

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF MILITARY VETERAN STUDENT ATTRITION AT
WESTERN VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

by

Gordon F. Cavendish, Jr.

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experience of “discontinued enrollment” for military veteran students at western Virginia community colleges. The theory guiding this study was Schlossberg’s (1981) transition theory, as the military veteran students were in transition from the military to the community college. The research questions were, *how did military veterans describe their experiences at the community college, and what factors did military veterans identify as influencing their decision to discontinue enrollment?* The methodology chosen was transcendental phenomenology which followed a focused structure and data collection methods including interviews, a questionnaire, member checks, and collection of related documents. The study purposefully selected United States military veterans with at least 12 consecutive months of active-duty service, who were in transition after September 11, 2001. These military veteran students subsequently enrolled full-time at a western Virginia community college and *discontinued enrollment*. Data analysis was structured but emergent, beginning with theme development and followed by *coding* to develop and describe the “essence” of the participants’ experience and their influences at western Virginia community colleges. The research found discontinued enrollment was a result of *peripheral v. primary* goal disagreement, insufficient preparedness for community college, and a lack of social connectedness.

Keywords: military veterans, community college, transition, attrition, culture, experience, and goal attainment.

Dedication

To my father (Gordon, Sr.) and my bride (Nikole Jean) of 35 years, both who were called home to Christ before the completion of this research—*in manus dei tutus*.

Acknowledgments

As one might imagine of any major undertaking in life, there are many influences, especially support of coworkers, friends, and family. This research is no different in that first I owe a debt to all the men and women who served our country. Their sacrifices to their country and assistance in participating in this research will not be forgotten. Indeed, from their experiences described herein, many may benefit. Second, to the many professors, especially my committee member, Dr. Avis Quinn, and Chair, Dr. Joseph Fontanella, who took this journey with me and continued to provide support even when I was weak, I owe gratitude. Third, to my many friends who belong to a tight-knit group affectionately known as the “man-cave”, who have heard each revision of this manuscript so many times and endured many late nights discussing every aspect thoroughly, I owe gratitude. In particular, Professor Allen Trigger and his wife Pam listened and supported me as only true friends do, proofreading and advising, but most importantly just listening and being there. To Professor Jim Soderberg who spent many late nights discussing philosophy and theology of which I have learned much. To Chip Givens and his wife Sue who always lent an ear when needed. To Professor Paul Daigle, a retired command sergeant major, who helped review interview questions and discussed the many aspects of the data analysis. Fourth, family are the ones who sacrifice the most during such projects, and my family was no different, especially my sons (Don III and Scott). Indeed, while Don would help recruit participants, it would be Scott who proofread the manuscript for grammar, and his wife (Courtney) who I owe the initial idea for this research. Fifth, motivation in the later stages of the analysis and defense came from my wife, whom God provided for me, Penny Cavendish, and who taught me that when you cannot run, walk, and when you cannot walk, crawl—to whom I owe endearing thankfulness. Last, this research would never have been

completed without the grace provided from our savior, Jesus Christ, who died on the cross at Calvary for our sins and arose from the dead three days later. While it has been commonly stated, “God will never give you more than you can handle” this is not true (2 Corinthians 1:8-10 English Standard Version). This adage does come from the Bible, but what it actually says is, “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it” (1 Corinthians 10:13 ESV). In Fact, God has and will challenge us beyond our capabilities—just ask Job or the disciples. Yet, what our Father will do is provide us the grace we need to meet the challenge, and I therefore lift up this research for His glory (Mattoon, 2015).

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List of Abbreviations

All-Volunteer Force (AVF)

Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB)

Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP)

Aspects of Identity Questionnaire (AIQ-IIIx)

Central Virginia Community College (CVCC)

Community College of the Air Force (CCAF)

Cooperative Learning (CL)

Department of Defense (DOD)

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

General Educational Development (GED)

Global War on Terrorism (GWOT)

Hazardous Duty Pay/Imminent Danger Pay (HFP/IDP)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Military Occupational Specialty (MOS)

Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB)

New River Community College (NRCC)

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Republic of Korea (ROK)

Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (GI BILL)

Transition Assistance Program (TAP)

Tuition Assistance (TA)

U.S. Air Force (USAF)

Veterans Administration (VA)

Veterans Educational Assistance Program (VEAP)

Virginia Community College System (VCCS)

Virginia Western Community College (VWCC)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Recent trends in the number and consistency of United States military veterans transitioning from military service to community colleges has highlighted some of the problems they encounter. Chapter one therefore, looks at the background, situation to self, and identification of the problem, followed by a statement of purpose, the significance of the study, the research questions, and definitions for select terms used in the study. Indeed, significant numbers of student veterans are not graduating, perhaps interpreted as not succeeding or discontinuing enrollment at the community college. Referred to as *attrition* in education circles, these challenges have been recognized by researchers at some four-year institutions, but the interest in community colleges is just now getting attention. In an effort to address these challenges for student veterans the following research study is being unveiled. Beginning with long held connections between the United States military and higher education, the researcher's motivations and experiences as both a student, veteran, and community college faculty member guides us through understanding the problem of attrition among student veterans. Moreover, the purpose of the research was to describe the experiences of student veterans at western Virginia community colleges leading to their subsequent failure. Given the significant number of veterans being discharged from the military and transitioning to the community college, with limited success, more research is needed to fill this "gap" on the issue. The resulting research questions, with a definition of terms, are then used to develop the best suited research plan to respond to the questions and address the problem—transcendental phenomenology.

Background

Dating back to the Morrill Land-Grant College Act of 1862, an almost unnoticeable

clause inserted by Senator Justin Morrill stating, “and including military tactics” (U.S. Congress, 2012a, Chap. CXXX, Sec 4) initiated the connection between colleges and the education of generations of men and women for military service to the United States (Abrams, 1989, p. 16). Since that time, the United States has solidified its collaboration with academia through enticing its citizens to military service with promise of financial assistance for higher education. Most notably, the United States involvement in a protracted Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) has mobilized millions of young men and women in the defense of their country. As a result, over 1.027 million military veterans have been predicted to reenter civilian life between fiscal years 2013 and 2017, and 44% of those who choose college will enroll in community colleges (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012; U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012, April 4). Yet, less than half of all undergraduate colleges are prepared to address the challenges unique to their incoming veteran population—consequently, many veterans will fail to graduate (Wheeler, 2011, pp. 2- 3).

Despite the significant size and challenges of this military veteran cohort, few studies have addressed veterans’ needs. Indeed, only since 2008 has any substantive research been identified on this population, with most studies investigating topical questions, such as the four-year college transition experience of “higher education to military deployment to higher education” (Hamrick & Rumann, 2010, p. 433). Wheeler (2011) examined the experiences of community college veterans through a lens of transition grounded in the work of Schlossberg’s (1995) transition theory but studied only currently enrolled military veterans (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Waters, 1995; Wheeler, 2011). Additionally, studies done by Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell (2009) at research institutions and Cohen and Zinger (2010) at community colleges have followed the seemingly traditional theoretical lens of transition.

Moreover, only a few studies have attempted to understand the experiences of community college military veterans, and none has examined military veterans who have discontinued their enrollment (Capps, 2011; Cohen & Zinger, 2010; Rumann, 2010; Wheeler, 2011). This study sought to address this gap in the literature by describing the experiences of those military veterans who have “discontinued enrollment,” thereby providing the community college with information essential to initiate change in support of the veteran population.

Situation to Self

The motivation to study issues related to community college achievement of military veterans, or lack thereof, was grounded in the researcher’s experiences as a military veteran as well as a community college graduate and faculty member. The philosophical assumptions included the ontological importance of the multiple realities of the participants and, therefore, the presentation of their varied experiences is described in detail (Moustakas, 1994). Moreover, the researcher’s integration into the study was clear and well established. The researcher served 20 years in the U.S. Air Force (USAF) including two deployments with Operation Southern Watch in Southwest Asia, one deployment in support of Operation Deny Flight over the Balkans, and a tour with the Air Force’s most forward deployed F-16 operational unit in the Republic of Korea. The researcher’s positions included service as an Aircrew Life Support Specialist, a Master Instructor, Recruiter, Aircrew Life Support Supervisor, First Sergeant, Inspector General augmentee, and Superintendent of Flight Operations. After a distinguished career, the researcher retired to pursue a second career in community college instruction where he has now accumulated fourteen years’ experience, first through teaching aircrew life support for the Community College of the Air Force (CCAF) followed by ten years teaching United States’

history and physical, cultural, and regional geography at Virginia Western Community College (VWCC).

