and screened for posttraumatic stress, traumatic brain injury, depression, and alcohol abuse or dependency. The COPM was an instrument used by occupational therapists to detect change in a client's self-perception of occupational performance over time. Five occupational challenges were discovered, (1) engagement in relationships, (2) college performance, (3) physical health, (4) sleeping, and (5) driving.

According to Plach and Sells (2013) productivity challenges in college were reported by 70% of the veterans in this study, with 28 subjects who were students. The two categories that emerged from the research were; veterans stated they had difficulty relating to younger classmates because of their military experiences, which caused them to mature more rapidly, and some veterans had difficulty concentrating in the academic environment, relearning skills. Three risk factors the researchers suggest contributed to the veterans' occupational performance are; length of deployment (12-15 months), multiple deployments, three or four deployments to Iraq and/or Afghanistan, and sleep deprivation.

Because of the data collected through Plach, and Sells (2103) research, occupational therapy can be effectively used to assist, motivate, and redirect veterans in their quest to be healthy. Occupation Therapy (OT) encourages rehabilitation through the performance of required daily life skills activities. Evidence from Plach and Sells (2013) research suggested finding

motivations to encourage veterans, and assisting them in dealing with obstacles or challenges can positively affect young veterans in the rehabilitation process. College and relationships were the two top challenges identified by veterans, with 77% reporting finishing college was a motivation to stay well (Plach & Sells, 2013). The researchers suggested reintegration strategies in place at institutions are a key positive factor for veterans transitioning into higher education, and attending classes. They also recommended training for faculty and staff, giving them awareness of student veterans experiences based on the qualitative interviews and the COPM questions.

Iraq and Afghanistan veterans participating in mental health services for Posttraumatic Stress (PTS) were examined for completion rates of counseling services, and total visits. The research consisted of 172 new patients (control group) and 422 existing patients (experimental group) which received a pre-treatment phone call as a reminder of their appointment. Aakre, Himelhoch, and Slade (2014) administered a quantitative research design using a regression analysis to analyze the data. Two retention measures were developed; completion of nine visits, and completion of total visits (attending all sessions).

Aakre et al. (2014) indicated veterans who were given pre-treatment (experimental group), via a phone call prior to their counseling session, had higher attendance and completion rates. Additionally, veterans who had no pre-treatment (control group) were at higher risk to not finish the outpatient program, and were less likely to complete nine or more visits (Aakre, Himelhoch, & Slade, 2014). Findings from this study suggest veterans who have been diagnosed with Posttraumatic Stress (PTS), or cognitive impairments such as Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), can benefit from a pre-treatment contact to increase completion rates. Aakre et al. (2014) research suggested the findings in this study can be generalized to veterans attending college, working duties, and staying on task to complete daily functions or requirements.

Time on task or the ability to complete assignments, work duties, or daily chores, is a necessity for student veterans as they navigate the challenges of transitioning into college life, and the academic environment. Levy-Gigi, Lencovsky, Myers, Orr, & Sharvit-Benbaji (2012) qualitative research intent was twofold; to bring attention to PTS, and develop a prediction model to identify veterans who may best be served with time-on-task training to improve cognitive functions. Five student veterans were interviewed with semi-structured techniques, and the results were analyzed. Levy-Gigi et al. (2012) research suggests PTS affects the hippocampus region of the brain in a broader form, affecting learning tasks and the ability to stay time-on-task. Simple tasks involving learning or memory recall which individuals must do every day to maintain functioning, can be compromised or altered in veterans who have been diagnosed with PTS. Verbal memory is one of the cognitive areas most affected; the ability to remember words, facts, and other important information such as appointments, can become a challenge for individuals with PTS (Levi-Gigi et al., 2012). The findings suggested PTS affects a specific region of the brain, the hippocampus, which is most responsible for short-term memory, memory recall, and cognition. Levy-Gigi et al. (2012) findings highlighted cognitive impairment associated with PTS diagnosis, bringing needed attention to how cognitive impairment affected learning for veterans. The researchers also suggested a Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) program to assist student veterans with increasing time-on-task requirements. Cognitive Behavior Therapy is treatment focusing on examining the relationships between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, to challenge the negative or unwanted thoughts, replacing them with healthy ones.

Concept Analysis Chart

The following chart represents key research studies examined in the literature review. The research questions were formulated after a thorough review of the literature to identify gaps; thus identifying the need for a research study to examine transition of student veterans at Peach University.

Concept Analysis Chart

CHART I: Studies related to student veterans progression and graduation

STUDY	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANTS	DESIGN/ ANALYSIS	OUTCOMES
DiMaria, 2006	Effect of residency requirements as a barrier for Hispanic military member degree completion	22 soldiers, 6 Army Education staff, 1800 college surveys sent	Mixed Method Quantitative: Test scores Qualitative: survey to schools Qualitative: interviews	Lower income HS students look to the military as a way to go to college. 1. Barriers of transfer credit from moving to many bases 2.A need for students with low scores a chance to enroll Army: Hispanic military members using ed benefits, 40% male, 60% female
Selber & Chavkin (2014)	Inside/Outside Model: Train BSW and MSW students working with military students and family members	300 student veterans, 16 student interns	Mixed Method Quantitative: student veteran grad rates Qualitative: Questionnaire and satisfaction survey	100% of BSW & MSW interns would work with veterans in the future 1) Model for training developed, over

STUDY	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANTS	DESIGN/ ANALYSIS	OUTCOMES
				900 hrs of service 2) Other units take courses to become familiar with student veterans needs 3) Graduation rates went from 52%, to 61% in 2 yrs, to 65% in 3 yrs because of inside/outside model
Habley, W. (2004)	Identify which academic and non-academic factors had the greatest effect on college retention	400 studies identified, 109 met the criteria	Meta-analysis Quantitative: combined statistical findings from many research studies	Academic & non-academic factors both significantly affect retention: 1) Early ID of students at risk 2) Level of institutional commitment & support 3) Strongest relationship when academic & non-academic factors are combined- facilitate student development & learning communities fostering a shared experience 4) Special populations may be affected differently depending on non-academic factors
Million Record	Grad data from	700,000 + records of	Quantitative:	1) Data not fully

STUDY	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANTS	DESIGN/ ANALYSIS	OUTCOMES
Project-Cate (2014)	veterans using GI Bill funds	used GI Bill funds in higher education	graduation data, years to complete degree	established from 2009 2) 5 yrs for AA/AS, 6 yrs for BA/BS 3)Inconsistent data collection & reporting by institutions regarding progress and graduation

CHART II: Studies related to how post-secondary institutional policies facilitate the transition of veterans into higher education

STUDY	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANTS	DESIGN/ ANALYSIS	OUTCOMES
Livingston, W. et al. (2011)	To determine whether military students sought academic support or social support	15 student veterans	Qualitative	Veterans sought social support from fellow veterans in lieu of academic support from faculty members 1. Student veterans tend to minimize or conceal their military service from non-veterans 2. Recommend services for supporting and acknowledging veterans

STUDY	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANTS	DESIGN/ ANALYSIS	OUTCOMES
Plach & Sells (2013)	Examine the occupational performance challenges encountered by young U.S. veterans	30 veterans ranging in age 20-29	Mixed Method Quantitative: COPM, screened for brain injury Qualitative: interviews	5 occupational challenges were discovered: School, sleeping, engagement in relationships, driving & physical health Reintegration strategies were discussed: 1) 60% of veterans returning to civilian life have some form of cognitive or occupational challenges 2) Reintegration strategies are key for veterans attending college 3) Staff/ faculty training, awareness
Wilson, K. et al. (2013)	Applying Tinto's Theory (1987); could the military community replace the college community	13 soldiers, 5 counselors	Qualitative: interviews	Military community replaced the college campus community: 1) Military chain of command promotes education 2) Offer flexible options, online, hybrid, proximity 3) Instructor/advisors are the face of the college

STUDY	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANTS	DESIGN/ ANALYSIS	OUTCOMES
Tomar & Stoffel (2014)	Understand the lived experiences of student veterans	18 photo voice pieces, 2 student veterans,	Qualitative: phenomenology using photovoice	Analysis revealed 4 themes: 1) Reminiscence of past duty 2) Reflection of military life 3) Entry to new stage of life-transition 4) Influence of the university environment
Napan & Elliot (2015)	Understand what factors affected how veterans renegotiated transition into civilian life	11 student veterans	Qualitative: interviews	Themes that occurred: *Military emphasis on task cohesion, *military structure, *military responsibilities and release anxiety, *combat experience, *social cohesion in combat units Veterans looked for military structure, didn't relate well with younger civilian peers, institution purposes affected transition
Aakre, J. et al. (2013)	(Neurological) Did pre-treatment contact improve retention rates	172 new, 422 continuing patients	Quantitative: regression analyses	Two retention measures developed: 1) Completion of total visits 2) Completion of 9 visits

STUDY	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANTS	DESIGN/ ANALYSIS	OUTCOMES
Levy-Gigi, E. et al. (2012)	Twofold: bring attention to PTS, and develop a prediction model to (ID) improve time on task	5 student veterans	Qualitative: interviews	Veterans were given pre-treatment via contact with staff (reminder) prior to first session thus retention and completion rates increased Identification of where PTS affects the brain-region, and functions Develop a cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) program to help students increase time on task

CHART III: Studies related to perceived institutional policies or organizational structures that affect student veterans' progression

STUDY	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANTS	DESIGN/ ANALYSIS	OUTCOMES
Osborne, N. (2014)	Gain insight into the transitional experiences of veterans on campus	14 student veterans 10 men, 4 women 22-30 yrs old	Qualitative	3 overarching themes emerged: 1) Military Culture 2) Connection to the institution 3) Unstable and potentially dangerous veteran stigma Veterans in the study said:

STUDY	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANTS	DESIGN/ ANALYSIS	OUTCOMES
				1) Military structure contributed to their maturation 2) Military experiences made it challenging for them to relate to younger peers, viewed peers as "out of touch" 3) 6 of 14, Military culture very different from college culture Developed-Veteran Alley Training
Santovec, M. (2015)	Expand on Dr. Minis Dissertation; Colleges were not addressing veterans needs	7, (6 Army, 1 Marine)	Quantitative	Reasons for less support: 1) WW II, most knew someone 2) Viet Nam stigma, smart ones went to college, others went into military 3) Veterans are "lunatics" or have PTS 4) Women veterans stigma, not smart-up to challenge Suggestions for colleges: 1) Women veterans support group 2) Health centers to train staff on women veteran

STUDY	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANTS	DESIGN/ ANALYSIS	OUTCOMES
				issues
Jones, K. (2013)	Describe and understand the identity development of student veterans into higher ed.	3 student veterans	Qualitative: phenomenological interviews	3 themes emerged: Adapting to civilian identity, higher education's role in supporting veterans, services for student veterans Record number of veterans returning to college-recognize what they have done in the past, encourage them to do more
Anderson, J. (2013)	Biography of Veteran, and qualities of higher education institutions that most effect transition	22 veterans	Qualitative: interviews and focus groups	Two aspects of biography posed challenges: social class prior to military, and military service Misaligned with university because of their military experience Need for mentorship program and university supported student veterans organizations, sensitize and train faculty, centralize services, and maintain

STUDY	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANTS	DESIGN/ ANALYSIS	OUTCOMES
Steele, J. (2015)	Examination of Veterans Upward Bound (VUB), and other support programs	Over 50 studies on veterans post-secondary prep programs	Qualitative literature review	communication 1)Extensive work on campus about strategies, very little on prep programs 2)Inconsistent data coll/rept by institutions 3)Difficult to determine HE success of veterans
ACE. (2012) Soldier to Student II-McBain, Cook, Kim, & Snead (2012)	Examine institutional support & practices for veterans in HE	690 higher education responded to survey	Qualitative: Survey response	1) Assisting military & veterans with transition in HE-only 37% offer services. 2)Raising faculty & staff sensitivity to unique issues faced by student veterans 3)Streamline campus administrative procedure for student veterans, especially deployed student veterans

Summary

The passage of the original GI Bill in 1944 led to an unprecedented expansion in both higher education and the middle class in the United States. Enrolled veterans doubled the number of

students in higher education and their success in completing a college degree had economic value as well. This new type of student on campus was mostly a new experience for colleges and universities given they previously had mainly enrolled the elites of society who already had job opportunities.

The GI Bill helped veterans of past wars and as the United States progressed in the Global War on Terror (GWOT), lawmakers recognized a need to update the GI Bill. This New GI Bill, (Post 9/11 GI Bill) for a new generation of veterans represented an understanding of the importance of higher education in the 21st Century economy.

Institutions of higher education have a growing challenge for administrative personnel to consider. Veterans will continue to attend college in record numbers, with some studies expecting a 20% increase of veterans on college campuses. Despite the high numbers attending college, there are few and inconsistent studies on retention and graduation rates of student veterans. Additionally, transition policies and services offered by institutions of higher education to support veterans as they navigate the transition from military duty to college student, are limited or non-existent. Even fewer services are available for student veterans who come to campus with combat injuries such as Posttraumatic Stress (PTS) or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). Yet veterans transitioning out of military service will continue to arrive on campus, more educated than previous veterans were, and with expanded federal funds to support their education goals.

The literature review examined existing research from multiple viewpoints with the intent to; understand the college transition for student veterans, identify what services, and supports are important for veterans as they transition, and how those services and needs vary from traditional students. In addition, the literature review examined institutional policies and procedures with

the goal of understanding what effect the said policies had on student veterans' transition into higher education, both positive and negative.

By examining the literature to identify transition barriers for student veterans, and identifying how institutional policies may affect degree completion, institutions of higher education can better meet the student veteran's needs. Institutional policies can reflect a "welcome" atmosphere to the veteran population on campus, just as they have welcomed other populations. Transition assistance services for veterans integrating into higher education can benefit from an ideal or "best practices" model describing success at other institutions. This ideal model of transition support services can assist institutions ethos of accountability and services to the student veteran population.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher presented the methodology, and investigated the research

questions. The rationale for the use of a qualitative design was explained as the researcher

examined the documents, and experiences of student veterans at Peach University. Data

included information from document analysis and interviews. The following research questions

were used to focus and guide this study:

1.   *What are the perceptions of student veterans towards Peach University?*

2.   *What are Peach University's written policies pertaining to student veterans?*

3.   *To what extent are there differences between what student veterans perceive is offered*

and what is offered in the written documents?