The researcher was simultaneously involved in the development and implementation of a Veterans Resource Center at this western Virginia community college, and has three years' experience teaching American history and world civilizations at a private four-year Christian college in southwest Virginia. Additionally, the researcher has six years' experience working with students as faculty advisor for the Madison Society—a political science and student debate club and, most recently, the Armed Forces Student Association—a local chapter of the national Student Veterans Association. Lastly, the researcher's son served seven years with the U.S. Army where he and his military working dog, Donja, were both medically retired from wounds received in Iraq. Subsequently, this young man enrolled at VWCC to pursue a community college degree, and his experience ended in discontinued enrollment in order to pursue a position as a federal officer for the Department of Homeland Security.

Given a close relationship to the study one may posit the advance of personal values. Indeed, this axiological assumption was evident, yet personal reflection suggested a neutral stance to the category of military veterans aside from a learned inter-service rivalry. However, from the standpoint of a community college faculty member, the researcher has come to learn not all students apply themselves equally, and hence, some have not been successful, perhaps because they were not as focused due to various life distractions. Yet, the researcher has believed the attainment of a community college credential is within reach, and even perhaps necessary, for all Americans. Furthermore, the study intended to “embrace the rhetorical assumption” (Creswell, 2007, p. 18) in that the narrative was personal, included the use of first-person, was chronological, and employed emergent literary terms. Lastly, the methodology

specifically identified emerging themes and adjusted to the inductive nature of the data collection, thereby ensuring rich and increasingly detailed analysis.

Concerning worldviews, the study was guided by social constructivism in that the views of the participants were advanced through open-ended questions and their subjective interpretations of meaning. As such, the context of the participants' life settings or identities provided background from which the researcher can interpret their experiences (Creswell, 2007). Meanwhile, consistent with the literature, the theoretical framework for military veterans reentering civilian life, becoming community college students, or discontinuing community college enrollment followed Schlossberg's (1995) "4 S System" of situation, self, support, and strategies (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Waters, 1995). First posited in 1981, Schlossberg's model of the adult transition process, as a response to a life event or non-event, included the approach, taking stock, and taking charge. During the transition, the four marked factors influencing the event could either be positive or negative and largely determined one's success at adaptation. Lastly, one's experiences were linked to self-identity and "often determines how a person approaches a current transition" (Goodman et al., 1995, p. 92).

Problem Statement

Over 1.027 million United States military veterans have been predicted to reenter civilian life between fiscal years 2013 and 2017, and 44% of those who choose college will enroll in community colleges (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012; U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012, April 4). Yet, less than half of all undergraduate colleges are prepared to address the needs of their incoming veteran population, with many veterans failing to graduate (Wheeler, 2011, pp. 2- 3). Moreover, the U.S. Department of Education (2005) stated students "at risk" exhibit one or more of the following characteristics: delaying post-secondary

enrollment, passing a general educational development (GED) test or not completing high school, being financially independent of one's parents, being single parents; having dependents other than a spouse; attending college part-time, and working full-time. It has been well established that community college students, in general, have more risk factors than their four-year counterparts and that military veterans specifically have a significantly higher risk of failure than their typical community college counterparts (Greene, Marti, & McClenney, 2008, p. 515). Meanwhile, military veterans have usually been both nontraditional and transfer students, resulting in additional risks to success (O'Herrin, 2011). The resulting problem is a large cohort of student veterans who are at risk of not meeting their educational goals and who need strategies for success; meanwhile this research seeks to provide a voice previously unheard.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experience of discontinued enrollment for military veterans at western Virginia community colleges. At this stage in the research, discontinued enrollment has been generally defined as failure to continue pursuing community college education to graduation for any reason other than graduation. Given the United States militaries' protracted involvement in the GWOT, it has been expected all military veterans will have some level of acute stress disorder and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), ranging from normal to severe (U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2004). Moreover, the research intended to contrast the end result of military veterans' discontinued enrollment with their initial goal—such as enlisting in the U.S. Armed Forces as a means to complete their education. Furthermore, the research hoped to identify the experiences that both facilitated and prevented their educational goal achievement, whether a result of risk factors, military transition, self-identity, community, support functions, or other personal experiences.

Last, the research sought to describe the meaning of the life experiences of the participants as they articulated their transition, personal growth, and development.

Significance of the Study

Given there are over 25 million United States military veterans, some two million active-duty service members, of which over 400,000 per year enroll in higher education, military veterans are a large pool of potential community college students (Ford, Northrup, & Wiley, 2009, p. 62). Indeed, the United States Department of Defense (DOD) is the largest employer in the world with some 3.2 million employees followed by the People's Liberation Army of China at 2.3 million and Walmart at 2.1 million (Alexander, 2012). Aside from the impact on student enrollment, military veterans who have access to transition services are more likely to succeed in academia thereby continuing their enrollment and increasing expenditures toward higher education. Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2012, April 4) projects over 200,000 veterans will be added to the pool each year through fiscal year 2036 (U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012, April 4).

In an effort to provide appropriate services to this significant cohort, this study can be used to meet the specific requirements of Executive Order 29, issued by the Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia to “identify new, expanded, or customized services that meet the educational, health care, and social services needs of Virginia’s veterans” (McDonnell, 2010). Furthermore, Wheeler (2011) identified a need for studies focusing on community college student veterans as well as “the relationship between actual military experience and the transition to higher education” (p. 179) while Murphy (2011) noted a need for more research on personal identity which effects one’s ability to blend-in. Last, Morreale (2011) identified a need for more research on cultural issues as well as those student veterans who “dropout”, both issues were

investigated in the current study (Morreale, 2011, p. 147). Given a paucity of research on community college military veterans, this study attempted to fill a gap in understanding the needs and characteristics of this group as concluded by their experiences (Hernandez, Rivera, & Rumann, 2011, p. 56); a gap recognized by the President of Virginia Western Community College when he stated, at an honor society induction ceremony for military veterans, that “more needs to be done” (Sandel, 2012). To that end, this study adds to the literature on both community college students and transitioning military veterans into higher education as well as assists administrators and professors alike in responding to the critical needs of this cohort (Coll, Coll, Joyce, & Oh, 2009).

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to understand the experience of United States military veterans who have attended community college and subsequently discontinued their enrollment without graduating. The following questions guided this study:

Research Question #1. *How did military veterans describe their experiences at the community college?* Through investigation of experience one may discern the obstacles to success, especially when a trend in the combined experiences of a population is identified. To that end, personal interviews of study participants are necessary to obtain the rich detailed data required for qualitative analysis. These experiences will be corroborated or explained through other forms of data collection thereby improving validity.

Research Question #2. *What factors did military veterans identify as influencing their decision to discontinue enrollment?* The decision to stay in college until goal completion versus discontinuing is an individual decision based on complex factors. To that end, this study’s purpose was to identify those factors which demonstrated trends which could be addressed by

educators to improve the success of veteran students.

Definitions

The following terms, used within the study, are defined here for clarity and reference.

1. *Aspects of identity questionnaire* - A measure of college student identity (Cheek, 1989).
2. *Attrition* - Refers to a student who “does not continue at the community college” (Wood, 2012, p. 304) or “a student’s failure to enroll from one semester to another” (Summers, 2003, p. 64) regardless of reason.
3. *Cooperative learning* - Interaction and participation of a small group of students to complete a task (Greive, 1996).
4. *Culture* - When applied specifically to military organizations, as “the totality of norms, attitudes, values, and specific criteria of conduct of the military organization” (Pielmus, 2013, p. 375)
5. *Discontinued enrollment* - For the purpose of this study, defined as “leaving higher education [community college] before achieving one’s educational objectives” (Schuetz, 2008, p. 17)
6. *Hazardous Duty Pay/Imminent Danger Pay (HFP/IDP)* - Payment of \$7.50 per day for service in an area “subjected to hostile fire or explosion of a hostile mine” or “On duty in an area in close proximity to a hostile fire incident and the member is in danger of being exposed”, or the military member was “Killed, injured, or wounded by hostile fire, explosion of a hostile mine, or any other hostile action” (Defense Finance and Accounting Service, 2012a; Defense Finance and Accounting Service, 2012b, p. 1). It should be noted that changing conditions over time as well as change in governmental regulation affects not only the amount received but also eligibility with some areas being

paid lesser amounts starting at \$50 per month to a maximum of \$225. For the purposes of this study, service members who received HFP/IDP were assigned in a “combat” area, regardless of the level of hazard.

7. *Identity* - A social position used to interact with others and formed from a “sense of belonging to ethnic, national, religious, racial, indigenous, sexual, or any of a range of otherwise affectively charged, socially recognized corporate groups” (Cinoglu & Arikan, 2012; Leve, 2011, p. 513).
8. *Millennials* - Commonly known as Generation Y, a generation demographically defined as born between 1980 to 2000 meaning they largely grew-up with the internet, making them “globally connected through the internet and social media,” their most significant characteristic (Bucuta, 2015; as cited in Ordun & Akun, 2015, Spring, p. 130).
9. *Motivation* - Motivation is an internal responsibility prompted by wants and desires (Kanar, 2008).
10. *Nontraditional student* - Educators and researchers commonly define nontraditional as having one or more of the following characteristics; older than 24; not living on campus; working full-time; married or having dependents; seeking occupational or non-degree credentials; enrolled less than full-time; and not fitting the homogenous characteristics of the institution due to race, ethnicity, gender, or other cohort characteristics (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002).
11. *Transition* - “Any event, or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles.” (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 111)
12. *Transition Assistance Program (TAP)* - Although called by different names and couched under different programs depending on branch of service or the military installation

involved the program most commonly known as the transition assistance program “provides information and training to ensure Service members leaving Active Duty are prepared for their next step in life whether pursuing additional education, finding a job in the public or private sector, or starting their own business.” (U. S. Department of Defense, n.d.)

13. *Veteran* - “The term ‘veteran’ means any person who served in the active duty military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable” (U. S. Congress, 2011). However, for the purposes of this study a veteran was defined as any person who has served a minimum of 12 consecutive month’s active-duty in any branch of the U.S. Armed Forces.

Summary

Since the early days of the United States, men and women have answered the call in the defense of country, which was rewarded over time with assistance toward completing higher education. Now, with sustained involvement in the GWOT millions are serving and many are transitioning to the community college which are not aptly prepared. As a researcher in the field of education who not only is a community college graduate, but a veteran with over a decade of community college teaching experience this researcher has experienced the transition from military life to civilian to higher education student. Given the significant numbers of veterans projected to follow this path and awareness of the inadequate preparation of many community colleges, something needs to be done. Therefore, an investigation of student veterans who discontinue enrollment at the community college with the purpose of describing current experiences is necessary as a means for educators to intervene with appropriate remedies. Since the DOD is the largest employer in the world, many of which will enroll in community colleges

as they transition from military service to student over the coming decades there is significant potential to help veterans achieve success, thereby strengthening them and the United States. To achieve this goal research designed to answer the question of how veterans described their experiences and what factors influenced them to discontinue the community college was investigated. Beginning with a definition of terms a qualitative transcendental phenomenological approach was selected as most appropriate.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The literature relevant to military veterans in higher education was largely limited, with few exceptions, to a theoretical framework of transition. Indeed, Schlossberg's (1995) "4 S System" of adult transition resulting from an event or non-event attempted to predict a successful life transition based on an individual's previous experience. As such, Schlossberg's (1995) theoretical application to military veterans was based on military veterans' transition from a military way of life to civilians, or in this case community college students. Not surprisingly, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs referred to the application for and attendance of college as a "major life transition" (U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012, August 8). However, an integral part of Schlossberg's (1995) theory was one's own identity or self, which made up one of the 4 S System components. Although identity theory was a relatively new topic of research, much has been done to note how one's perception of life provided background and experience in support of transition from one life event to another (Burke & Stets, 2009). As a result, Schlossberg's (1995) transition theory was the guiding theoretical framework for this study and is discussed first in this review, followed by a complete review of the literature relevant to military veterans and the community college.

To that end, the literature review began with establishing the connection between military service and benefit programs to include the development and call for educational benefits. The term "veteran" was defined for the purposes of benefit eligibility and as a term used for many purposes. Indeed, the definition of a veteran is codified. Followed by a discussion of significant veteran benefits legislation since World War II the veteran was rooted in a framework of transition from military service to community college student. Clearly, the complexity of

educational benefits and the concerns with transition together demonstrated obstacles and opportunities for the student veteran. Moreover, the attributes of the nontraditional student as applied to the veteran cohort suggested additional challenges for student veterans. The culture of the military veteran as it presents itself to the community college has become a challenge for educators as they develop services and strategies to best provide for this cohort and an investigation into the military culture, predominantly since 1990, was explored. Beyond the *weltanschauung* (worldview of a group) of U.S. Armed Forces culture, the call for transition services was identified. Last, both student motivation and attrition were discussed through an investigation into characteristics that both assist and detract from goal completion of student veterans—with a summary of outcomes in western Virginia community colleges.

Theoretical Framework

Schlossberg (1981) first posited her groundbreaking work on transition as “a model for analyzing human adaptation to transition,” (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 5) which has been followed by numerous articles and books. As a counselor of military veterans in transition, Goodman et al. (1995) addressed the following complaint: I served four years in the Armed Forces, and now I have separated and cannot find a job—so I thought I would go back to school and use my GI Bill. Goodman et al. (1995) responded to this statement, “How can we as counselors help adults address these very real concerns?” (p. x). As a result, their work has broad implications for those working with adults in transition.

Factors that influenced the military veterans in their transitions from military service members to community college students were the *situation*, *self*, *support*, and *strategies* modeled in Goodman et al. (1995) as the 4 S’s. The *situation* variable identified what was happening and whether it was an event or non-event. Moreover, what was happening was anything that resulted

in change, hence the identification of a non-event, such as a job promotion that did not materialize (Goodman et al., 1995). Next, the variable of *self* answered to whom it was happening. In other words, the identity of that person, whether a student, military member, father, or civilian, provided individual characteristics to the transition that were either positive or negative, related to the person's demographic or even psychological resources such as ego development, self-efficacy, or values. The variable of *support* suggested what was available to the individual to assist in dealing with the transition. This might include family, friends, or culture groups such as institutions like the community college. Moreover, Kahn (1975) used a "convoy of social support" (Antonucci & Kahn, 1980, p. 273) to measure support that he viewed as not static but reciprocal (Antonucci & Kahn, 1980). Last, the *strategies* variable described how the individual coped or "the things people do to avoid being harmed by life strains" (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978, p. 2). Given stress is part of life, each individual has developed responses either to modify, control, or manage stress and may bring these strategies to bear on the transition (Goodman et al., 1995).

Related Literature

A review of the literature demonstrated a need to discern the experiences of military veterans who have attended community college yet withdrew from a program of study without completion. Indeed, only a handful of studies have looked at the community college student in the past decade (Capps, 2011; Cohen & Zinger, 2010; Rumann, 2010; Wheeler, 2011).

Background

Beginning with the Morrill Land-Grant College Act of 1862, an almost unnoticeable clause inserted by Senator Justin Morrill stating "including military tactics" (U.S. Congress, 2012a, Chap. CXXX, Sec 4) initiated the link between the United States and its citizenry as a

resource for national security. Moreover, the benefit system of today dated before the republic and the war between the Pilgrims and the Pequot's of 1636 (U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012a, April 21). In providing for those disabled by the conflict, the Pilgrims set the stage for an expansion of veterans' benefits to most of New England during the colonial period, thereby becoming commonplace by the Revolutionary and Civil Wars (Ferling, 1981; U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012a, April 21).