The researcher proposed three parts of this study. First, the researcher examined the

documents and policies written by Peach University. Second, the researcher interviewed student

veterans at Peach University. Third, the researcher examined the differences between what the

university says it offers to student veterans as they progress, and what is perceived by veterans as

offered.

Research Design

A qualitative research design method was selected for this study because of the need to

capture the participants' story and experiences through in-depth interviews, which cannot be

done through quantitative methods (Maxwell 2013). By giving a voice to each participant, the

researcher collected think data (Patton, 2002) which cannot be collected any other way, and can

be used to seek understanding of the phenomena being studied. Additionally, because qualitative

research methods study smaller samples of participants, the inquiry was more in-depth with

participants, and the researcher was flexible, inductive in nature, allowing a reflective process to

occur as themes emerged and developed with the study (Robson, 2011).

Qualitative research uses an approach to inquiry by combining and associating forms of

research, such as in-depth interviews, and documents (Creswell, 2009). By using this approach,

the researcher sought to provide richness and depth of inquiry to explore and explain policies

established by Peach University and the student veterans' perceptions of those policies.

A qualitative study is a method of exploring the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to

social or human situations, can lead the researcher into thick data for inquiry, and used a variety

of data sources such as interviews, to strengthen the study (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). According

to Vaterlaus and Higginbotham (2011) qualitative methods are "data enhancers" (p.1) allowing

the researcher to see key aspects and information more clearly from firsthand accounts of

participants, allowing the researcher to reconstruct or change the focus based on information and

data collected. Maxwell (2013) explained qualitative research is continually being assessed by

the researcher to ensure the study can accomplish what the researcher intends, and is

strengthened by the interaction of different design components.

Qualitative research methods tend to examine data thematically to identify similarities and

differences in the collected data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Themes are patterns

across data sets and are necessary to the contextual description of qualitative data. This allowed

the researcher to fracture the collected data, rearranging it for comparison with other data

collected in the same category, to begin to develop emerging themes in the research (Maxwell,

2013).

The researcher's goals were to examine documents espousing policies, programs, services, and procedures relating to student veterans, and to fully understand each participant's perception of how Peach University views their needs. In inquiry into the relationship between the perceptions of the student veterans and the programs and policies relating to student veterans, best practices were ultimately discussed and analyzed for relevance to the study.

Research Site

Peach University is a pseudonym used to ensure confidentiality of the participants and their data used (Maxwell, 2013). The research site is a public, 4-year institution of higher education in the southeastern part of the United States. Peach University has 413 highly qualified, undergraduate faculty members with a faculty to student ratio is 17:1 (Institutional website, 2015). The enrollment is 6,000-10,000 students (2015-2016); a medium sized undergraduate public institution classification according to Carnegie Classification (2014). The male-female ratio for Peach University is, 40.5% male and 59.5% female. The racial groups are 53% White, 35% Black, 5% Hispanic, 2% Asian, and <5% other or multiple races (Peach University website, 2015). The selection of a campus with a diverse population, allowed data collection to be gathered from a wide range of participants, which was used to enhance rigor and validity of the study, through a diverse population sampling collection (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013).

The institution was located within 10 miles of a major military base, housing over 25,000 service members (Vander Brook, 2015). Both Peach University and the military installation have established roles in the community, often worked together to promote education advancement (Peach University website, 2010). Some of the shared education opportunities were, field trips bringing junior high school students of military members to Peach University for a college tour and an information session about degree options, participation in an education fair

twice per year on the local military instillation, and joint training sessions with military education staff and Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) staff. Additionally, there were volunteer opportunities, and non-educational events throughout the year (Peach University website, 2015).

Population

Permission to conduct this study was obtained from Peach University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The researcher's plans were reviewed by the institution's IRB (Creswell, 2009). IRB committees exist on campus to ensure federal regulations were adhered to, providing protection against human subjects violation (Creswell, 2009; Sieber, 1998).

The population of this study were student veterans who attend a public four-year institution, Peach University. Peach University has over 700 veterans enrolled each academic semester according to the institution's VA Enrollment Certification official (2015), who has the task of accounting for, and certifying enrollments each semester for student veterans at Peach University who use GI Bill funds (Peach University Office of Veteran Services, 2015). Participants were student veterans (military members). Student veterans are defined as military members or prior military members from all branches of service; Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard, using their educational benefits to pay for college.

Sampling

A purposeful sample was selected from the population of student veterans for this study. A purposeful sample focuses on smaller overall numbers of participants, but places emphasis on deep inquiry of the participants' unique context (Glesne, 2011). In addition, a sampling of policy documents and information brochures were collected from Peach University's main campus,

veterans' center, Academic Center for Excellence (ACE), Admissions and Financial Aid offices, and materials such as posters or flyers displayed throughout the campus.

Data Points

Data from the participants were collected using a semi-structured, open-ended interview protocol (Creswell, 2007). Interviews were conducted in the Veterans Center at Peach University; they were recorded and transcribed for analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Data from student veteran interviews provided insight into the participants' experiences with services and policies for student veterans at Peach University (Etherington, 2004).

Data was collected from documents pertaining to student veterans from the institution's web site, and other offices on campus. The researcher examined documents to identify policies and programs, which were designed to assist student veterans in transition, provided services, and guide them through degree completion. Policy documents were found in the offices of admissions, financial aid, and registrar, Academic Center for Excellence (ACE), veterans' center, and specific colleges on campus who had printed documents and information for student veterans. This data included flyers, emails, advertisements, scholarship opportunities, and/or website information. Data collected from documents informed the researcher of policies espoused by Peach University and was used to develop the survey instrument for interviews with student veterans (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Glesne, 2011). All collection and labeling of documents was done by this researcher.

Developing the Interview Questions

Four main themes from the document analysis emerged as necessary categories, which appeared frequently throughout institutional documents. From the emerging themes, and the literature review, the interview questions were developed. The researcher developed a Data

Source Table (Table 1) which represents; how the documents emerged as broad categories

initially, and then moving to themes, the interview question developed, and the literature used to

guide this study. An interview protocol included reading and rereading of each document,

coding the document with an initial category, and then developing the themes.

Table 1

Data Source Table

Document	Theme	Interview Question	Literature
Application for Admission	Admissions	IQ 1	Steele (2015), Aakre, et al. (2013)
Testing for Admission	Admissions	IQ 1, IQ 2	DiMaria (2006), Plach & Sells (2013)
Transfer Policies	Admissions	IQ 5, IQ 7	Million Records Project (2013), Osborne (2013)
Military Student Bill of Rights	Admissions	IQ 1, IQ 6	Wilson, et al. (2013)
GI Bill Benefits	Financial Aid	IQ 1, IQ 8	Livingston, et al. (2013)
Veterans Data Sheet	Financial Aid	IQ 1, IQ 5	Selber & Chavkin (2014)
Statement of Understanding	Student Veteran Center	IQ 3, IQ 8	Tomar & Stoffel (2014)
Welcome to student veterans	Student Veteran Center	IQ 3, IQ 8	Napan & Elliot (2015), Santovec (2015)
Adult Learner	University/classroom environment	IQ 3, IQ 4, IQ 8	ACE (2012) Soldier to Student Survey, Jones (2013)

Document	Theme	Interview Question	Literature
Academic and Support Resources	University/classroom environment	IQ 3, IQ 5	Anderson (2013), Habley (2004)

Once the data collection begun, the researcher categorized the information in the following steps (Maxwell, 2013; Saldana, 2009). First, the researcher organized the collected data using hand codes initially, and then moved to a Document Analysis Worksheet (Appendix B) to best analyze the data. All data were coded. Second, the researcher sorted and categorized types of data, displaying the information in a spreadsheet.

Third, the researcher thoroughly read and then reviewed materials collected. This process allowed the researcher to take notes and begin to develop tentative ideas about relationships, themes, and categories related to issues relevant to student veterans' (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). Fourth, the researcher determined, and document common elements from the documents collected, flyers, and other posted material, which lead to emerging themes found throughout the data. According to Creswell (2009) the development of categories and emerging themes is an ongoing process involving continued reflection about the collected data.

Fifth, the researcher wrote down possible themes and ideas for coding documents using the Document Analysis Worksheet. Coding was not just the recording of data and entering it into a spreadsheet, according to Creswell (2009) who recommends researchers must engage "in a systematic process of analyzing textual data" (p. 186). Sixth, the researcher developed an initial coding log of collected data, and as more themes emerged, the researcher expanded the list of codes. Using the initial coding, the researcher notated a code on each document collected (Saldana, 2009). According to Saldana (2009) the coding style is decided by the researcher to best fit their method. The coding protocol was read each time the researcher began to code data

to ensure all procedures were followed and adhered to, and all coding occurred in the same manner (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013).

Next, the researcher determined the analysis procedures to be used. Through this process, the researcher continually reflected, and made the necessary changes to allow adaptation to the design, data collection method, and/or coding, as the study developed (Patton, 2002). The researcher next compared the reported information from the documents collected, and the written or visual information with data obtained from interviews with student veterans.

Interview Protocol

The researcher used the interview protocol to collect data from participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). The interview protocol were a set of defined procedures of how the interview was conducted and a list of the questions that were asked (Creswell, 2009). The interview protocol was important as it provided a guide for conducting the interviews, and the basis for the questions, which came from the literature (Robson, 2011). According to Robson (2011) using the literature and themes from the literature, and using the content data from collected documents, the researcher established a foundation for the developed initial interview questions. The interview protocol (Appendix C).

Procedures

The researcher maintained a journal, documenting all meetings, events, and personal experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1994; Maxwell, 2013). Personal journal documenting allowed the researcher to work through biases throughout the study by making experiences, thoughts and feelings visible (Etherington, 2004). Through this process of acknowledging and documenting the researcher's experiences, Etherington (2004) states the researcher can better control for bases as they conduct the study.

Participant confidentiality was ensured by coding all interviewees' responses to protect their identities (Boden, Kenway, & Epstein, 2005). All data and codes were secured on a password-protected computer, and locked in a secure office. Two individuals had access to the codes, the researcher, and the faculty advisor (Maxwell, 2013).

At the start of the interview each participant was given a written description of the study, and required to sign the Informed Consent form before they could participate (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) (Appendix D). Participants were informed of their right to terminate the interview at any time (Creswell, 2009). If any interviewee decided not to participate in the study, no loss of confidentiality or repercussions for terminating the interview would have been assigned. No participants terminated the interview.

Qualitative Data Collection

First, the researcher obtained policy documents from Peach University's offices of admissions, financial aid, registrar, ACE center, veterans center, and specific colleges on campus who have produced veteran specific documents. These documents included website information, flyers, scholarship opportunities, and advertisements (Butin, 2010).

Second, the researcher obtained the names of department contacts responsible for student veteran policies, and the location where documents may be posted throughout Peach University. As the documents were collected, the researcher began to categorize the policy documents by initial broad themes, which include admissions, academic advising, financial aid, tutoring, courses/instruction, and accommodation policies (Maxwell, 2013). The qualitative data collection process, according to Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013) should be interactive. Their view is, "We strongly advise analysis concurrent with data collection" (p.70), strengthening purposeful data collection and encouraging consideration of emerging themes.

Third, the researcher will interview 8-14 student veterans to determine their perceptions of policies espoused by Peach University. Interviews can collect data, which cannot be gathered through surveys (Butin, 2010). This type of inquiry allowed the researcher to collect data about experiences, and perspectives on the services or program being examined from participants expressing their views and or judgments (Butin, 2010; Tobin & Begley, 2004). An Item Analysis is represented which listed all items in the data collection instrument, the literature that supports the instrument, and which research question(s) answered (Table 1).

Table 2

Item Analysis

Items	Literature	RQ
Research Question 1 Interviews	Jones, K. (2013) Cate, Million Records Project (2014) Steele, (2015) Anderson (2013)	1, 2, 3
Research Question 2 Documents	Miles, et al. (2013) Napan & Elliot (2015), Soldier to Student (2012) Tomar & Stoffel (2014) Osborne (2014)	2, 3

Qualitative Data Analysis

A qualitative data analysis was conducted and an emergent design methodology was used. According to Patton (2002) emergent design is flexible, allowing adaptation of the evaluation design and data elements collected as understanding broadens. The researcher reviewed the data noting emerging themes in documents, and transcripts from participant interviews (Patton, 2002). All collected data was read and then reread by the researcher to obtain a general sense and reflection of meaning, before further analysis was conducted of the data to ensure the developing themes are grounded in framework of the study (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Themes were developed and transcribed for analysis (Saldana, 2009).

Initial broad themes related to the research questions, which emerged included admissions, academic advising, financial aid, and tutoring, courses/instruction, and accommodation policies for student veterans (Maxwell, 2013). Using thematic analysis the researcher examined the collected data, pinpointed the what, where, and record patterns or themes within data. Thematic analysis involves, viewing data multiple times, identifying themes, and coding the data to the identified themes (Vaterlaus & Higginbotham, 2011). Coding in qualitative inquiry, according to Saldana (2009), can be a word or phrase that assigns a summative attribute to data collected from interviews. Additionally, coding was the process of organizing collected information into categories, and labeling them with a term from the language of the participants (Creswell, 2009).

A document analysis was conducted by the researcher from the collected written or policy documents from Peach University, and the interview transcripts. The researcher read and reread all material to compare the data from the documents at Peach University, and the experiences transcribed from interview with student veterans to determine to what extent there were differences (Glesne, 2011; Maxwell, 2013).

How Results Will be Reported

In qualitative research methods, the descriptive results were reported in a narrative format. Because the researcher conducted interviews, the data results were narrative (Creswell, 2009).

Reliability

Reliability in qualitative research included three key elements; stable, consistent results, clear research questions which align the study's design with the literature and research questions, and comparison of the research finding to what is in the literature (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1994).

Validity

Validity was maintained in this study by developing and applying a sound research design and methods, which used an emergent design with descriptive analysis (Creswell, 2009). Validity in the data collection methods was adhered to through consistent data collection, and interviews with participants who represent the phenomena of student veterans at Peach University (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2002). A content analysis was conducted using documents collected from Peach University pertaining to student veterans (Lincoln & Guba, 1994; Maxwell, 2013).