Yet undoubtedly, the most dynamic change in veteran benefits came with World War II and the GI Bill under an assortment of names and legislation (Abrams, 1989; McGrevey & Kehrer, 2009). Indeed, the societal significance of the World War II era veterans' benefits, in general, had a profoundly positive impact on American society as over 15 million men became eligible for benefits including unemployment, low-cost mortgages for homes and businesses, pensions, and education—including job training and scholarships and loans for higher education (Foner, 2012; Loss, 2005). Moreover, it should be noted President Franklin D. Roosevelt specifically referred to both “servicemen and women” in his speech of November 23, 1943, on the “Return of Service Personnel to Civilian Life,” followed by the use of “person” in succeeding legislation, thereby recognizing not only the 350,000 women who served in auxiliary military units but also those making up fully one-third of the 1944 home-front civilian laborers (Foner, 2012; Roosevelt, 1943; U. S. Congress, 1944).

Regardless, the bill had its critics, with the most serious asserting the legislation “perpetuated racial and gender discrimination in American life” (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009, p. 4). Yet, given the unparalleled scope and impact of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (commonly referred to as the GI Bill, the GI Bill of Rights, or the Bill of Rights for GI Joe and GI Jane) as well as the economic, political, and social—most profoundly educational impact;

clearly any modern day review of veterans educational benefits should begin here (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009; Loss, 2005; Mettler, 2002; Wynn, 1996).

Veterans Discussed

The term veteran, as it applies to United States military service, can and does mean different things to different people and as a result is defined in a multitude of ways depending on the use. For example, the Higher Education Act of 1965 as amended and enacted in 2013, defined a veteran as “any individual who—has engaged in the active duty in the United States Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, or Coast Guard; and was released under a condition other than dishonorable” (U.S. Congress, 1965, p. 544; U.S. Congress, 2013). Yet, despite this definition, provisions in the Higher Education Reconciliation Act of 2005 note differences between service in the National Guard and Reserves, attendance at United States military academies, as well as active-duty for “training only” purposes in eligibility decisions for federal financial aid (FinAid, 2014, para 4; U.S. Congress, 2006).

Meanwhile, the United States Census Bureau stated, “Veterans are men and women who have served (even for a short time), but are not currently serving, on active duty in the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, or the Coast Guard, or who served in the U.S. Merchant Marine during World War II” (U. S. Census Bureau, 2013). Service in the National Guard or Reserves, only qualifies one as a veteran, if “called or ordered to active duty” with an exception for training in the case of the United States Census Bureau (U. S. Census Bureau, 2013). And, the Social Security Administration turns to the United States Code for the answer. To that end, Title 38 of the United States Code § 101 – Definitions stated, “The term “veteran” means any person who served in the active duty military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable” (U. S. Congress, 2011). Yet again,

this definition is insufficient for the purposes of eligibility for veteran's benefits. Indeed, United States Code defined veterans differently not only for the purposes of readjustment benefits (Title 38, Part III, Chapter 42) but for employment (Title 5) purposes as well.

Furthermore, various laws define eligibility for veterans' benefits based on active-duty service alone, even if that service was not part of the U.S. Armed Forces. For example, civilian women who were attached to the U.S. Army Air Force during World War II were considered active-duty pursuant to public law 95-202 (1977), and as such, these Women's Air Force Service Pilots were eligible for veteran's benefits administered by the Veterans Administration (Moulta-Ali, 2014; U.S. Congress, 1977). Moreover, for the general purposes of eligibility for benefits, the following definition from Title 38, Part III, Chapter 42 of the United States Code was most useful in ascribing characteristics of the veteran and further defines the eligible veteran as:

a person who—served on active duty for a period of more than 180 days and was discharged or released therefrom with other than a dishonorable discharge; was discharged or released from active duty because of a service-connected disability; as a member of a reserve component under an order to active duty..., served on active duty during a period of war or in a campaign or expedition for which a campaign badge is authorized and was discharged or released from such duty with other than a dishonorable discharge; or was discharged or released from active duty by reason of a sole survivorship discharge. (U.S. Congress, 2012b)

Clearly, the purpose for the use of the term veteran delimits the manner in which a veteran is defined, and for the purposes of benefits eligibility, one's active service, length of service, discharge conditions, service during time of conflict, and service in the National Guard, Reserves, or as a civilian are considered (Moulta-Ali, 2014). Similarly, in the case of this research, a veteran was defined as any person who has served a minimum of 12 consecutive month's active-duty service in any branch of the U.S. Armed Forces.

Readjustment to Transition

Beginning with the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, where some 7.8 million

veterans have received educational benefits—service to one’s country has become synonymous with education benefits (Loss, 2005; Mettler, 2002; U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012a, April 21). Moreover, President Roosevelt unknowingly justified this response of the past seven decades when he stated, “...the members of the armed forces have been compelled to make greater economic sacrifice and every other kind of sacrifice than the rest of us, and they are entitled to definite action to help take care of their special problems” (Roosevelt, 1943). As such, the bill provided not only educational benefits by way of technical training, refresher courses, and college education but paid a monthly living allowance. In addition, the bill provided for guaranty of home, farm, and business loans as well as paid unemployment for up to one year.

Last, the bill provided for job counseling and additional hospital facilities and empowered the Veterans Administration (VA) with primary responsibility. Notwithstanding this readjustment assistance, some 3 million veterans of World War II found “their own way into the postwar world” (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009, p. 9). Despite this, perhaps more importantly, the bill gave “...emphatic notice to the men and women in our armed forces that the American people do not intend to let them down” (U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012, February 9).

With the expiration of the World War II era veterans’ GI Bill, Congress enacted the post-Vietnam Veterans Educational Assistance Program (VEAP). Veterans who entered military service from January 1, 1977, to June 30, 1985, could contribute through payroll deduction to a fund that could provide up to \$8,100 in benefits for a maximum contribution of \$2,700 (U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012c, July 24). Although the program received incidental increases, it also was riddled with exclusions and exceptions, such as requiring a high school

diploma to receive benefits and excluding many vocational and graduate school programs. Additionally, the program did not meet the costs of college tuition, so many veterans were unable to use the benefit as they were lacking the resources to fill the gap between this benefit and the actual costs of college. Colleges required payment of tuition up front while VEAP paid a monthly allowance to the veterans based on enrollment level and contribution into the program. In theory, it was designed to pay for thirty-six months of college, but many veterans applied for and received refunds of contributions.

Despite the lack of an ongoing military conflict for the United States, in 1984 Congressman Gillespie V. Montgomery (D) from Mississippi reworked the GI Bill. A retired major general in the Mississippi National Guard, Montgomery was no stranger to the cause of veterans, and his efforts resulted in the renaming of the GI Bill to the Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB) (Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, n.d.; U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012, February 9). His legislation, enacted by Congress on June 1, 1987, as Public Law 100-48 and titled the New GI Bill Continuation Act extended indefinitely the eligibility entry date of armed forces personnel and provided educational assistance for the All-Volunteer Force (AVF), including extension of higher education benefits, vocational readjustment, and restoration of lost educational opportunities (U. S. Congress, 1987). Indeed, America was responding to the need for marketing to induce volunteers to join the military, especially upon conclusion of the draft in 1973 and the subsequent rise of an AVF (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009).

Beyond the MGIB, the Post 9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008, according to the Director of the United States Office of Personnel Management, John Berry, is “the most comprehensive educational benefit package since the original GI Bill” (Berry, 2013, p. 1).

Signed into law on June 30, 2008 by President George W. Bush, H.R. 5740 applied to service members honorably discharged with at least ninety days of service beginning after September 10, 2001, and provides benefits for housing and education (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009; U. S. Congress, 2008). The Act provides payments of benefits for up to thirty-six months for full tuition and fees to attend school plus a books and supplies stipend, a monthly housing allowance, and a one-time payment of \$500 for those relocating from counties with less than six people per square mile. Schools authorized for payment include institutions of higher learning (public, private or foreign), non-college degree granting institutions, apprenticeships and on-the-job training, flight schools, and correspondence schools (U. S. Congress, 2008).

An example of the housing allowance paid, based on basic allowance for housing for the pay grade of an E-5 service member with dependents attending school in Lynchburg, Virginia—home of Liberty University—would be \$1,113 per month (Department Travel Management Office, 2013). Lastly, in some cases, benefits may be transferred to dependents and some veterans may qualify for the Yellow Ribbon Program, which provides for the “maximum benefit rate,” which could exceed \$18,000 per academic year (U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012b, July 24; U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013, February 19). All told, one can now recognize why United States military service is synonymous with education.

Finally, this researcher experienced first-hand the DOD’s implementation and use of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). Dating back to 1990, the TAP program was developed to assist separating service members with transition assistance to civilian life. Perhaps a goal best articulated by Hilda L. Solis, U. S. Secretary of Labor from 2009 to 2013, when she stated, “On the battlefield, our soldiers pledge to leave no fellow soldier behind. Our pledge is...and must always be...to leave no Veteran behind” (as cited in U. S. Department of Labor, n.d.a; U. S.

Department of Labor, n.d.b; U. S. Department of Labor, 2010). To that end, TAP created a partnership between the Departments of Labor, Defense, Homeland Security, and Veterans Affairs to access information, thereby assisting the service members in their job searches and the use of related services. So what did this mean for veterans? Service members and spouses attended a 3-day workshop to help prepare them for the transition ahead, which, of course, could include transition to college and the use of veterans' educational benefits (U. S. Department of Labor, n.d.a). Furthermore, on July 23, 2012, President Obama announced a "redesign" of the TAP to lengthen the program from three days to 5 to 7 days, expand guidance and counseling, and "transform the military's approach to education, training, and credentialing for military members" (The White House, 2012). Indeed, the United States government now views the experience of separating from the armed forces, to one's next chapter in life, as a transition.

To not only aid that transition but also provide for the continuing educational goals of active or perhaps better stated as "career service members," the varying military departments provide Tuition Assistance (TA) to active-duty, National Guard, and Reserve members (American Forces Press Service, 2013; Military One Source, 2013; Ratigan, 2013). While not a VA administered program, TA provides funding for accredited coursework up to 100% of tuition and some fees, minus textbooks, to a maximum of \$4,500 per year (Military One Source, 2013). Historically, the various service departments have provided tuition and fees under the TA program at varying percentages from 75 to 90 to 100%—at times leaving the service member to pay the difference (Military One Source, 2013). Although each military department administers the program independently, service members are generally required to pass coursework, not be discharged from active-duty service prior to course completion, or quit (with some exceptions); otherwise, they face repayment (Military One Source, 2013). Moreover, TA is seen as the

primary means for career-minded service members to meet educational goals, including vocational, undergraduate, and graduate programs which are expected to benefit their advancement in the ranks. To that end, of the 1.4 million serving, over 300,000 took advantage of TA through completing some “870,000 courses last year” (Terkel, 2013) which resulted in over 50,000 diplomas, certificates, and degrees for service members (Maze, 2013; Patton, Robson, & Svan, 2013; U.S. Department of Defense, 2012-2013).

In a final note, this summary of veterans’ benefits highlights only the major legislation, and the annual appropriations for such legislation routinely impacts the actual benefits received, which change as appropriations increase or decrease. For example, on March 8, 2013, the Secretary of the Army suspended Tuition Assistance for the balance of the fiscal year—a decision quickly followed by the Marines, Air Force, and last, the Coast Guard (Lawrence, 2013; Patton, 2013; WPTV Staff, 2013). The Navy did not follow suit but considered reducing the funding level to 75%. Although Congress would act to restore benefits, announced first by the Army on April 10, 2013, the suspension had “sparked outrage, anxiety and despair” among service members as well as a “devastating impact” on enrollment and tuition revenues at universities (Kube & Miklaszewski, 2013; O'Brien, 2013; Patton, Robson, & Svan, 2013). Additionally, it would be an overstatement to say all veterans are provided educational benefits or even medical benefits as there are many eligibility requirements and the manner in which benefits are provided may prevent the use of certain benefits. Indeed, as someone honorably retired from the U.S. Air Force with over twenty years’ honorable service, this veteran is not eligible for the GI Bill, but was at one time eligible for VEAP, and is not authorized medical care from the Veterans Administration, leaving one to ponder the political rhetoric versus the actual experience of veterans receiving benefits. Not surprisingly, most Americans would find this

statement confusing given the common misbeliefs and stereotypes most hold concerning military benefit programs. Nonetheless, service members, unfortunately, find themselves at the mercy of political whims and bureaucracy that has proven to complicate and derail their education, housing, or other transition processes.

Transition Services

On April 27, 2012, President Obama signed an executive order entitled “Establishing Principles of Excellence for Educational Institutions Serving Service Members, Veterans, Spouses, and Other Family Members” in a large part due to recent predatory practices of educational institutions (Obama, 2012). The Senate committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation heard testimony in November 2013 on the targeting of service members and their families over lending practices and associated predatory lending with concerns for military readiness, morale, and costs associated with maintaining an AVF (Cronk, 2013). This order can, therefore, be said to establish a new standard or principles with regard to the application of veterans’ educational benefits. As a result, this study was a “first-look” at the effects of this executive order. Aside from this order, community colleges were under pressure to improve outcomes of military veterans transitioning to the classroom.

Nontraditional Students

According to O’Herrin, American Council on Education, “Veterans are, by definition, nontraditional students” (2011, p. 15). Indeed, a nontraditional student has been defined variously depending on the purpose ranging from simple to complex. The former definition commonly referred to age, race, gender, residence, employment, and type of program as nontraditional (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). Meanwhile, the later nontraditional student has also been defined as a student who does not attend college

immediately following high school. As such, military student veterans in higher education met many of the characteristics educators and researchers commonly have used to define nontraditional, such as older than 24, not living on campus, working full-time, married or having dependents, seeking occupational or non-degree credentials, enrolled less than full-time, and not fitting the homogenous characteristics of the institution due to race, ethnicity, gender, or other cohort characteristics (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). In the case of military veterans, most have one or more characteristics, plus “Many veterans who enroll in college are doing so for the first time and not only face reintegrating into civilian life but becoming acclimated to college life” (Davis, 2013, p. 2) clearly placing them in a position of transition. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, students holding a self-identity of military veteran were considered nontraditional.

Culture

Williams (1976), a literary critic and cultural theorist, has stated *culture* is “one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language” (as cited in Domosh, Jordan-Bychkov, Neumann, & Price, 2013, p. 32). Referencing military organizations, Pielmus (2013) defined *culture* as “the totality of norms, attitudes, values, and specific criteria of conduct of the military organization” (2013, p. 375). Meanwhile, Hajjar (2014) provided not only a concise definition of culture, but a working definition that became what he calls a “military cultural toolkit” (p. 119). In his study, Hajjar (2014) defined culture:

as a contested toolkit or repertoire filled with tools, schemas (cognitive structures), frames, codes, narratives, habits, styles, language, symbols, values, beliefs, and assumptions that provide a group, organization, institution, or society with shared meaning, collective identities and orientations, and strategies of action. (p. 119)

Furthermore, a consensus among scholars indicated culture is a social construction (Arnaud & Tinoco, 2013). As such, simply stated, *culture* can be said to be the learned behavior of a group

(Herspring, 2009). Therefore, the combined experiences of military veterans comprise a specific culture group of which *sub-cultures*, or social behaviors that are both homogenous yet different than the larger culture group, are likely to develop. Moreover, military veterans maintain characteristics of formal, functional, and vernacular culture groups while simultaneously being included in the subculture of students in higher education, members of the military in some cases, Millennials or other generational groups, and so forth.

More specifically, Lieutenant Colonel Dunivin (1994) noted the uniqueness of military culture and identified it as learned, shared, adaptive, and symbolic. Furthermore, Dunivin (1994) argued military culture exists within a “combat masculine-warrior paradigm” (p. 534) whereas Snider (1999) argued military culture supports the “management of violence” (as cited in Arnaud & Tinoco, 2013, p. 42) while Hajjar (2014) not only agrees with the warrior paradigm, but acknowledges its presence dating back to 1900 as the strongest cultural influence today. Simultaneously however, Hajjar (2014) noted an emerging “peacekeeper-diplomat” cultural orientation beginning about 1990 and with a greater sophistication in technology spanning the entire period (p. 135).