Summary

In Chapter III, the researcher presented an outline, description, and reasons why qualitative research design method was used for this study. The qualitative research design in this study conducted inquiry using semi-structured interviews, utilizing descriptive analysis, which

reported clear and credible findings from the data. Data was collected from Peach University's policy documents and interviews with student veterans. The researcher's inquiry of the policy documents gained information and understanding about assistance for student veterans espoused by Peach University. Additionally, interviews conducted with student veterans allowed the researcher to gather contextual data from the actual experiences of the participants.

The researcher described the method of collecting policy documents, including how the data was recorded, transcribed, and coded, for analysis. A description and rationale of the coding process starting with hand codes and moving to a Document Analysis Worksheet and spreadsheet was described. Through this process, the researcher explained the development of emergent themes and categories in the coding cycle. From the data presented in the documents as well as data gathered from the interviews with student veterans, the research confirmed and highlighted the differences between the written policy and services established in the university's printed documents and the perception of the services experienced from the student veterans. From the analysis of this research, knowledge can be gained to focus on themes relevant to student veterans.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

Transition from military service to the college campus requires student veterans to move from a centralized structured system, which emphasizes teamwork, and provides support, to a higher education system that tends to be decentralized and focuses more on individual accomplishments. Every institution has policies, documents, and procedures to facilitate traditional new students when they transition onto campus, yet few services are offered for transitioning veterans as they enter higher education (Cole, 2013). Printed policies and documents guide students through the application and admission process, continuing through degree completion, and the graduation process. As the student veteran population continues to grow on college campuses, institutional documents that pertain to student veterans should be aligned with services espoused.

The researcher proposed to examine three issues. First was to examine what perceptions student veterans had about Peach University. The second purpose was a contextual analysis of the written policy documents, and printed material pertaining to student veterans to determine what institutional policies were espoused. The researcher examined all relevant policy documents from Peach University, a four-year institution of higher education with approximately 8,200 students. A systematic inquiry was conducted of the printed documents from Peach University pertaining to student veterans through content analysis of the written and printed material. The content analysis provided categories and emergent themes, which led to the

development of eight questions used in the qualitative interviews the researcher conducted with

student veterans. Third, the researcher examined to what extent there were differences between

what student veterans' perceive as services offered, and what is actually offered by Peach

University to student veterans. By gaining understanding of the student veteran's perception of

Peach University, and through an analysis of documents, the research explored differences

between what students perceived and what was offered.

The following research questions guided this qualitative study:

   (1) *What are the perceptions of student veterans towards Peach University?*

   (2) *What are Peach University's written policies pertaining to student veterans?*

   (3) *To what extent are there differences between what student veterans perceive is*

        offered and what is offered in the written documents?

Research Design

   A qualitative data analysis was conducted and an emergent design methodology was used.

The research study had two data points; content analysis of documents, and open-ended

interviews with twelve student veteran participants.

Respondents

   Initial contact was sent by email to 232 potential student veteran participants informing them

of the study, and inviting them to participate (Appendix A). Thirteen (5.6%) student veterans

enrolled in Fall 2015 classes responded by email to the researcher with their intent to participate.

Interviews were scheduled with thirteen student veterans at a mutually agreed upon time and

location. Twelve student veterans showed up for their scheduled interview, signed the required

informed consent, and completed the interview.

Twelve student veterans participated in this study, eight males, and four females. The researcher purposely collected two descriptive demographics from the participants: (1) Participants self-reported the number of years they served in the military, (2) Participants' self-reported rank they attained in the military. Additional descriptive characteristics were collected as a direct result of the interview protocol and questions. The additional descriptive characteristics included age and medical retirement status from military service. For the purpose of this research, the number of years in service and military rank attained by the veteran were used to further analyze the participants experience level and age when they arrived on campus.

Time in service and rank attained by the participants presented descriptive characteristics of each student veteran, by further describing their specific military experience. Additionally, the collected descriptive characteristics allowed the researcher to report responses across different ages, genders, and levels of experience. No consistent demographics of student veterans were reported. The average time in service (mean) of the twelve participants was 10.6 years of service. The average rank attained was Sergeant (SGT or E5). The average (mean) age of the student veteran participants was 32.2 years old. An additional descriptive characteristic of medical retirement or discharge status emerged through the interview protocol, and a theme of students with injuries also emerged. This descriptive characteristic developed as a direct result of the interview icebreaker question, "Tell me about your military service and what brought you to Peach University." A visual representation of Descriptive Characteristics of Student Veteran Participants is shown in Table 3.

Findings-Documents

The steps used to gather and report the qualitative data analysis followed a strict protocol. The researcher first gained IRB approval to collect and analyze documents from Peach

University's offices of Admissions, Financial Aid, Registrar, Academic Center for Excellence

(ACE), and the Student Veteran Center. For the purpose of this study, documents can be defined

Table 3

Demographics of Student Veteran Participants

Student Veteran Interview	Years of Service	Rank	Age	Gender	Medical Discharge
1	10	SGT/E5	35	M	Yes
2	7	SGT/E5	26	M	Yes
3	8	SPC/E4	32	F	No
4	4	SGT/E5	25	F	No
5	22	SFC/E7	44	M	No- but injured
6	20	SSG/E6	39	M	No
7	18	SSG/E6	38	M	Yes
8	15	SFC/E7	35	M	Yes
9	11	SSG/E6	34	M	Yes
10	3.5	SPC/E4	46 now 22 then	F	Yes (Gulf War One- 1991)
11	6	SGT/E5	30	F	Yes
12	3	SPC/E4	26	M	Yes

as printed policies pertaining to services or procedures, information about services, flyers,

brochures or posters, web links and, website documents pertaining to student veterans.

Additionally, documents and printed material pertaining to student veterans' were collected from

Peach University's website, posters, flyers, and brochures from colleges. A wide array of 78

documents were collected. As each document was collected, a coding symbol was noted on the

document along with the location, where the document was retrieved from, as well as in the

researcher's document log to establish an audit trail. The purpose of the Document Log was to

identify and name each document, assign a matching coding symbol on the document and to the

document log, and to note the location where the document was found (Table 4). The researcher

kept a journal to document thoughts, ideas, and experiences during data collection.

Table 4

Document Log

Document	Coding Symbol	Location
1. Admission Application	ADM 1	Online-Admissions Office
Admission Packet	ADM 2-6	Admissions Office
2. Square One: Adult re-entry	ADM 2	Admissions Office
3. My First Choice	ADM 3	Admissions Office
4. Honors Application	ADM 4	Admissions Office
5. Housing/Meal plan	ADM 5	Admissions Office
6. Resident Life Info/Application	ADM 6	Admissions Office
7. Admissions-Welcome to Veterans	ADM 7	Online Military Tab
8. Admissions-Demographic/Degree general information	ADM 8	Online Military Tab
9. Admissions-undergrad description deadlines	ADM 9	Online Military Tab
10. Admissions-graduate requirements and deadlines	ADM 10	Online Military Tab
11. Admissions-GoArmyEd information	ADM 11	Online Military Tab
12. Admissions-Adult Learner definition and resources	ADM 12	Online Adult Learner Tab
13. Admissions-links to Veteran homepage	ADM 13	Online Adult Learner Tab
14. Admissions-links to undergrad/	ADM 14	Online Adult Learner Tab

Document	Coding Symbol	Location
grad homepage		
15. Admissions-admission Forms for military	ADM 15	Online Adult Learner Tab
16. Testing-requirements for admission	TEST 1	Academic Center for Excellence
17. Testing-tutorial services	TEST 2	Academic Center for Excellence
18. Testing-Square One information	TEST 3	Academic Center for Excellence
19. Testing-testing requirements for new students	TEST 4	Online Admissions Tab
20. Testing-requirements for Adult Learners, links to military	TEST 5	Online Admissions Tab
21. Testing-requirements for military	TEST 6	Online Military Tab
22. Testing-COMPASS information study questions, registration	TEST 7	Online Military Tab
23. Transfer Credit-definition, more than 30 semester hours	TR 1	Online Admissions Transfer Tab
24. Transfer Credit-what transfers, Transfer Articulation Agreement	TR 2	Online Admissions Transfer Tab
25. Transfer Credit-other sources of other sources of credit	TR 3	Online Admissions Transfer Tab
26. Transfer Credit-fee, requirements, definition	TR 4	Online Military Tab, undergrad
27. Transfer Credit- definition, more than 30 semester hours	TR 5 (TR 1)	Admissions
28. Transfer Credit-transfer course equivalency information	TR 6	Admissions
29. Registration-description of which orientation to attend ROAR-Recruitment, Orientation, Advisement, Registration	REG 1	Online Orientation, ROAR
30. Registration-active duty military instructions	REG 2	Online Orientation, ROAR Active Duty Military
31. Registration-Mission Statement military	REG 3	Online Orientation Military, Mission Statement
32. Financial Aid- FAFSA information	FSA 1	Financial Aid Office
33. Financial Aid-dates/deadlines	FSA 2	Financial Aid Office
34. Financial Aid-application information	FSA 3	Online Financial Aid Tab
35. Financial Aid-policies	FSA 4	Online Financial Aid Tab
36. Financial Aid-FAQ's	FSA 5	Online Financial Aid Tab
37. Financial Aid-Code of Conduct	FSA 6	Financial Aid Tab

Document	Coding Symbol	Location
38. Financial Aid-information	FSA 7	ACE
39. Financial Aid-contacts/links	FSA 8	ACE
40. Financial Aid-FSA/HOPE information	FSA 9	Online, Admissions-Financial Aid
41. Financial Aid- application directions	FSA 10	Online, Admissions-Financial Aid
42. Financial Aid-Financial Aid Tips	FSA 11	ADA Office
43. Financial Aid-FSA at a Glance, information and steps to apply	FSA 12	ADA Office
44. Financial Aid-FAQ's	FSA 13	ADA Office
45. Financial Aid-FSA for Adult Students	FSA 14	ADA Office
46. Financial Aid-application and Federal school code	FSA 15	Online Financial Aid
47. GI Bill-veteran data sheet	GI BILL 1	Student Veterans Center
48. GI Bill-Statement of Understanding	GI BILL 2	Student Veterans Center
49. GI Bill-contact information for Department of Veteran Affairs	GI BILL 3	Student Veterans Center
50. GI Bill-how to verify enrollment	GI BILL 4	Student Veterans Center
51. GI Bill-GI Bill FAQ's	GI BILL 5	Student Veterans Center
52. GI Bill-Tuition Assistance information	GI BILL 6	Student Veterans Center
53. GI Bill-how to apply for GI Bill benefits	GI BILL 7	Online Military Tab, Veteran Affairs Home
54. GI Bill-how to transfer GI Bill benefits	GI BILL 8	Online Military Tab, Veteran Affairs Home
55. GI Bill-Yellow Ribbon program	GI BILL 9	Online Military Tab, Veteran Affairs Home
56. GI Bill-link to VONAPP, veterans online application	GI BILL 10	Online Military Tab, Veteran Affairs Home
57. GI Bill-FAQ's for GI Bill	GI BILL 11	Online Military Tab, Veteran Affairs Home
58. GI Bill-link to FAFSA application	GI BILL 12	Online Military Tab, Veteran Affairs Home, link to Financial Aid
59. Student Veterans Center-disclosure/consent form	SVC 1	Student Veterans Center
60. Student Veterans Center-veterans Data Sheet	SVC 2 (GI BILL 1)	Student Veterans Center
61. Student Veterans Center-instructions for submitting award letter and class schedule	SVC-3	Student Veterans Center
62. Student Veterans Center-FAQ's	SVC 4	Student Veterans Center
63. Student Veterans Center-Welcome to Veterans	SVC 5	Online Military Tab

Document	Coding Symbol	Location
64. Student Veterans Center-student resources	SVC 6	Online Military Tab
65. Student Veterans Center-Tuition Assistance	SVC 7	Online Military Tab
66. Student Veterans Center-Net Price Calculator	SVC 8	Online Military Tab
67. Student Veterans Center-information military spouses	SVC 9	Online Military Tab
68. Student Veterans Center-contact information for Veteran Center staff	SVC 10	Online Military Tab
69. Student Veterans Center-military advisor/retention specialist contact information	SVC 11	Academic Center for Excellence
70. Support Services-academic and student support resources information/contact	SUPSVCS 1	Academic Center for Excellence
71. Support Services-Vet to Vet Peer Support Program	SUPSVCS 2	Office of Disability Services
72. Support Services-Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) flyer	SUPSVCS 3	Office of Disability Services
73. Support Services-documentation request form	SUPSVCS 4	Office of Disability Services
74. Support Services-list of "not" reasonable accommodations	SUPSVCS 5	Office of Disability Services
75. University/Classroom environment-military students Bill of Rights	ENV 1	Online Military Tab
76. University/Classroom environment-welcome to Adult Learners, understands the needs	ENV 2	Online Adult Learner Tab
77. University/Classroom environment-veteran friendly award, examples of services	ENV 3	Online "In The Know" News
78. University/Classroom environment-welcome letter to veterans, tutoring resources available	ENV 4	Online Military Tab, Academic Center for Tutoring (ACT)

As the documents were collected, the researcher used hand codes initially to develop a document table with initial broad categories. The initial categories were; Admissions, Academic Advising, Financial Aid, Tutoring, Disability Services, Student Veterans Center, and University Environment.

The researcher collected 78 documents pertaining to student veterans from Peach University. A Document Analysis Worksheet (Appendix B) was developed to review and note key categories and themes emerging from each document. From the Document Analysis Worksheet, the researcher first identified the type of document such as a policy document, flyer or brochure, or a website link and made notations on the document, the researcher's document log, and the Document Analysis Worksheet. Next, the researcher looked for physical characteristics of the documents, and dates of creation. The analysis continued by the researcher examining each document and asking the following questions; what audience was this document written for, what two things were said about student veteran policies, and what questions were unanswered.

These questions allowed the researcher to analyze each document by asking about specific content from the collected data to establish meaning and contribution to the study. The Document Analysis Worksheet was used to examine the content of each document with the following procedures: Listed two important statements from each document, asked the question "why was this document printed/produced", what evidence in the document or quote from the document supports why it was written, list two things the document reports about student veterans, and what question(s) are left unanswered from the document. This analysis was used to document the content of the collected data. After the document analysis was completed, four main categories emerged: Admissions, Financial Aid, Student Veteran Center, and University/Classroom environment.