Similarly, military veterans belong to sub-culture groups that also match their self-identity. For example, “Guard and Reserve units are subject to multiple activations and deployments, so individuals re-entering college may simultaneously be students, veterans, and armed forces members,” (Hamrick & Rumann, 2010, p. 431) therefore, it should not be surprising that descriptions of self-identity may be complex. As a result, one can discern the complex nature of culture and humankind. Moreover, within the community college situation of higher education, the characteristics of the culture can be expressed as one of high diversity, for example, the nontraditional student (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002).

Additionally, Hajjar (2014) argued similar multiculturalism in today's U.S. armed forces impacts the military in two distinct ways. Beginning in 2011, homosexuals obtained the right to not only serve legally but openly, thereby forcing the military to culturally adapt. Aside from homosexuals, the past decades have seen multiple minority groups including non-Christians, women, Mexican-American, and others force adaptation thereby including these subcultures into the whole. Beyond this adaptation, recent multinational missions require the close work of U.S. Armed Forces with their counterparts and people of other nations, thereby introducing change and innovation to military culture (Hajjar, 2014). The introduction of these service members in higher education would likely increase multiculturalism; therefore, it could be argued the overall culture group of the community college is an absence of homogeneity—the very attribute that defines a group. With this in mind, if one is to understand the military veteran student, one must understand the culture or learned behavior (Domosh et al., 2013).

Given culture is socially constructed, it is reasonable to expect military veterans were indoctrinated quickly, during various training phases of their military service, to set values and beliefs in support of the Department of Defense mission (Arnaud & Tinoco, 2013). In consideration of their choices to volunteer for military service, service members experienced a life-changing event, thereby changing “their understanding of society and self” (Smith & Wilson, 2012, p. 66). Not surprisingly, the transition from military culture to education culture as well as a simultaneous change in self-identity prompts “disorienting dilemmas” (Smith & Wilson, 2012, p. 67) in education. Veterans' rituals, symbols, and heroic stories, which have previously bonded them, have been replaced, or perhaps transitioned to new social norms in the community college (Arnaud & Tinoco, 2013). As a result, veterans require a bridge to build cross-cultural relationships (Francis & Kraus, 2012).

Although the combat masculine warrior, a largely white, male-dominated culture group appears firmly entrenched in military culture, culture is not static. Despite a resistance to change, today's military has on occasion been accused of being a "laboratory for social experimentation" (Dunivin, 1994, p. 541) in light of the argument "most social change within the military has been externally imposed" (Dunivin, 1994, p. 539). Yet, there were clear differences between culture in the U.S. Armed Forces and American society—leading some to believe these differences should be exposed and eliminated (Hillen, 2000). Furthermore, McNeal (2009) argued recent attempts to more closely relate these cultures have been thwarted successfully by the military. Indeed, Dunivin (1994) described a changing military culture once defined by characteristics of conservative moralism, the masculine warrior, exclusionary, homogenous, separatist, and hostile to outsiders.

Most notable of cultural changes in the past few decades was inclusion of women into combat occupations and homosexuals for a more heterogeneous group. However, reinforcement of masculine norms still pervades despite movement away from a separatist attitude as evidenced by lingering social hostility. Moreover, Hudribusch, Koeszegi, and Zedlacher (2014) argued these norms result in aggression toward female soldiers. They noted "misogynic jokes, denigrating glances, and sexual harassment" toward female soldiers are common in many national armies (Hudribusch et al., 2014, p. 227). Their study argued that group cohesion, abuse of authority, and "hypermasculine" elite forces prompt high levels of aggression which is applied in protection of cultural norms (Hudribusch et al., 2014, p. 228). Indeed, an attempt to catalogue the cultural characteristics of group cohesion by Kirke (2009) was stymied by the complexity of the data and lack of a common trend. Regardless, Kirke (2009) modeled four social structures in an effort to conceptualize the data. These models included a formal command, informal, social,

and functional structure and provided a tool for analysis from the perspective of the observer (Kirke, 2009).

Despite these findings, it would appear military culture is moving toward a more inclusive, egalitarian attitude with more social tolerance. Nonetheless, Francis and Kraus (2012) still interpreted veteran identities as male heterosexuals, despite removal of some exclusions; namely, women in combat occupations and homosexuals. Additionally, they cited experiencing firsthand the veteran perspective on campus issues as Black and White while administration interpreted gray (Francis & Kraus, 2012). Perhaps this perspective rests in the military culture of “conservative moralistic ideology as reflected in its ethics and customs” (Dunivin, 1994, p. 534). Additionally, Francis & Kraus (2012) noted veterans in the academic environment were mistrustful of administrations’ intentions, uncomfortable with administrative collaboration, ignorant of institutional culture and processes, resented being treated like common students, while aware of their social importance (Francis & Kraus, 2012). All told, they strongly identified themselves as “student veterans” (Francis & Kraus, 2012, p. 12) and stood up for themselves in the face of inequities (Francis & Kraus, 2012).

Student Motivation

Perhaps the most interesting question regarding the success or failure of veterans attending community college has been the issue of motivation. Indeed, this issue has affected all community college students. As such, the challenge of motivation was dealt with first. Within higher education and educational psychology, motivation of students has been an ongoing concern of educators. How do professors motivate students to read the textbook? How do professors motivate students to engage in active learning? How do professors motivate students to actively participate in class? Many educators have turned to educational psychology for the

answers to these questions, while others considered the issue of student motivation as an individual responsibility and not the concern of educators. Nonetheless, educators have a responsibility to teach in a manner consistent with the greatest student outcomes, making motivation of students an issue for educators. However, research has shown that student motivation is intertwined with teaching techniques. Moreover, Linda B. Nilson (2010), in her book *Teaching at Its Best*, argued “...effective motivational techniques and effective teaching techniques greatly overlap” (2010, p. 55). As a result, the following analysis focused on an overview of supporting theories of educational psychology, strategies for motivating not only students of higher education but also military veteran students, and associated teaching techniques.

So what exactly is *motivation*? Carol C. Kanar (2008), in *The Confident Student*, viewed motivation as an internal responsibility prompted by wants and desires (Kanar, 2008). Meanwhile, *Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary* (2009) defines *motivation* as an “act or process...[or] condition” resulting from force, stimulus, influence, incentive, or drive (“Motivation,” 2009). And last, Nilson (2010) considered motivation as “stimulating the desire to learn something” (p. 51) which in the case of academics is the subject matter. So where does motivation come from? Clearly, a consensus exists among researchers in that motivation results from either *intrinsic* or *extrinsic* factors. Although psychologist Steven Reiss argued motivation cannot be forced into two categories, he was clearly outside of conventional thinking (Grabmeier, 2005). Instead, Reiss (2012) argued “to motivate another person, you have to appeal to their values” (para 1). Regardless, understanding the source of motivation for the student veteran is necessary.

Intrinsic forms of motivation included body, mind, and transpersonal sources while extrinsic were outside sources of motivation (Huitt, 2001). In order for educators to intrinsically motivate students, educators should fully explain the importance of an idea, thereby creating interest, followed by activities that not only make learning connections, but also provide a plan to achieve a specific learning goal. Additionally, the later source, while effective in the classroom, loses effectiveness once outside the educator's control. These extrinsic sources include ensuring students completely understand expectations, are provided remedial feedback, and gain rewards. Not surprisingly, students with intrinsic motivation achieve higher outcomes in regard to learning (Huitt, 2001). Indeed, it can be argued that most military veterans, in part as a result of their training, have learned to take advantage of this intrinsic motivation thereby providing them an edge once in the classroom.

A final consideration regarding motivation was *emotion*. While emotions generally do not include a goal, they can be energizing. As a result, both students and educators may be subject to the forces of emotions. For example, in pre-school children, research suggested a relationship between emotions and motivation to the extent that children may change their behavior based on perceived emotional outcomes (Bodrova & Leong, 2003). Similarly, educators are prone to stress, thereby allowing this social construct to “play a key role in shaping motivation...” (DiPardo & Potter, 2003, p. 323). Therefore, emotions should be recognized as a source of motivation—albeit non-direct.