Admissions

The most frequent document mentioned or cross-mentioned in the analysis pertained to

the admissions process. There were thirty-one documents, which pertained to the admission

process for student veterans with subcategories of testing, transfer matriculation agreements, and

initial registration for courses. Fifteen documents pertained to student veterans' application and

admission, seven documents pertained to testing, six documents stated transfer policies and/or

articulation, and three documents pertained to, or were related to registration for courses. These

documents were represented in the Document Log, Table 3: ADM 1- 15, TEST 1-7, TR 1-6, and

REG 1-3.

Financial Aid and GI Bill Policies

Twenty-seven documents contained information on financial aid or GI Bill policies and

information. There were an almost equal number of documents pertaining to financial aid and

GI Bill (a form of financial aid) information represented in printed documents from Peach

University. Fifteen documents pertained to Financial Aid, and twelve documents pertained to GI

Bill information for student veterans. The GI Bill documents also provided web links to federal

sites to gain information and apply for GI Bill funds. These documents were represented in the

Document Log, Table 3: FSA 1-15, GI BILL 1-12.

Student Veteran Center

Sixteen documents were collected with the Student Veteran Center as the main theme, with

support services as a sub theme. Eleven documents related to the Student Veterans Center and

five documents which pertained to support services were collected. An example of the types of

documents collected were a veterans data sheet, instructions for submitting award letter and

class schedule, FAQs, and academic support services contact information. These documents

were represented in the Document Log, Table 3: SVC 1-11, SUPSVCS 1-5.

University/Classroom Environment

Four documents contained information about the university and classroom environment.

Peach University's news publication, "In the Know" highlighted the recognition award for the

institution being a Veteran Friendly campus. Additionally, the main page of the student veteran

website, the first page of a recruiting flyer/brochure or welcome letter to the student veteran, also

highlighted this category as an important foundational tenet of Peach University's long history

with the military and close proximity to a military base. These documents were represented in

the Document Log, Table 3: ENV 1-4. A visual representation of the types of documents

collected is shown in (Table 5).

Organization of Content Data Analysis

In addition to keeping an audit trail, the researcher made field notes as documenting how

themes developed. The researcher used the frequency of these themes, which ran through the

documents to develop the survey instrument, interview questions, for this qualitative study.

Admission documents were the most frequent category with thirty-one mentions of admission

policy documents, information sessions or cross-referenced. Financial Aid or GI Bill documents

Table 5

Types of Documents Collected

Office/Department Collected From	Number of Documents
Admission	15

Testing	7
Transfer	6
Registration	3
Financial Aid	15
GI Bill	12
Student Veteran Center	11
Support Services	5
Advising	2
University/Classroom environment	4

were the second most frequent or cross-referenced document, totaling twenty-seven times. The

office of the Student Veteran Center, was mentioned, cross-referenced, or redirected in

documents eighteen times. When the printed document recommended the student veteran leave

from one location or office (Financial Aid or other offices), and directed the student veteran back

to the Student Veteran Center for assistance, this counted as a back to the Student Veteran

Center. The final theme, which emerged from the document analysis, was the

university/classroom environment; the printed documents promote Peach University as a

"Veteran Friendly" institution. Four documents stated ease of application and access to the

University and/or classroom environment being veteran friendly.

Developing the Interview Questions

From the documents collected broad categories emerged initially, and then were coded as

themes based on the content from the documents. The researcher analyzed the documents to

determine meaning and content in the following method: (1) Examined content data, which was

studied by exploring background information to establish policy and historical insight. (2)

Documented content information for use in interviews. (3) Wide array of documents provided

additional research data on the phenomenon studied. (4) Noted and tracked changes in

documents over time. (5) Analysis and evaluation of data produced knowledge and

understanding of the written documents. These methodologies lead to the development of the

interview questions.

The interview questions were developed from the document analysis, and from the existing

research, which supported this study. The researcher developed the interview questions by

reading and rereading each document, coding the document with an initial category, and then

developing the themes. Additionally, the researcher documented emerging themes as they

developed in the field notes. A Document Mapping Data table was developed, which

represented where the documents were located, advantage(s) and disadvantage(s), document

information, and the Interview Question derived from the document (Table 6). The advantages

and disadvantages categories allowed the researcher to further analyze the content of the data by

determining and documenting established meanings and contributions of each document.

Table 6

Document Mapping Data

Document	Location	Advantage	Disadvantage	Results	Interview Question(s)
Application	Online-Admissions tab	Required for Admission	No Student Veteran Category. No option to upload DD214	Admitted or Denied	IQ 1

Document	Location	Advantage	Disadvantage	Results	Interview Question(s)
Testing requirement	Online-Admissions, Adult Learner. Military tab	States required testing	Not clear on attempts, reapplication	Meet testing requirement or denied admission	IQ 1, IQ 2
Adult Learner	Online-Adult Learner	Clear definition, resources stated	Not distributed to all new student veterans	New student veterans are not aware of services	IQ 1, IQ 4, IQ 5
2016 Orientation dates	Online-Orientation	Details requirement	Geared for transitioning from HS to college	Traditional orientation. Student veteran transition services not given	IQ 1, IQ 5
Transfer requirement	Online-undergrad admission	States required official transcripts needed	No definition of how previous credits are awarded. No option to upload DD214	New students may receive transfer credit	IQ 5, IQ 7
Military Credit	Online-admissions, military credit	Directs student veteran to submit DD214	No direction how/where to submit DD214	Delay in student veteran being awarded credits	IQ 6, IQ 7
Welcome Student Veteran	Online-link from main page to Veteran Affairs	Contact information and important links	No welcome from university administrator	Welcome is centralized from the Veteran Affairs office	IQ 1, IQ 3, IQ 5, IQ 8
Academic Support Resources	Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) lobby	Detailed contact information for academic support	Not distributed to all student veterans	Not all student veterans receive the same	IQ 2, IQ 4

Document	Location	Advantage	Disadvantage	Results	Interview Question(s)
		services		information	
Tutoring for student veterans	Online-military tab, ACT	Specific details on how to receive services	Not distributed to all student veterans.	58% of student veteran participants knew of this service	IQ 1, IQ 4,
Military Bill of Rights	Online-Military tab	Detailed services which should be delivered	Not distributed to new student veterans. No university wide policy.	No student veteran participants knew of this	IQ 1, IQ 5, IQ 6
GI Bill benefits	Student Veterans Center-flyer	Detailed information regarding GI Bill application for funds	Not found on website	Student veterans do not all receive the same information	IQ3, IQ 5, IQ 8
"Military Friendly" recognition	Online-In the Know	Recruiting and marketing tool to attract veterans	No definition of the term, not used university wide.	Veterans are drawn to the term, misalignment in perception and services	IQ 1, IQ 3

Findings-Qualitative Interviews

Twelve student veterans answered in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured interview questions (Appendix C), with follow-up questions regarding all aspects of the student veterans participants transfer, admission, and progression process as they matriculated to the college campus.

The researcher followed interview protocol asking each participant the same interview questions in the same order, to enhance credibility, and validity. For the purpose of confidentiality, the researcher assigned each participant an identification pseudonym ("Student

veteran participant #1"). Additionally, the researcher kept a detailed field journal notebook to provide evidence of the methods and eliminate possible bias.

Interviews from Student Veterans

Research Question:

(1) What are the perceptions of student veterans towards Peach University?

The researcher explored the connection, or reason why the student veteran selected Peach University as their college choice. By eliciting information about the circumstances that brought the student veteran to Peach University, the researcher could potentially explain some perceptions about the institution. All twelve participants were connected to the local military base by their service and their subsequent exit from military service, or had a spouse serving at the local base. Each of the twelve participants reported they had prior knowledge of Peach University before they began their admissions process. The participants reported that they had heard of the institution or knew someone who attended Peach University. These responses indicated a theme of prior knowledge about Peach University. Additionally, three of the twelve participants (25%) received information from Peach University's satellite campus located on the military installation, prior to their admissions process (Table). All student veteran participants had exposure to Peach University.

Table 7

Decision to Attend Peach University

Student Veteran	Exit From Local Military Base	Family	Prior Knowledge Of College	Received Information
1		X	X	
2	X		X	

Student Veteran	Exit From Local Military Base	Family	Prior Knowledge Of College	Received Information
3		X	X	X
4	X		X	
5	X		X	
6	X		X	
7	X		X	X
8	X		X	
9	X		X	
10		X	X	
11	X		X	X
12	X		X	

Response to the Application and Admission Process

All twelve student veteran participants had been out of high school for at least 5 years when they applied for admission to Peach University. Four participants (33%) used the term "easy" or "simple" to describe the application process, while the other eight (67%) described having no issues with the application part of the admission process. However, all twelve participants stated there were inconsistent instructions and/or information on the steps necessary to gain admission once the initial application was completed. Three participants (25%), Student Veteran #2, #8, #9, stated Peach University was their first college experience. Five participants (42%), Student Veteran #2, #5, #6, #7, #10, stated Fall 2015 was their first semester at Peach University. Combined, seven of twelve participants (58%) were first time college students and/or first semester at Peach University (Table 8).

Table 8

Semesters at Peach University

Student Veteran	1st	2nd - 4th	5 or more
1			X
2*	X		
3		X	
4			X
5	X		
6	X		
7	X		
8*		X	
9*			X
10	X		
11			X
12			X

* 1st College Experience

    The student veteran participants in their interviews revealed the application was simple, but the admissions process was more challenging and they experienced some delays. Specifically, student veteran participants #1, #4, #5, #7, and #12 stated they had difficulty connecting with an advisor to complete registration for courses, a necessary step to complete the admission process.

    Each student veteran participant commented on issues or time delays when admitted to Peach University. Student Veteran #12 expressed ease of the application process, but encountered difficulties as a transfer student, which caused him to consider leaving Peach University before the admission processes were completed. The degree of time, and/or difficulty with admittance

to the college ranged from a low of one month, to Student Veteran #5 stating it took eight

months to almost a year for admittance due to inconsistent and inaccurate admission information

processes given to the student veteran participant, according to his responses. The following

responses reflected Research Question (1).

      "Admissions has a tendency to automatically assume that because you're
listed as a veteran that you're an out-of-state student. So a lot of times they
automatically code you as out of state, and charge you for out-of-state tuition,
when you are from Georgia, or that even though you've been out of the military
for 3 or 4 years, but you've spent that time in Georgia, and you've established
residency, but they still code you as out of state. I think that is a huge problem
with getting admitted."
(Student veteran participant #1, November 11, 2015, p. 7)

      "Some parts of the application easy. Finding out what I needed was not so
easy. The school said this, the VA said this, confusion and running around, back
and forth to different offices. I think, being that typical Army guy, if they
would've said 'Here's a checklist, this is what you need to do', I would have been
able to go boom, boom, boom, boom. Which seems like every time I finished one
thing and brought it to them, like, Okay, now, well you forgot to go, and you
have to go do this to finish that, I'm like, I could've had all that done, brought it to
you and I think it would've been a bit more streamlined if there was a list.
Honestly, it was probably almost eight months to a year process to actually get in
the school."
(Student veteran participant #5, November 12, 2015, p. 4)

      "Peach University actually does a pretty good job. I think my wife actually
handled a lot of my application stuff. She works at a college so she was able to
help me do a lot of the application process. Once I got accepted and then got e-
mails saying, 'This is your academic advisor.' I called about 40 times, never got
an answer, and I finally just walked into the building one day and they're like,
'Yeah, she's in Europe for three weeks on vacation.' If you're assigned somebody
and actually invite you to come in, as an incoming student who is trying to get
everything set up, it's frustrating if they are not there. I think the best thing about
Peach University right now is their Veterans Affairs office downstairs, because
you can go in there anytime. They took care of everything once I was accepted
into Peach University,"
(Student veteran participant #7, November 13, 2015, p. 2-4)

      "One of the things that comes to mind, the freshman seminar that I had to go
through, it really seems geared towards students exiting high school, and I
understand that, but being such a large adult learner and student veteran
population here it'd be nice to have something a little different, more geared

towards us than that. Most of the stuff they teach us is habits that were already established in the military. I remember going to the ROAR, the orientation and talking to some of the representatives that were there at the time, talking about the veterans."
(Student veteran participant #8 November 13, 2015, p. 4-5)

"I had to take a freshman learning course. At the time I think I was thirty years old, I believe, I think. I was sitting in this class with a bunch of people right out of high school and the class teaches you, how to make sure that you use your tuition assistance for school and not for crap and how to make sure you got time set aside for your courses and stuff. Because not less than a year before I was in charge of a combat platoon where we were going back and forth through a combat zone in a convoy with a whole lot of responsibility and now you are sitting in this class. It was a course that I had to pay for.
(Student veteran participant #9 November 13, 2015, p. 9)

"Application was easy, I used the online option. This is my 3rd school so it's not my first time applying to college. I applied as a transfer student, that took a little bit more to get admitted. It wasn't clear what was next, what I needed. Some problems transferring credits, but everyone in the Student Veteran Center was helpful. They helped me with where to go. The transfer for veterans is probably, if you really, probably like broke it down statistically and looked at it, that's probably the number one reason why veterans don't graduate college, it's because of transcript, excuse me, transfer credits. I almost dropped out of school!"
(Student veteran participant #12 November 16, 2015, p. 3-4, p. 12)

During the application and admission process, the participants reported interacting with administrative and support staff from Peach University as they transitioned on to campus, and were exposed to policies from the institution. The interaction ranged from emails, phone calls, to in-person conversations. All twelve student veteran participants, at some point in their interviews, stated the Student Veterans Center provided the needed assistance and guidance to complete the application and admission process.

Student veteran participants did not all receive the same information, in part, due to what admission classification they were initially given, or if information was delivered through a method of transmission on-line. Interview question (5) (Appendix C) asked participants to tell the researcher about any information sessions they experienced or any written information they

received. The following responses reflect the student veterans' experiences with information

sessions.