Moreover, from a theoretical perspective, theories of motivation were profuse. Within the field of management; for example, theories of motivation include McGregor's Factor X/Y theory, the Hawthorne study, Herzberg's Two Factor theory, and equity and expectancy theory (“Top Motivation Theories Explained and Compared,” 2004). Meanwhile, within educational

psychology, theories of motivation include behavioral, cognitive, psychoanalytic, humanistic, social learning, social cognition, transpersonal, and achievement motivation (Huitt, 2001).

Additionally, this list should not be considered all-inclusive, and many of these theories have what could be considered as sub-categories—most notably, the cognitive. Yet, for brevity and the purposes of this analysis, a closer examination of constructivist, cognitive, and humanistic theories of motivation was warranted.

Beginning with the latter, the humanistic theory of motivation has been largely synthesized by the well-known Abraham Maslow. Maslow postulated that humans are motivated by a hierarchy of needs. Moreover, to attain the growth needs, one must first fulfill all of four deficiency needs, respectively. First are the physiological needs or those that maintain our human bodies. These needs include water, food, and comfort. Second, are the safety and security needs or the need to be free of danger. Third, are the need for belonging and love. One must be accepted by others to move on to the fourth need of esteem. One must be satisfied with one's level of achievement, competence, and approval of others. Maslow's growth needs originally only consisted of self-actualization, but he later added two lower levels below and one above. The former two lower levels included a cognitive and aesthetic level and the later self-transcendence. Maslow theorized that when one reaches one's highest potential, one would self-actualize (Huitt, 2001).

Next, the cognitive theories of motivation were perhaps the dominant theories within the field of educational psychology (Cauley & Pannozzo, 2009), and included the dissonance, attribution, and expectancy theories (Huitt, 2001). Similar to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, the dissonance theory argued that when a discrepancy exists between beliefs and action, humans will act to resolve the discrepancy. In this manner, one's behavior changes,

according to psychologist Leon Festinger, who postulated the theory in 1954 (McGraw-Hill, 2009). Next, the attribution theory argues that humans rationalize success and failure through either internal or external “attributions” (Huitt, 2001, p. 4). In the learning environment, students with an internal control of their ability and effort relate to greater achievement as opposed to luck, and the learning task was too difficult, thereby signaling impaired achievement. Last, expectancy theory dictated the existence of a perceived probability of success plus the attachment of a reward, and the value of the goal all work together as a source of motivation. Should any of the variables be low or missing, motivation will be adversely affected. Conversely, if all the variables are present and high, motivation is high (Huitt, 2001).

Perhaps categorized as both cognitive and social, the constructivist theory included several influential researchers including Jerome Brunner, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky. Indeed, Brunner was influenced by both Piaget and Vygotsky in the development of his theory of constructivism—a theory that generally argues one uses existing knowledge as a foundation for learning new ideas and concepts (Overbaugh, 2004). To that end, similarities between the social and cognitive aspects of the theorists can be synthesized, thereby suggesting a learning environment that: 1) “has multiple representations of reality,” 2) “represent[s] the complexity of the real world,” 3) “emphasize[s] knowledge construction inserted of knowledge reproduction,” 4) “emphasize[s] authentic tasks in a meaningful context rather than abstract instruction out of context,” 5) “provide[s] learning environments such as real-world settings or case-based learning instead of predetermined sequences of instruction,” 6) “encourage[s] thoughtful reflection on experience,” 7) “enable[s] context- and content- dependent knowledge construction,” and 8) “support[s] collaborative construction of knowledge through social negotiation, not competition among learners for recognition” (Chen, n.d.).

A final consideration regarding motivational theory centered on personal belief and value systems. Darmawan, Lietz, and Mathews (2007) of Flinders University used a definition of *values* provided by R. M. Williams (1979) as “interests, desires, goals, needs and standard of preference” (p. 248). Essentially, values affect motivation which impacts behavior. As a result, values influence cognitive, affective, and behavior aspects. Therefore, when students apply specific situations against their value systems, they are assessing a behavior of what ought to be. This influence of values will clearly affect behaviors as they are applied to situations and as students make decisions on a daily basis. As such, knowledge of values has been found to be motivational in specific instances, thereby clearly providing a means of predicting student level of motivation (Darmawan et al., 2007).

So how do professors of higher education motivate military veteran students? First, the professors understand them. Educators have agreed that students bring their cultural background into the classroom, and depending on age, one can generalize their backgrounds based on shared experiences relevant to the whole of society for a specific time. To that end, the various generations of students can be categorized. Millennials, students born from 1980 to 2002, have the shared experience of an “always-on” (McGlynn, 2008, pp. 20-21) information network and the view of education as a commodity that is purchased like one would an automobile. Moreover, these students have always had computers and video games, making learning more about knowing how and where to find information than memorizing rote facts. As a result, these students do not tolerate delays; multi-tasking and typing is preferred to reading a book and handwriting (Oblinger, 2003 July/August). Therefore, understanding these strengths and using them in the manner of a scaffold to support the learning environment builds on these known experiences and skills. Educators who adopt teaching techniques, such as group activity directly

relevant to the course in a student-centered classroom, take advantage of these strengths (McGlynn, 2008).

Given most military veteran students in higher education today are Millennials, they are the current challenge. Yet, in higher education, in general, and the community college in particular, educators may find themselves confronted with other generational groups: The Builders or Veterans, born from 1925-1945, are traditionalists; The Baby Boomers, born from 1946-1964, are educated, cause-orientated, and question authority; The Generation Xers, born from 1965-1979, are serious, stressed-out, and skeptical (Hoff, n.d.). Given the challenges of such diversity in higher education, one might consider the educators' task as unmanageable. Yet, diversity is increasing. In fact, Millennials are the most diverse generation to date, especially ethnically (Knox, 2004). The classrooms of today include first generation college students and numerous ethnic and racial groups, are multi-generational, communicate in languages other than English, require accommodations mandated by legislation, and come from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as the military veteran to highlight a few. Not surprisingly, Buckridge and Guest (2007) of Griffith University asked the question, "Is it possible to teach in a way that works well for all students?" (p. 133). Their extended discourse concludes that from one point of view, educators must make choices which will disadvantage some students, while another suggests teaching strategies that reach out to students in a multivariate of ways, thereby extending opportunity to all. Still, another suggests teaching should be modified to allow student choices to participate in learning that best fits students' style. So yes, the challenge is great, but largely achievable (Buckridge & Guest, 2007).

One of the greatest motivational challenges can be maintaining students' interest, once students are enrolled in college, long enough to engage the students in the course. This known

phenomenon of decrease in interest has been well documented in secondary education and found to correlate to higher education. Based in motivation, research aligned with either *personal* or *situational* interest. The former, although associated with intrinsic motivation, would be an inaccurate state of reference, yet personal interest is dependent upon a high inner drive. The later, situational interest, is external in nature and dependent on environmental factors. Such ephemeral interest is affiliated with task value theory—the idea that something interesting or important is more engaging or motivational (de Jong, Korteweg, van der Veen, & van Leeuwen, 2005). Moreover, research into motivational factors found students with a decreased interest from the first to the second year was a result of reduced “integration” (de Jong et al., 2005, p. 287), a real concern for the nontraditional military veteran student. Furthermore, consistent with motivational theory, researchers correlated the decrease in interest with situational components and personal commitment. Last, evidence of an “expectations component” or self-efficacy was noted. Students with low expectations of performing at standard were less likely to be well integrated and committed, marking decreased interest (de Jong et al., 2005).

Given that low self-efficacy results in problems with student motivation, most notably the internal belief that one is doomed to failure, students will either fail to attempt or make a fleeting attempt—surrendering quickly. However, why do some students believe they are doomed to failure? Research suggested four sources of self-efficacy including individual task performance, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological reactions (Margolis & McCabe, 2006). Moreover, most people have experienced the successful completion of a task with a feeling of pride, enactive mastery, or success of an individual task performance providing a positive reinforcement. Those without positive experiences may come to believe they are incapable of performing. Meanwhile, knowledge of the task performance of friends, colleagues,

or others provides people with positive or negative visceral experiences. Knowledge of these attempts may help people perform on their own or discourage them. Next, verbal persuasion reinforces that yes, they can complete a particular task, especially when that message comes from a credible source such as a teacher. Yet, if verbal praise is heard and the students fail to perform on the task, the students will quickly learn verbal persuasion is meaningless. Last, physiological reactions to low self-efficacy may manifest as anxiety during performance of a task. Such feelings may adversely impact performance at any time during the task and frequently ends with a flight reaction—attrition (Margolis & McCabe, 2006).