> "The biggest information sessions I've seen are coming out of the VA office, and that's as far as the university going over any of their expectations with me, that never happened. I think the most confusing part is the add/drop policy. Because the add/drop policy for people using GI Bill benefits is different than the university policy. I think that while it's explained in the Veterans Affairs Office here on campus, it could be explained a little bit better from the university. I don't think the university addresses that issue at all with any of the students."
> (Student veteran participant #1 November 11, 2015, p. 7-8)

> "I cannot recall one policy that I was read, or that I received, or that was emailed to me. I can't recall a single one. I honestly don't think it happened at all. The only thing I did learn was when I was changing from a business major to a psychology major is that our physical education requirement isn't needed because we're veterans. That's the only thing I learned."
> (Student veteran participant #3 November 12, 2015, p. 5)

From the interview data collected, student veteran participants consistently said they neither

attended, nor received any value from the mandatory academic information sessions. Student

veteran participant #8 attended a ROAR session for new freshmen, and student veteran

participant #12 attended an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) session (Table 9).

Transfer Credits Awarded

Interview question (6) (Appendix C) was used by the researcher to ask participants to discuss

their experiences when then they transferred credit to Peach University. The researcher inquired

specifically about transferred previously earned credits and military earned credits to their degree

plan.

Table 9

Information Sessions Pertaining to Student Veterans

Student Veteran	Attended in Person	Emails	Walk In to Student Veteran Center

Student Veteran	Attended in Person	Emails	Walk In to Student Veteran Center
1		X	X
2			X
3			
4			
5			X
6			
7			X
8	X (ROAR)	X	
9		X	X
10		X	
11		X	
12	X (ADA services)	X	

All twelve participants stated the transfer policy was unclear and that they were uncertain why some credits transferred and others did not. Ten participants (83%) stated as the student with transferring credit, they felt they should have had some say in where the credits were awarded or have an understanding why credit awards were decided. Additionally, each participant expressed some level of frustration with the amount of credits received from previous courses and/or military experience.

The average number of semester hours transferred toward a degree were 25.4, with all the participants receiving some credits (Table 10), even though Student Veteran #2, #8, and #9 were first time college students. All of the student veteran participants stated they did not receive as

many Joint Service Transcript (JST) credits (military service experience counted towards

semester hour credits) as they believed they should have.

Table 10

Semesters Hours Transferred to Degree Plan

Student Veteran	10 or less	11 to 29	30 or more
1	3		
2		19	
3			39
4		25	
5			36
6			60
7		29	
8	3		
9		23	
10		15	
11		29	
12		24	

University and Classroom Environment

The term "Veteran Friendly" was advertised or stated in printed documents, and Peach

University was recognized with an award from Victory Media's 2016 Military Friendly Schools

list ("In the Know", November 2015). The researcher explored the participants' perceptions of

Peach University as a veteran friendly intuition.

Five of the twelve student veteran participants (42%) stated there were no clear definitions of what a "Veteran Friendly" institution was defined as at Peach University. All twelve of the participants suggested the term "Veteran Friendly" should be used more throughout the institution to assist student veterans' in the transition. Interview responses reinforced the perception that the Student Veteran Center was recognized as the place to go to resolve issues. The following responses represent how the student veteran viewed the term "veteran friendly." These responses reflect Research Question (1).

> "I think it's real nice that they have that label, but in practicality, I don't see a whole lot of that. All that really means to me is that they accept the GI Bill money. There's notations in all the syllabi about if you have learning disabilities, or whatever, to go through the office, the disability office. But you know, it's Veteran's Day today, and we're military friendly, but we're still in school. There seems to be a lot of disconnect between what the administration says, 'We're military friendly,' and the teachers who are supposed to be reporting about people using benefits in the class, or the understanding that certain veterans don't do well with assigned seating. I don't see the university going out of its way to recognize days that, I'll say normal society, for Memorial Day or for Veteran's Day, I don't see the university outside of the Veteran's Affairs Office, doing anything to recognize those holidays, and that's kind of concerning for me, especially when they say that they're a military-friendly university." (Student veteran participant #1 November 11, 2015, p.4)

> "It depends…what their definition of veteran friendly is. When it comes to being in the institution, yes, it was very easy to get all my paperwork done as a veteran and turn in my GI Bill information, and things to that effect. I don't really see a lot of veteran stuff outside of this hallway, the veterans' center, and the ROTC building." "I do feel that female veterans like myself are a lot more underrated. A lot of people don't think to even ask if I'm a veteran, or they don't highlight that females are in the military as well."
> (Student veteran participant #3 November 12, 2015, p.4, p.10)

> "What does veteran friendly mean? To me, well, what it means is that it allows me to, which is something that is very important to me as a veteran, to be able to bring my prior military experience, and previous different courses or college time that I may have completed throughout my career. It allows me to bring all those credits with me and be allocated properly for my degree process."
> (Student veteran participant #6 November 13, 2015, p.4)

"Veteran friendly...I got to know the definition of the statement first. I mean, what are they considering? What do they consider a veteran-friendly environment? Wal-Mart could be considered a veteran-friendly environment. For the simple fact that, if you look at, they say, 'Well, we have access for handicapped.' Well, every place has access for handicapped. I guess it's a hard question, because unless you know what their definition is of "veteran friendly." (Student veteran participant #7 November 13, 2015, p. 5)

"I think, you'd first start to look at what guidelines make them a veteran military…friendly or I don't know what the check box is for them to be that. I know that the head lady in the VA office here, Miss Kathye, she is phenomenal. She, I think and four individuals who really run the whole department there. School wise, teacher wise I mean I've had to like, I had one bad experience with my service dog. I didn't have a vest on it (service dog)" and a person from the institution (changed by researcher to protect identifiable information) "ended up telling me I didn't deserve a service dog, like I didn't need a service dog! I was extremely embarrassed, it was terrible!" (Student veteran participant #12 November 16, 2015, p.6)

Seven of the twelve student veteran participants (58%) in their interviews mentioned transition assistance; specifically guidance and support services, for military members as they arrived on campus were needed. Two recommended transition services mentioned from the student veteran participant interviews were a veteran specific orientation and a designated counselor/advisor for student veterans, as ways to ease the transition process.

"I think my circumstance may have been a little different from the norm in the fact that I got to sit down with the dean and figure out all of my transfer credits, and how it was going to be processed, and what department accepted what, and which departments did not accept which classes. Definitely, for the student veterans that don't get a sit down experience, they definitely should. Veterans' should be able to sit down with an advisor."
(Student Veteran #4 November 12, 2015 p. 13-14)

"I think because I'm older and have been to other colleges, sometimes the transcripts were the biggest pains. If they had it where you came in and sat down with a counselor and they told you what website to go to, that would have been a big help."
(Student veteran participant #5 November 12, 2015 p. 5)

"Getting acclimated, and it's just simple questions, but I think if you're a student veteran coming in, there should be an orientation for us because it's a

culture shock. Coming into some of these classrooms, with some of the kids that are there nowadays." (p. 6)
"I think one thing that would really help as it falls under policies, it falls under everything you do for the university, as if you actually had an academic advisor that was strictly for veterans, so they could come in and say, 'Well, you've taken 60 course hours throughout your military career, let's combine them and see. Okay, well right now you're really strong in path A or you could go to path B.' Whatever two paths they are, so some suggestions, but whatever you'd like to do, so they could help tailor and mold." (p. 12)
"A lot of different events could trigger veterans. An academic advisor for veterans would be a great thing, and I guess could maybe educate teachers, and instructors on trigger related stuff.
(Student veteran participant #7 November 13, 2015 p.14)

"That's what I mean with that element of military transitioning in the school…
but I really think if the university offered just a class, and then have the VA pay for it. Have a class that's offered to them that sets them up to learn how to manage college and fit it in into their schedule. That'd be the best thing you could do. I honestly probably even make it mandatory, but have it as a completion thing not something that's graded."
(Student veteran participant #12 November 16, 2015 p. 15-16)

Twelve of twelve student veteran participants stated education was a continual part of their duty, and they received professional development provided by the military. Several student veteran participants discussed their experiences with military education compared to civilian education, stating they believed there were differences from their perspective. Additionally, all twelve student veteran participants expressed reminiscences of their military experience, military education, describing their service as something they are proud of.

"Coming to college was a transitioning point for me. I had military education and training which was different."
(Student veteran #8 November 13, 2015 p.9)

"The Army made me a better woman…as a female many people don't even think of me as a veteran. Student body are not aware of sacrifices soldiers make. I think the only issue transitioning from military to civilian is I am not wearing my uniform, a huge disconnect now. Are other vets feeling the same way? I say it because I am still proud of my service."
(Student veteran #11, November 13, 2015 p. 10-11)

"I think one of the biggest challenges us veterans' have is transitioning from the learning style in the military to learning style in a college. Like a military school consists of whenever you get sent to a school ... Like I got sent to a course and it was a month long. School is your job, you go to that school from six o'clock in the morning to five o'clock at night and, you are just constantly hitting the same subject over, and over, and over again, until it is beaten into you and it's ingrained. And then coming to college, students are showing up late, faculty showing up late, things getting cancelled and it's being stretched out over an entire semester of what if you were in the military would be condensed down into a two week school, if that." (Student veteran participant #9 November 13, 2015 p.13-14)

Classroom environment, specifically the physical layout of desks, and where the door was located was a concern for six of twelve (50%) student veteran participants. Student veteran participants #1, #4, #5, #7, #9, and #12 stated the physical layout of the classroom, being able to see the door, and not having assigned seating, allowed them to adjust to the learning environment sooner and focus on the educational experience instead of the seating arrangements. Eleven of twelve student veteran participants (92%) stated they had been deployed, with several stating they had multiple deployments. Student veteran participants stated their prior deployment experiences could affect their classroom focus.

"I have difficulties in large groups. I am one of those disabled veterans, but I don't broadcast it. I just try to find a spot in the classroom where I feel comfortable or where it seems like a smaller class and I deal with it. It is just the mass. You will get that with a lot of combat vets. My grades are a little lower in large classes, but I don't know if there is any real correlation or not".
(Student veteran participant #9 November 13, 2015 p.7-8)

Data collected from the interviews with student veteran participants revealed part of the transition to college was the realization of a cultural shift, which both involves the mode of instruction and the level of expected focus necessary for learning. Five of twelve student veteran participants (42%) mentioned lack of focus, and disrespect for the learning environment and/or professor from their younger, non-veteran student classmates, made it hard to relate to them. Formal transition services from the institution and mentoring from fellow student veterans to

new student veterans to assist in the transition process were mentioned by seven of the twelve

student veteran participants (58%) as a way to facilitate the veteran as they matriculate to

campus. Formal transition services offered on college campuses are established at less than 37%

of institutions, according to Soldier to Student 2 (McBain, Cook, Kim, & Snead, 2012). There is

no unique admission process or category for student veterans at Peach University.

    The results from the interview data revealed all twelve participants had prior knowledge of

Peach University before their application process, which may have influenced their perception of

the institution. Additionally, during, and throughout their transition process on to campus, all

participants interacted with administrators, and/or staff, which further developed their

perceptions. The data results revealed participants viewed Peach University as an institution,

which had established a reputation with the military community and had easy access for

application. Five of twelve student veteran participants (42%) stated there was no clear

definition of veteran friendly, with student veteran participants #1, #3, and #12 stating beyond

the Student Veteran Center, their perception was they did not see a veteran friendly campus.

This analysis directly answered Research Question (1).

Research Question:
(2) What are Peach University's written documents pertaining to student veterans?

    The printed documents advertise the university with an award from Victory Media's 2016

Military Friendly Schools list ("In the Know", November 2015) as a place to serve veterans. In

order to gain recognition for this award, school administrators' answered over 100 questions in

10 categories. The following statements were in a newsletter sent out to the staff and faculty at

Peach University.

"Peach University has again been designated a 2016 Military Friendly School. A new Military Service Center on main campus to better serve soldiers/veterans and their dependants who are enrolled." "We have staff members, professors and physical space specifically designed for our military students"- Provost.
(ENV. 3-In the Know, November 6, 2015. Document Log, Table 4)

"Post secondary institutions earning the 2016 Military Friendly School award have exceptionally strong programs for transitioning service members and spouses. Our Military Friendly Schools are truly aligning their military programs and services with employers to help students translate military experience, skills and training into successful careers after graduation." D. Nichols, Victory Media.
(ENV. 3-"In the Know" November 6, 2015. Document Log, Table 4)

The admission and application process required each participant to use or adhere to established university policy as the veteran transitioned from military member to college student. The testing policy document for admittance to Peach University states:

"To gain admission to Peach University you may be required to pass an entrance exam. The type of exam you are required to take will depend on how many college hours you are transferring in as well as how many years you have been out of school. COMPASS: This test is required for any prospective student who has not gained 30 or more college hours and has been out of high school for more than 5 years" (TR. 2-Transfer Tab, online "What Credit Transfers" September 29, 2015. Document Log, Table 4)

New university applicants are classified as Traditional Students, Adult Learners, or Transfer Students. The student veteran identifier comes later after enrollment. Peach University's policies states that any student over 23 years of age, are classified as an Adult Learner, and the institution allocated resources to foster success. The following document specifically highlights military/veterans and defines them as Adult Learners.

"Adult Learners are defined as any student age 23 and older… Peach University has allocated resources exclusively for the Adult Learner. Below are a few resources designed exclusively for the adult learner… Military/veterans (hyperlink)- Peach University is proud to be recognized as a military friendly school."
(ENV. 2-Adult Learner Tab, online "Adult Learner-GOAL" September 29, 2015. Document Log Table 4)

Although (ENV. 2, Document Log Table 4) outlines resources available for Adult Learners

including Military/Veterans, and highlighting Peach University as a military friendly school, the

policy documents did not state that student veterans would automatically be classified as Adult

Learners based on their military service.

> "We understand the needs of adult learners are often different than the needs of
> the traditional student who is fresh out of high school."
> (ENV. 2-Adult Learner Tab, online "Adult Learner-GOAL" September 29, 2015.
> Document Log Table 4)

Peach University's documents highlighted the importance of mandatory academic

information sessions, transfer credit evaluation policy documents, advising and counseling

sessions, especially for new students on campus. The following document states how new Non-

traditional and Transfer students on campus will gain information.

> "Non-Traditional and Transfer Students- at your one-day ROAR session, you
> will learn about campus resources and services, as well as meet with your
> academic advisor in order to register for your first semester." "Students
> transferring in who have completed thirty or more hours should take the Transfer
> Student on-line orientation" (REG. 1-Online Orientation ROAR "Orientation
> Dates" September 29, 2015. Document Log, Table 4)

Additionally, Peach University's written documents, SVC 4, SVC 6, and SVC 11(Document

Log, Table 3) for student veterans highlighted information sessions, veteran resources, and

support services such as advising and tutoring as part of the transition process. The following

statements add to the support documents from the university.

> The Military Student Bill of Rights document states:
> "Appropriate, accessible academic and student support services should be
> available"
> (ENV.1-Military Tab, online "Military Student Bill of Rights" September 29,
> 2015. Document Log, Table 4)
>
> The Welcome Letter to Veterans document from the Director, Academic Center
> for Tutoring (ACT) states:
> "Based on my military experience and current research on soldiers in academics, I
> have prepared my tutors to work with you to meet your expectations"

(ENV. 4-Military Tab, online "Welcome from Director of Academic Center for Tutoring (ACT)" September 29, 2015. Document Log, Table 4)

The university emphasized in their printed literature the importance of mandatory academic information sessions to holistically address the developmental needs of new Peach University students. The following registration document states how Peach University will assist in transition.

 "We aim to facilitate the successful academic and personal transition of new students and their families into the Peach University community…participants will develop an understanding and appreciation of the academic, developmental and social opportunities available, as well as knowledge of campus and community resources."
(REG 3-Online Orientation "Mission" September 29, 2015. Document Log, Table 4)

Transfer Credit Policy

Transfer policy documents (TR1-TR6, Document Log, Table 4) were mentioned six times in the document analysis. These documents covered the definition of transfer credits, what courses are transferable, other sources of credit such as military experience, and transfer course equivalency information. Peach University's transfer policies are university policies, which pertain to all students attempting to bring in previously earned credits from other institutions, not only student veterans. The following statements represent transfer policy documents from Peach University.

"The university makes every effort to transfer credit for academic work completed at other institutions. In general, courses completed at a regionally accredited college or university will transfer"
(TR. 1-Transfer Tab, online "Transfer Students" September 29, 2015. Document Log, Table 4)

"Submit an official DD214, DD295, or military transcript for evaluation of possible credit. A maximum of 21 semester hours may be awarded for 12

consecutive months or more of active duty service. In addition, Wellness
requirements will be waived"
(TR. 3-Transfer Tab, online "Other Sources of Credit" September 29, 2015.
Document Log, Table 4)

Documents from Peach University highlighted Joint Service Transcript (JST) credits could

be awarded for the veterans prior military service, and directed participants to several locations,

including a federal website, to gain access to the potential credits. In the transfer credit

document, TR. 1-"Transfer Students" (Document Log, Table 4) the statement "will transfer" was

made concerning courses taken at regionally accredited institutions. In the transfer document

TR. 3-"Other Sources of Credit" (Document Log, Table 4), the statement "may be awarded" was

made concerning military credits. Military experience may be awarded in academic credits with

a DD214 form. The DD214 form represented the veteran's military job record and formal time

of service document. In order for the student veteran to gain academic credit from their military

service, they were required and instructed to send their DD214 form to the admission

department. However, in TR. 3-"Other Sources of Credit" (Document Log, Table 4) no

instructions were given to send the DD214 form.

The analysis of policy documents covered specific topics such as admission, application,

transfer policy, and testing. The institutional documents from these topics were the same

documents for all students, and were not veteran specific. Parts of the admission, and application

documents varied from waiving fees for veterans to turning in additional supporting documents

such as a DD214 for veterans who sought to gain admission. Financial Aid for student veterans

was reported as GI Bill funding, and required additional documents, application, and

classification for students who used GI Bill funds to pay for classes.

Research Question:

(3)   *To what extent are there differences between what student veterans perceive is*

offered and what is offered in the written documents?

There are various relationships between documents and the perception of student veteran participants. Peach University had an established reputation with veterans prior to enrollment based in part with the proximity and long history with the local military instillation. Additionally, Peach University prided itself on being veteran friendly, which was further enhanced by proximity to the military base. All twelve student veteran participants stated they had prior knowledge of Peach University, and knew a fellow veteran who attended Peach University. This relationship was strengthened because the veteran knew other veterans who had attended, which contributed in a positive way to the student veterans' perception of the institution.

Relationships between perceptions and documents regarding the application and admission processes differed in several ways. First, documents stated Peach University was a veteran friendly institution, with exceptional programs for transition of veterans onto campus, and after degree completion ENV. 3-"In the Know" (Document Log Table 4). However, there was no veteran unique orientation program at admission as student veterans transferred to campus. Veterans' experiences, such as deployments and multiple colleges attended, require a variety of services not provided to traditional students. Results from the interviews suggested student veterans perceptions were; services to student veterans should be tailored to their needs and experiences as Adult Learners, not Traditional Students.

Was there consistency in the printed documents regarding testing requirements and transfer credits awarded compared to what the tests the student veterans were required to take, and what credits were awarded for their degree plan? As an Adult Learner, the testing policy

requirements, and mandatory information policy sessions are different from the non-traditional student. Adult Learner document TEST 3-"Other Sources of Credit" (Document Log, Table 4) give the Square One reentry testing requirements for Adult Learners. Document TEST 5-"Adult Square One" (Document Log, Table 4) states the testing requirements for Adult Learners and redirected or linked the student veteran to the military link, which connected to the home web page for the Student Veteran Center for specific assistance. Peach University documents did not have specific testing requirements for student veterans; they are classified in the admission process as Traditional Students, Adult Learners or Transfer Students. This ambiguity resulted in student veteran participants being required to produce both an official high school diploma (not required for Adult Learners) and take the COMPASS assessment test as well. The awarding of academic credits for prior military service varied among student veteran participants and required the veteran to submit a DD214 document in the admissions process.

Adult Learners were defined and a connection was made to the veteran population, highlighting a veteran friendly campus ENV. 2-"Adult Learner-GOAL" (Document Log Table 4). Additionally, a registration document REG. 3-"Mission Statement" (Document Log, Table 4) emphasized the institution would facilitate the successful academic and personal transition of new students. However, interviews with student veteran participants revealed five of twelve (42%) stated Peach University had no defined definition of the term veteran friendly. Second, seven of twelve (58%) of student veteran participants stated they would have benefitted from transition services specific to veterans needs, stating there were no unique transition services for them. Finally, all student veterans in this study met the age criteria to be Adult Learners, yet none of them knew of the classification, simplified admissions process, and extended support services available for Adult Learners Peach University offered.

All interview participants stated they viewed the Student Veterans Center as a place where they could get clarification of policies and support. Each participant referenced being redirected back to the Student Veteran Center (SVC), commenting how the SVC provided guidance, assistance and direction. These statements are significant in several ways: First, the Student Veteran Center (SVC) does not admit students, and according to policy documents, has no discussion or influence on how student veterans are admitted to Peach University. Student veterans appear to view the SVC as a place to go to resolve issues, receive information, and a place that is most like what they are familiar with based on a military culture.

Second, student veterans' responses suggested they are used to structure, and lists; this structure produced a strong sense of discipline and maturity in the veteran. Student Veteran #5's response after one day of being shuffled from office to office, suggested a need for a checklist. Student veteran participants self reported that they would take steps to resolve issues or be proactive to avert potential issues. The admission documents analyzed did not provide a list(s) and clear directions for veterans as they transitioned to campus, but covered topics such as: Honors application, general degree information and deadlines, military forms, and Adult Learner resources (ADM. 2-15, Document Log Table 3).

Support Services such as tutoring for veterans and ADA services are readily available, however many of the student veteran participants did not participate in the available services. As an example seven of the twelve student veteran participants (58%) said they were aware of the free tutoring services for veterans, but to date none of the student veterans had used the support services available outside the Student Veteran Center.

The Student Veteran Center provided access and communication. In other areas, such as transferring of credit, and lack of veteran specific orientation, all twelve student veteran

participants suggested Peach University's policies made part of the admission process more challenging. Receiving incomplete admission information, unclear transfer credit information, and not having an advisor specifically for veterans were a few ways the student veteran participants stated the admission process was challenging. New student veterans merging with traditional students just out of high school for orientation, not connecting with an academic advisor, the add/drop policy for students using GI Bill funds, and transfer of credits were additional areas where written policy documents and services delivered differed based on interview information. This analysis directly answered research question (3), highlighting the various relationships between documents and student veteran perceptions.

Summary

The researcher examined all written policy documents and printed material pertaining to student veterans at Peach University. The process involved a content analysis of 78 documents and printed material collected from Peach University's key offices on campus, and the researcher also conducted open-ended interviews with twelve participants.

Themes emerged from the document analysis and the analysis of interview transcripts, which provided examples of differences between stated policy and student veterans' perceptions of actual services provided. Student veteran participants stated there appeared to be a lack of a definition and campus wide policy for the term "Veteran Friendly" and some professors lacked knowledge of a veteran friendly campus. The open-ended interviews collected data from the student veteran participants which suggested the on-line application for admission to Peach University was simple; however, necessary information to complete the admission process such as a checklist of mandatory academic sessions, orientation, and awarding of transfer credits was inconsistent, with no unique transition and orientation services for veterans. All twelve

participants aging in range from 25-46 years old fell under the Adult Learner identification classification, were identified as Adult Learners according to the documents, but were unaware of the classification and the services supporting Adult Learners. Support services were available but veterans' use of these were limited.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary

With the passage of the Post-9/11 Veterans Assistance Act 2008, combined with the reduction of the number of service members from two extended wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (2011-2015), veterans attend institutions of higher education in record numbers. Some researchers and scholars suggested an increase of up to 20% of veterans on college campuses by 2020. Additionally, veterans tend to seek admission to institutions with which they were familiar, knew fellow service members who attended, and institutions that were connected to their military bases. The transition from military service, a disciplined and mission-focused culture, to the civilian lifestyle and college campus was challenging for some veterans if services were not available at higher education institutions to facilitate the transition.

A qualitative study was conducted with two data points, in three steps. First, a document analysis of 78 Peach University documents, and printed material pertaining to student veterans was conducted. From the document analysis the researcher developed eight interview questions. Second, twelve student veteran participants were interviewed using open-ended questions. The researcher then examined to what extent there were differences between printed documents and student veterans perceptions of Peach University as they transitioned. Through this study, the researcher added to the body of knowledge on student veterans in higher education.

The following research questions guided this study:

(1) What are the perceptions of student veterans towards Peach University?

(2) What are Peach University's written policies pertaining to student veterans?

(3) To what extent are there differences between what student veterans perceive is offered and what is offered in the written documents?

Major Findings

The results of this qualitative study revealed nine major findings:

(1) Student veteran participants had prior exposure to Peach University.

(2) There were no consistent demographics of student veteran participants.

(3) Peach University does not identify student veterans as a unique admissions category.

(4) There was no unique admissions process for student veterans.

(5) There was no reported specific orientation for student veterans.

(6) Support services were available but have limited use by student veterans.

(7) The admission process was inconsistent and confusing to student veteran participants.

(8) Participants perceived some professors, and others lacked knowledge of what constituted a veteran friendly campus.

(9) Student Veteran Center provided access and communication.

Conclusions

1. Conclusion: A place of choice.

Peach University is a place of choice for veterans. The results from the interview data revealed student veteran participants viewed Peach University as an institution, which has established a reputation with the military community. All twelve student veteran participants confirmed having a prior knowledge of Peach University. The prior knowledge came from fellow military members or the education center at the local military base, and the student veteran participants made their decisions to enroll, in part, based on that prior knowledge.

Peach University's long established relationship with the local military may have also influenced the veterans' perception of the institution, and contributed to their decision to attend. Additionally, during, and throughout their transition process on to campus, student veteran participants interacted with staff, and/or administrators further developing their perceptions.

2. Conclusion: No clear definition of the term Veteran Friendly.

Five of the twelve student veteran participants (42%) said there was no clear definition of what "veteran friendly" at Peach University meant. The student veteran participants stated, outside the Student Veterans Center they did not perceive Peach University as a veteran friendly environment campus wide.

3. Conclusion: Student veterans represent a diverse group-Be proactive in addressing needs.

Student veterans were diverse in age, race, male or female, and had various levels of prior college experiences. They were alike in these ways; choice of career-military service, average time in service 10 years, had prior knowledge of Peach University, and wanted to complete a bachelor's degree for civilian career advancement. Diversity among students is common and not unique to student veterans. However, the institution can accept the diversity of student veterans as is allowing the uniqueness to play out naturally or they can invest and try to improve the quality of services delivered. To be proactive, and to take a stand philosophically and ethically to invest in services to support the recruitment and retention of student veterans would further benefit the institution as well as the student veteran. These differences could be further addressed by the university as they support veteran transition.

4. Conclusion: Admission process was inconsistent.

The admissions process for student veterans was inconsistent, with not all incoming student veterans receiving the same admission information and guidance during the application process. Data collected from twelve student veteran participants suggested no veteran specific admission or transfer procedures, which could represent a more streamlined admissions process for veterans. The first step in attending Peach University was the application and admissions process. Student veteran participants stated Peach University had easy access for application, but no defined admission and transition processes for veterans.

5. Conclusion: No unique veteran orientation.

No veteran unique orientation services were available at Peach University. Student veterans perceived they were poorly served by some admission and advising policies. From the analyses of 78 documents, there was no indication of any veteran specific process or orientation pertaining to student veterans. Peach University has an extensive traditional freshman admission

process, orientation, and registration services to facilitate the new traditional student on to campus. There is no defined, separate admission process or orientation for student veterans as they transition onto campus. In addition, five student veteran participants (42%) recommended an advisor specifically for veterans as they transition into campus.

Orientation was a requirement for admission and provides an avenue for valuable information, which was delivered to new students on campus. However, the data from interviews with student veteran participants suggested the experiences and needs of new student veterans as they transitioned to campus were significantly different from an 18 year old just out of high school.

6. Conclusion: Support services are available, limited use by student veterans.

Support services were available but were not being used by student veterans. However, student veterans are a group that need services and could benefit from the established existing services at Peach University. Seven of the twelve student veteran participants (58%) stated they were aware of tutoring services for veterans; however, none of the twelve student veteran participants had used the service to date. Enhancing communication and activities regarding established support services could better connect the student veteran with the existing services.

All student veteran participants interviewed attending Peach University had some degree of service related injury, with 67% of the sample population being severe enough to result in a medical retirement from the military. The percentage of student veterans on campus with injuries required awareness and adaptation on the part of the student, faculty, and the institution as a whole. These adaptations ranged from allowing the student veteran to sit in the back of the classroom, or where they can see the door, to ensuring student veterans are aware of ADA services, no-cost tutoring services, and that their service dogs were allowed on campus.

7. Conclusion: Some professors and others lacked knowledge of veteran friendly.

The perception from the student veteran participants was some professors, and other staff lacked the knowledge of a veteran friendly campus. The importance of staff and faculty to the student veteran was; faculty and staff are the face of the institution, often the only social contact student veterans had with the university. Six of the twelve student veteran participants (50%), stated the classroom environment, specifically the set up and seating arrangements in the classroom made them uncomfortable. Student veteran participants explained assigned seating in the front row by the professor, not being able to see the door, and large noisy classrooms such as lecture halls with 100 or more students, contributed to their perception of the institution.

8. Conclusion: Student Veteran Center provided access and communication.

By providing access and communication, the Student Veterans Center (SVC) was the place at Peach University where student veteran participants perceived they received guidance, support, and resolution of issues as they negotiated the transition process on to campus in pursuit of their educational goals. The interviews revealed student veteran participants indicated the Student Veterans Center was the single best resource Peach University provided for a "veteran friendly" campus. The Student Veterans Center was a place student veterans could walk in unannounced and receive assistance.

Discussion of Research Findings

Student veteran participants in this study were reminiscent of their past military duty, and reflect often on the military way of life. Wilson, Smith, Lee, and Stevenson, (2013) found student veterans sought the same sense of community and teamwork they were used to from the military culture when they chose a college. Additionally, Wilson et al. (2013) found veterans sought institutions of higher education they had exposure to, or knew a fellow veteran who had

attended. Wilson et al. (2013) and the researcher support the conclusion and Major Finding (1),

Peach University is a place where veterans seek admission because of exposure to the institution.

Million Records Project (Cate, 2014) used data from records and demographics of over

700,000 veterans who used their GI Bill to fund their education. Cate (2014) found data

established from 2009 records, when the Post 9/11 GI Bill was introduced, had not been fully

established by institutions. Inconsistent data collection of demographics, and reporting by

institutions regarding progress and graduation rates made it difficult to capture specific data from

veterans. Steele (2015) used a qualitative literature review to examine over 50 studies on

veterans in higher education; finding inconsistent data collection and reporting that made it

difficult to determine the demographics and success of veterans in higher education. Student

veteran participants in this study were diverse in age, military experience, and college

experience. The age ranged from 25-46 years old, with an average of over ten years of military

service prior to attending Peach University. Seven of twelve student veterans were either first

time college students and or in their first semester at Peach University. Five student veteran

participants had attended multiple colleges prior to Peach University. The researcher's findings

in Chapter IV support a diverse demographic veteran population at Peach University, reporting a

range of ages and college experiences. Demographic data of student veterans collected by the

researcher, and the existing research from Cate (2014) and Steele (2015) support the conclusion

and Major Finding (2), veterans at Peach University are demographically diverse. Graduation

rates of student veterans were not examined.

All twelve-student veterans in this study had prior knowledge of Peach University, stated the

application process was simple, but the admittance process into Peach University was not clearly

defined. From this study, the researcher found student veterans received different or incomplete

information on the next steps and requirements needed to complete the admission process.

Habley (2004) used a Meta-analysis method to combine statistical findings from 109 studies to identify academic and non-academic factors that affect retention. A key finding was early identification of special populations at transition to campus, which may be at risk.

Osborn (2013) found six of fourteen veterans (43%) stated military culture was very different from college culture; emphasizing veterans in transition need defined services. Findings from interviews of this study revealed; three student veteran participants (25%) were first time college students, all over 23 years of age, nine student veteran participants (75%) had some pervious college experience, with eight of twelve student veteran participants stating formal transition services could assist with their admissions process. From the results of Osborne (2014) study, a program (Veterans Alley), to assist new veterans in transition to campus was developed to address the support needed for transitioning veterans.

Aakre et al. (2013) investigated if pre-contact with a veteran prior to mandatory appointments increased retention and allowed participants to complete services. Aakre et al (2013) revealed when a reminder contact was given to a veteran before the mandatory service, both retention and completion rates increased. While this research did not specifically examine retention, it is a direct result of transition to campus; students' transition to campus, progress in courses, and retention keeps them attending.

Seven of twelve student veteran participants (58%) stated to the researcher a need for veteran specific admission and orientation processes. There was inconsistency in the admission process and in the documents due to which classification the student veteran was given; Traditional Student, Adult Learner, or Transfer Student. Some student veteran participants found the admission process confusing. Policy documents outlined what were needed for students to be

classified as a Student Veteran, however the Adult Learner classification often ran parallel, and all twelve participants fell under both classifications. Web documents were not user friendly. Student veteran participants stated, testing, advising, and the add/drop policy documents were inconsistent and unclear for student veterans, requiring a follow-up meeting or session for the new student veteran to complete that portion of admissions and to register for class.

The American Council on Education (ACE) study, Soldier to Student 2 (McBain, Cook, Kim, & Snead, 2012) collected qualitative survey data from 690 higher education institutions regarding institutional support and practices pertaining to veterans. McBain et. al (2012) revealed only 37% of institutions offer formal, defined transition services for veterans. Additionally, a streamlined admission process for veterans as they transition, and specifically for those who are deployed, was recommend to ease the admission process. Aakre et al. (2013), McBain et al. (2012), Osborne (2014), and the researcher support the conclusion and Major Findings; Peach University has no unique admission classification or processes for student veterans, and no unique student veteran orientation.

Support services are readily available throughout Peach University for student veterans. The results from this research suggested student veterans did not seek the available services. DiMaria (2006) examined barriers such as institutional transfer requirements, and prior economic status of the veterans may affect their transition and degree completion. This researcher did not explore socioeconomic status of the student veterans who participated, but did examine transfer credits awarded as part of the admissions process. Recognition of transfer credits for student veterans for prior learning was inconsistent.

DiMaria (2006) revealed barriers arose with awarding of credits to veterans due to multiple moves from base to base, often attending multiple colleges without earning a degree.

Interviewees from student veteran participants in this study suggested student veterans wanted advising and transfer assistance, to explain the awarded credits and direct the student veteran in the right academic path.

Plach and Sells (2013) used a mixed method approach to examine the occupational challenges of 30 combat veterans ranging in age from 20-29. The researchers revealed up to 60% of veterans returning to civilian life had some form of cognitive challenges. A key recommendation from Plach and Sells (2013) was defined reintegration strategies are key for veterans attending college, faculty and staff training awareness is necessary.

For this study, the researcher revealed a demographic of student veterans with injuries on campus. Eight of twelve student veteran participants (67%) attending Peach University had some injury, which was directly related to their military service. Only one student veteran participant, student veteran #12, used the Disabilities Services Office support programs. Selber and Chavkin (2014) developed a training model, which in part created opportunities for other units to take courses to become familiar with student veterans needs and to encourage student veterans to use the available services. DiMaria (2006), Plach and Sells (2013), Selber and Chavkin (2014), and the researcher support the conclusion and Major Finding (6); support services are available at Peach University but had limited use by student veterans.

Levy-Gigi et al. (2012) examined where the effects of Posttraumatic Stress (PTS) effected the brain, and which cognitive behavior therapy could increase time on task. The researcher in this study did not examine any diagnoses of PTS. However, 67% of student veterans in this study self-reported injuries, which retired them from their military service.

Santovec (2015) investigated how colleges were addressing veterans' needs. This qualitative study examined possible reasons for less support for veterans. One area that arose was women

veterans, suggesting a stigma that women veterans are not smart or up to the challenge of the military. The researcher did not examine support services along gender lines, but instead looked at the whole picture of veterans transitioning from military service to college campus. Two female veterans in this study, student veteran participant #3, and #11, made specific comments about support for women, and others not knowing they were a veteran. However, the results of this study do not support Santovec (2015) findings.

Tomar and Stoffel (2014) used phenomenology to examine the lived experiences of student veterans. A key outcome was in the transition to a new stage of life, reflection of their military life was still present. Additionally, influence of the university environment, specifically how the student veteran perceived the administration and professors viewed their prior military service affected their transition. Wilson et al. (2013) suggested professors and advisors are the face of the college to the student veteran. McBain et al. (2012) recommended raising faculty and staff sensitivity to unique issues faced by student veterans as a way for the institution to support transitioning veterans. The student veteran participants in this study suggested not having a clear definition of the term veteran friendly outside the Student Veteran Center, led to their perception professors lacked knowledge of a veteran friendly campus. Wilson et al. (2013), McBain et al. (2013) and the researcher support the conclusion and Major Findings (2) and (7); there is no institutional definition of veteran friendly, and some professors and others on campus may lack understanding of a veteran friendly campus.

According to the student veteran participants in this study, the Student Veterans Center provided the veteran with a sense of community, and culture they were familiar with, which contributed to their perception of Peach University in a positive manner. Napan and Elliot (2015) qualitative research examined military environment and structure veterans were familiar

with, and how factors and other veterans in support roles affected transition to civilian life.

Anderson (2013) revealed a need for veterans to have programs available such as mentors, the

availability of student veteran organizations, having centralized services, and maintain

communication may positively contribute to veterans' transition. Additionally, student veterans

reported from Livingston, Havice, Cawthon, and Fleming, (2011) they often sought social

support from fellow veterans in lieu of academic support from non-veterans or faculty members.

Several student veteran participants in this study stated the Student Veterans Center was the best

part of Peach University. Giving the student veterans a physical place, where other student

veterans can go to be around students with similar experiences, provides a needed resource for

student veterans and contributes to strengthening a positive perception of the institution.

Anderson (2013), Napan and Elliot (2015), Livingston et al. (2011) and the researcher support

the conclusion and Major Finding (8); the Student Veteran Center provides access and

communication.

Implications

As institutions of higher education continue to see an increase in student veterans on

campus, defining veteran friendly practices on campus, and establishing unique admission and

transfer services for this growing population will benefit these four key areas; (1) student

veterans, (2) administrators and faculty from the institution attended, (3) higher education in

general, (4) further research. Implications from these four key areas can improve educational

practices in the following ways; through development of unique services for student veterans,

support and reform educational practices to eliminate barriers and improve services delivered to

student veterans, and make an original contribution to the field of educational leadership by

leading the innovation to define and implement the term "veteran friendly" on campus as standard practice for higher education institutions.

Services to student veterans could improve from a focus on, and defined establishment of transition services, allowing them to move through the admission process more effectively, and begin course work sooner. In a broader since, institutions throughout higher education could improve services to the expected growth of 20% increase of the student veteran population, and increase the perception that veteran friendly services are available campus wide as they transfer, and not just a recruiting slogan. Further research could expand on the findings of this study in the following ways; (1) examining specifically admission and transfer processes across other populations, (2) veterans with injuries arriving on campus, (3) services for supporting veterans-which services are used effectively, (4) overall campus awareness of transitioning veterans needs. Specifically for Peach University, with its long history with, and close proximity to a local military base, the institution has an increased opportunity to continue to deliver and expand unique services for veterans, and the military community as they transition from active duty service to campus.

Recommendations
(1) Orientation for Veterans.

A Veteran Orientation would allow Peach University to deliver the needed transition and admission information in a succinct, specific manner to student veterans, giving required admission information in a setting, which could save time and resources, while promoting a "veteran friendly" experience. Student veterans arrive on campus with life experiences that are different from traditional freshmen. Interviews with student veteran participants in this study suggested they need more transition services and information on how the college system works

versus the military system with which they are familiar. Retention strategies increase when transition services are provided for veterans, and staff and faculty awareness of student veteran needs are discussed. This could be discussed at the department levels, and at the administrative levels.

(2) Institute a "Veteran" classification for military members.

A distinct new formal admission classification of "Veteran" should be created with a specific set of actions associated with this designation, separate from the Adult Learner classification. Even though the student veteran population at Peach University was approximately 8% of the student body, new veterans to campus would benefit significantly from the classification, and transition services once provided. The presentation of a DD214 would trigger an immediate referral (electronic list) to the Student Veteran Center, resulting in staff being notified of new student veterans' applications. One third (33%) of interview participants indicated they were not referred to the Student Veterans Center or told of its existence, in their initial application process. This recommendation could increase the likelihood that all incoming student veterans would be given the same needed information.

Once the veteran classification is formally implemented, a processing checklist and welcome packet should be given to each new student veteran. The Student Veterans Center, in coordination with the admissions department, should develop a checklist for student veterans to follow as they transition on to campus. This checklist should cover: (1) the application and DD214 attachment, (2) required Student Veteran Orientation, (3) required testing (COMPASS) or SAT/ACT information, (4) advising and counseling information, (5) financial aid options information. Additionally, the packet would have all admission requirements and services in

written form, with a detailed campus map, highlighting the key areas to complete the admissions and registration process.

 (3) Veterans acquaint themselves with services available on campus

 In addition to ADA services, free tutoring was available for student veterans, counseling and other support services are available. These services are established and are a ready resource for student veterans. However, there was limited use by the student veteran population in this study. Further examination should be conducted of services to understand which support services are being used, by the student body not only the student veterans, to establish how to best spend resources while improving services.

 (4) Student Veterans discuss needs with faculty and administrators

 Student veterans should take the opportunity to talk with staff, faculty, and administrators about their needs and potential concerns. These conversations should start at the Student Veteran Center with students gathering points of discussion. The next steps should include faculty and administrators hearing the concerns once a semester to address any potential issues or concerns. By having this open form of communication, the student veterans have an avenue to express concerns or share pertinent information with faculty to further open and increase communication and understanding of student veterans needs.

 (5) Define Veteran Friendly

 Peach University received the Military Friendly Award (Victory Media, 2015) multiple times, recognizing the institution as an institution friendly to veterans. The process to receive the recognition and award required compliance in ten different areas pertaining to student veteran services on campus. Peach University should use the award compliance requirements to define, and implement veteran friendly policies and specific actions on campus. Making this

information known to faculty, staff, and the student body should increase the entire institution's awareness of student veterans, and give a descriptive definition of what veteran friendly means at Peach University.

Defining veteran friendly with a descriptive definition campus wide should improve awareness of student veterans' needs, provide support for services, and help non-veteran students and faculty better understand the student veteran population. Defining the term should further support the alignment of documents and services delivered to student veterans, and prepare Peach University for the 20% expected growth in this population on campus. Peach University espouses itself as a "veteran friendly" institution where prior military members can be transformed during their college experience. This positive narrative should be a sign to many incoming student veterans that Peach University understands the veteran population, and unique student needs of military members.

A formal welcome from key stakeholders at Peach University for the veterans' page on the website, as well as a video recorded welcome could further emphasize Peach University as a friendly, welcoming place for veterans to attend college. This welcome should reinforce that the administration values the student veterans for their military service and their choice to attend Peach University. Additionally, the welcome should encourage the new student veteran population on campus by showing the same consistency to the veteran population as to other populations.

(4) Further research needed.

This study should be conducted with all students in an effort to examine admission policies and procedures across all populations. A comparative study of student veterans and non-student

veterans' admissions processes should be then conducted to determine if the issues with admission are consistent across the student body population or unique to student veterans.

Additionally, further research should be done to examine to what extent are student veterans arriving on campus with service related injuries, and how these injuries affect their learning. This study did not specifically aim to examine student veterans with injuries. However, 67% of the population interviewed arrived on campus with some form of service related injury. Further research and specific inquiry regarding how learning may be affected should make an educational contribution to address this growing condition among the veteran population.

(5) Interview Protocol Instrument

The interview protocol should be used at other institutions regionally and nationally to measure whether their student veteran responses were consistent with those from Peach University. If they were not similar, this could indicate Peach University may have some internal policy ailment issues to be addressed that were unique to the institution. If they were similar, this could indicate the experiences of student veterans as they transition were common across institutions.

(6) Best Practices Guide

The findings from this study should lead to development of a "best practices" guide for administration, staff, and faculty to better understand and serve the student veteran population as they transition on to campus, progress in courses, and complete their degree. Additionally, transition and admission practices of colleges and universities with military communities should be compared to non-military communities to examine what the differences were.

(7) Veterans and non-veterans use of Support Services

Examine to what extent student veterans and non-veterans use Student Support resources on campus. By examining to what extent services were used, and which services were used more effectively, Peach University should have a better understanding of which services to spend resources on and which services to eliminate. Specific, unique, services should be further developed to support and assist student veterans, while using resources more effectively.

(8) Advantages of proximity to a military base

Because of Peach University's long history and close proximity to a military base, examine to what extent the University perceives its advantages to recruit veterans from the military base. A few questions to consider: (1) Because of the established history and proximity to the local military base, does Peach University expect a certain amount of military members to attend? (2) What recruiting policies are in place to reach out to veterans, and their family members about the educational opportunities at Peach University? (3) When was the last time the recruiting strategies were updated, and is there a strategic plan in place for outreach to the military community? (4) What transfer and support services are in place to keep the student veteran attending Peach University for future semesters?

Dissemination

To address the broader audience, a presentation at either a regional or a national meeting of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) on "best practices" for the transition and admission of student veterans on to campus may have the result of expanding the results beyond Peach University to other institutions. This should potentially spark a national dialogue and bring awareness to student veteran admissions challenges. This should be significant as institutions across the country will be experiencing an increase in student veterans on campus, and less than 37% have formal transition services

available. In contrast, 100% of college campuses have some form of services for Traditional Students, assisting in their matriculation process. Formal, defined transitions services for veterans should further support a veteran friendly college campus.

For the local audience and immediate contribution to the educational leadership at Peach University, sharing the pertinent findings from this study with admissions, administrators, and faculty should be the first steps. Faculty and administrator awareness regarding student veteran needs should be raised through dissemination of the findings, highlighting some comments and suggestions from the student veteran participants. The admissions team should use this information to structure trainings and admission policies, which should benefit all populations at Peach University. Additionally, because of the admissions team's experiences, they should contribute significantly to a "best practices" guide, which may have positive implications on all populations of students as they are admitted to Peach University.

Concluding Thoughts

The existing research regarding student veterans indicated transition from the military environment to the college environment can be challenging for some veterans. Little research, prior to this study, has been conducted on transitional services for veterans, and to what extent they may affect retention. Qualitative research guided the theoretical framework of this study, using Schlossberg's Theory of Transition (1995). Transition, according to Schlossberg (1995) was any event or non-event resulting in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles. Exit from the structured military culture to the college campus for veterans was considered an anticipated transition. Providing a structured transition process will ease the anticipated transition to campus, provide the needed support services, and potentially increase retention for student veterans.

For this reason, the veteran will often select an institution with which they are familiar with or have exposure to from the education center on their military base, under the perception that transition will be easier. Participants in this study all had prior knowledge of Peach University before they began their application. Application and admission policies established by Peach University can affect the student veteran's transition both positively and negatively, even before they enroll in courses. Participants reported the application was easy, but the follow-on steps to gain admission were confusing, and often had the participant going from one location to the next to resolve an issue. This pattern of inconsistent or incomplete instruction caused the service member in some cases, to become frustrated with the transition and admission process.

Establishing transition services, a Veteran Orientation, and a complete checklist for student veterans to follow, could increase the effectiveness of the admission process, and have the student veteran in the needed courses more quickly. Student veteran participants stated their military service and required movement of duty locations had them transitioning often throughout their career, but structure and guidance was provided for them from their chain of command, and in the military process in general. Less than half of all colleges and universities have formal transition services and orientations for veterans as they navigate onto campus. Peach University does not have transition services for veterans; the admissions department and the Student Veterans Center are expected to deliver these services. Student veterans could benefit from a veteran specific orientation, and transition services.

The term "veteran friendly" was used in the printed documents to describe how Peach University reaches out to student veterans. There is no formal or national definition of this term. The term outside of the Student Veterans Center, and with some staff members, is not widely used as a tenet for the institution. Defining veteran friendly by using the award criteria required

to receive institutional recognition, combined with highlighting the Student Veteran Center, and the services offered throughout campus, should create a more informed campus regarding veteran concerns, and encourage defined veteran friendly practices throughout campus.

Alignment of documents espoused and services delivered was a goal most university departments would like to achieve. Peach University has a well-established reputation with the local military community, and had a long history of admitting veterans, spouses, and dependents of service members to the institution. As the student veteran population grows, it is important policies align with services delivered to this population. When the policies, and services better align, multiple benefits can occur; student veterans have a streamlined application and admission process, they progress in their degree, and retention rates increase for this population, and other populations may benefit as well. When policies and services align and delivery services were improved with one population, the extension or carry over to other populations often occurs concurrently or with little innovation (Habley, 2004).

For me, conducting this study allowed me to gain valuable insight and knowledge about our veterans and their long established history in higher education. Student veterans have a documented history of doing well in higher education, since the end of World War II. With the Post 9/11 educational benefits and the downsizing of the military, veterans will continue to seek admission to institutions of higher education. As an educator, I am encouraged by the results of this study because the findings provide a path to increase opportunities for student veterans to progress and ultimately graduate, reaching their education goals. The results of this study can make an original contribution to Peach University, and the higher education community. Specifically, this study can advance the research and body of knowledge pertaining to student veterans' transition on to campuses, progression in courses, and retention issues.

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APPENDIX A
EMAIL TO PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS:

Study Title: Veterans in Higher Education: A qualitative examination of student veterans at Peach University.

Dear Student Veteran,

My name is Debra Wales. I am a doctoral candidate in the Counseling, Foundations, and Leadership department at Peach University. As part of the requirements for my degree in Curriculum and Leadership, I am conducting a study and would like to invite you to participate.

I am studying student veterans as they transition from military service to the college campus. In an effort to gain insight to increase student veteran retention, my study is examining what the printed documents from the institution embrace, versus the student veterans' perceptions of the documents and services offered.

If you decide to participate, your participation will be an in-person interview. Questions regarding your experiences and perceptions as you transitioned onto campus as a student veteran will be discussed. The interviews will be held in a mutually agreed upon place and time, lasting approximately thirty minutes. The interview will be audio taped so I can capture your exact responses and accurately reflect on those responses. The audio tapes will be reviewed by Debra Wales, transcribed, and coded to protect each participant's identity. Once the audio tapes are analyzed, they will be destroyed (December 2015).

Minimal discomfort may arise when some of the interview questions are asked regarding your experiences. You are not required to answer any question you do not want to, and you can terminate the interview at any time. Participation is confidential. Participation is voluntary. All student information and responses will be kept in a secure location at Peach University. The results of this study may be published or used for training at professional meetings. In either situation, your participant identity will not be revealed. Additionally, ------ University (name removed to protect identity) will be given a pseudonym *Peach University*, to further protect your identity.

Although you may not benefit directly from participating in this study, sharing your experiences for analysis in this study will give insight and knowledge to issues student veterans experience when they transition into college.

I am available to answer any questions you have regarding this study. You can contact me by phone ---- or email ----. You can also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. ---- or email ----. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you can contact the Institutional Review Board at Peach University ----.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you would like to participate in this study, please respond to this email informing me you want to participate.

V/r,
Debra Wales

 ----.edu

APPENDIX B

Document Analysis Worksheet

1	TYPE OF DOCUMENT: _ Policy Document _ Map _ Advertisement _ Letter _ Website Link _ Federal Record/ Website _ Flyer _ Brochure _ Other
2	UNIQUE PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DOCUMENT: _ Interesting Letterhead _ Notations _ Handwritten _ Web Link _ Typed _ Seals _ Other
3	DATE(S) OF DOCUMENT:
4	AUTHOR (OR CREATOR) OF THE DOCUMENT: POSITION (TITLE):
5	WHAT POPULATION WAS THE DOCUMENT WRITTEN FOR?
6	DOCUMENT INFORMATION: A. List two important aspects of the document/printed material: B. Why was the document/printed material written? C. What evidence supports why the document was written? Quote from the document. D. What were two things the document implied about student veteran policies? E. What question(s) were left unanswered by the document?

STUDENT VETERAN INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interviewee: **Date:**

Audio Tape number:

Introduction

Hello, I am Debra Wales. Thank you for your assistance in this research project about student veterans. Before we start the interview, I would like to assure you that this interview is confidential. The audio tape and transcription of the interview will be secured at Peach University. Excerpts or key phrases may be part of my final research report, but your name or any identifying characteristics will not be included in the report.

The interview will be approximately thirty minutes long. I will be recording the interview for accuracy, depth, and further analysis. A copy of the transcript will be made available to you for review to confirm your responses. You will have seven days to make any corrections or comments about the transcript. If I do not hear from you by the end of the seven days, the transcript will be added to the research for analysis.

Do you have any questions? Are you ready to begin? May I turn on the audio tape? If during the interview, there is something you do not want recorded, alert me and I will turn off the audio tape.

Ice Breaker Question:

Please tell me about your military background; how long you served, what rank you earned, and what brought you to Peach University.

PROBE/FOLLOW-UP: Confirm demographic information, time and rank reached in service.

Interviewee rank: **Time in service:**

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1.   You stated (_____) was what brought you to enroll at Peach University. Can you describe your application/admissions process?

PROBE QUESTIONS:
Did you have outside (non-Peach University staff) assistance in the process?
Were you identified as a student veteran or adult learner?
Do you remember seeing a Military Student Bill of rights?
Can you identify what was the most valuable assistance you received and who provided it?

2.   Can you identify any hurdles or barriers you faced that came from institutional policies (i.e., admissions, testing)?

Transition to classes/learning: Thank you for your feedback on your admissions experience. Let's discuss the university environment and the classroom learning environment you experienced.

3. Peach University is considered a "veteran friendly" institution, what is your view of this statement?

PROBE QUESTIONS:
What would have made it a more "veteran friendly" experience for yourself and other student veterans you know?
Can you give examples from your professors/classes?
Did your professors know you were a student veteran?

4. If you had/have difficulty in any of your courses, what would you do?

PROBE QUESTIONS:
Are you aware Peach University offers tutoring services to student veterans?
Would this service be helpful to you? Explain.

Transition to documents espoused (adopted/embraced) by Peach University: Thank you for sharing your experiences. Is there anything else you would like to add about your admissions or classroom experiences? Anything you care to share or think is important to know?

Ok, thank you for your comments. Let's discuss Peach University's written policies and information pertaining to student veterans, specifically when you transferred from military service to the college campus?

5. Can you tell me about any information sessions you experienced or received written information on regarding student veteran policies at Peach Univeristy?

PROBE:
Was the information explained in person, or were you given policy documents?
Did you access information about veterans' policies online? Was it helpful?
How would you improve it?
What was most helpful/confusing about this information?

Transition to transfer policies and credits awarded by Peach University. Ok, thank you for that information. Let's specifically discuss your transfer credits, and any college credits you received for your military service.

6. What were your experiences when you tried to transfer previous credits and/or military credits to Peach University?

PROBE:

Did you find printed transfer information was consistent with what was done for you?
Can you explain? Can you give me an example?
What was most helpful/difficult?
Did you seek an advisor's assistance? Why/Why not?

7.   How many credits were you trying to transfer to Peach University?

PROBE QUESTIONS:
Can you explain how you found out about Peach University's transfer policy?
How could this transfer policy improve to better serve student veterans?

Transition to specific offices for service. Thank you for sharing your experiences. Let's shift the discussion to specific services at our Student Veteran Center (SVC).

8.   Tell me about the Student Veterans Center (SVC) here at Peach University.

PROBE QUESTIONS:
What other services did the SVC give you information on (i.e., Counseling, GI Bill, class registration)?
Describe any financial aid information you were given or told about?

Transition to closing: Thank you for your responses, in closing I would like to give you an opportunity to make any comments or add any information you think is important. Remember, the purpose of this study is to gain information from you, the student veteran, about your experiences and perceptions regarding Peach University's student veteran documents/policies. Is there anything you would like to add? Is there anything you feel was left out of this interview?

Thank you for your time and sharing your experiences.