Given the first goal of motivating students in higher education is to understand them, it follows that the second is how to use this knowledge to motivate them. Educational researchers have provided a plethora of research on teaching techniques that serve to not only motivate students, but also to engage them in a meaningful way. With this charge, educators can begin. Higher education is well-known for its large lecture halls filled to capacity with excited students eager to learn, graduate, and move on. To this end, professors have adopted the technique of lecturing to a large audience anywhere in size from six to 2,600 (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2012). Although perhaps once effective, this method cannot match the learning styles of diverse students perpetually. In fact, Millennials require a learner-centered environment. As a result, professors must adapt and modify their teaching techniques to better correlate the diversity of learning styles and motivations before them. While the lecture has been the focus of educational researchers as an example of an obsolete teaching technique, the reality is this teaching method can be effective if modified.

Researchers have demonstrated the singular reliance on the protractive lecture in higher education, and the data is dismal. Researchers Biletzky and Keim (1999) found that adjunct

faculty at community colleges use lecture 83% of the time and that “active learning and technologies are rarely or never used by as many as 60-70% [of faculty]...” (p. 735). Yet conversely, many professional educators reported on successful modifications of the technique. One self-study completed by Moustakim (2007) highlighted the effectiveness of what he called “lecturettes,” or short 10 to 20 lectures, interrupted by discussion spaces (p. 215). Meanwhile, researcher Donald Greive (1996) in his teaching handbook recommended “changing activities every 20 minutes” (p. 57). Both examples are consistent with current research that suggested students experience a significant decrease in attentiveness after 15 minutes of lecture, and this includes highly motivated medical students (Nilson, 2010).

Although the interwoven association of motivation and teaching techniques has been established, emphasis must be on actively engaging the students in the classroom. McGlynn (2008), professor of psychology at Mercer County Community College, highlighted this with an example. She told a joke about methods employed in training a mule. One begins by taking a sturdy piece of lumber and striking the mule. Although this has nothing to do with training, it does get the mule’s attention (McGlynn, 2008). Yet, this was not a new idea. A study (Gunderson, 1971), with the goal of identifying the necessary competencies of community college faculty, identified motivating students as the most required competency. It follows that a later study (Goetsch, 1978) indicated motivating students was the single most identified need for professional development of faculty (McCaslin & Sanford, 2004).

So how do professors engage their military veteran students in active learning? The key is innovative and creative techniques that involve the students and require them to respond in ways that use multiple senses and hence, active thinking. Professor S. France (1991) has identified multiple techniques as effective in motivating his students. During lectures, he

requires his students to make note of a question that comes to mind from the lecture. He then attempts to answer some of these questions after every lecture. He also incorporates the one-minute response in asking his students to write a narrative explaining, in either one sentence or one paragraph, a noteworthy idea. For particularly complex ideas, France incorporates graphs or illustrations that visually explain concepts in innovative ways—responding to the various learning styles in his classroom. He interrupts lectures with requests for alternative ways of viewing a topic, thereby associating students' personal experiences through brainstorming. Other techniques included reading from primary sources and facilitating students' efforts toward their careers—a practical application (France, 1991).

Teaching techniques that build on the strength of Millennials in particular include cooperative learning (CL), also known as collaborative learning. Building off the social skills of students, CL forces interaction and participation of a small group of students to complete a task. In effect, the students teach each other as well as depend on one another for a grade, thereby relegating the instructor to the position of facilitator (Greive, 1996). Research has consistently shown CL as an effective motivational classroom teaching technique, but, nonetheless, research also demonstrates marked use of the technique across a continuum from 10 to 93% (Abrami, Chambers, & Poulsen, 2004). This inconsistent use has been found to be the result of low self-efficacy on the part of educators—suggesting a need for professional development (Abrami et al., 2004).

Similarly, other effective teaching techniques include discussions, questioning techniques, experiential learning, writings, and the use of technology. Discussions are useful in smaller groups, develop problem solving skills, and motivate students. In discussions, the educator facilitates, usually through asking a series of open-ended questions intended to engage

the students in thoughtful conversation. However, questioning techniques can be used in other venues. Questioning can be useful as a discovery method, in classroom assessments to assess the level of learning and for student evaluation (Cavendish, 2010). Meanwhile, experiential learning can take many forms. In experiential learning, students use experience to discover and learn answers. Some techniques include debate, role-playing, simulations, and real experiences such as internships. Writing also prompts student learning through active thinking. Writing techniques such as free-writes, one-minute papers, journals, learning logs, letters home, and mock tests have been found effective. Last, technology can be effective in the classroom in many ways. Students who learn more from visual or kinesthetic senses have the advantage over traditional classrooms based on auditory stimulus. Modern uses of technology include learning management systems, presentation software (some interactive), podcasts and vodcasts, web resources, wireless classrooms and mobile devices, Web 2.0 tools which include blogs, wikis, and social bookmarking tools, and even virtual worlds (Nilson, 2010).

Charmian B. Sperling of Middlesex Community College made the point clear when he stated, “The goal of the scholarship of teaching and learning is ultimately to enhance student learning” (2003, p. 600) perhaps obvious, indeed common sense. Nonetheless, too many educators have lost sight of the goal in higher education. Why? Because professors in higher education are researchers, trained to investigate and examine a narrowly defined thesis within their fields of study. They are not trained educators. They are not trained how to teach, unless one includes a teaching internship where untrained professors teach potentially new professors how they teach based from their experience. In fact, recent research into full-time higher education faculty found most learned to teach by either on-the-job training (teaching by doing—not suggesting a formal program) or emulation of their own professors (Knight, Tait, & Yorke,

2006). Decidedly, most professors prefer teaching in the manner that they were taught or learn (McCaslin & Sanford, 2004). Last, researchers found full-time faculty learn to teach through collaboration with colleagues—those informal work place conversations about problem students and other teaching issues between classes (Knight et al., 2006).

Additionally, in higher education is the increasing presence of part-time or adjunct faculty who, like their counterparts, may have had no formal training in teaching. In fact, adjunct faculty are less likely to ask for assistance in teaching due to the stigma attached. In most cases adjuncts are surrounded by colleagues with higher degrees and competing interests; besides, they were hired to teach, making them understandably apprehensive about admitting they might not know how (McCaslin & Sanford, 2004). Not unlike full-time professors, adjuncts as well have been shown to learn about teaching through on-the-job training, their own learning experiences, workshops and conferences, and collaboration with colleagues (Knight et al., 2006). Therefore, from a systemic view, higher education is split between two groups of educators that are largely untrained in pedagogy.

With this in mind, the simple answer to the motivation of students, in general, and military veteran students, specifically, is more effective pedagogy through educator professional development. Indeed, multiple research studies indicated a need for professional development. Additionally, studies note professional development that is offered in higher education may not be effective, primarily because the intent and content may be something else entirely—masquerading under the name of professional development. However, most educators seek professional development intended to increase their skills and knowledge on their teaching topic, not the topic of teaching (McCaslin & Sanford, 2004). Furthermore, while professional development appears to be offered to a significant portion of full-time faculty in some manner,

most institutions rarely, if at all, include adjunct faculty in their programs—a growing portion of their teaching community.

Furthermore, also related to motivation is a student's locus of control. When one considers the definition of *motivation* one looks for a student's inner drive to achieve. But, many students do not accept personal responsibility for their own actions. In this case, students may expect to be entertained or see the educator as responsible for their learning, placing students with an external locus of control at a disadvantage. Nonetheless, it is the responsibility of the student to take advantage of the education offered, not the educator's responsibility to "offered [*sic*] their 'education' from a runcible spoon" (McCarron & Savin-Baden, 2008, pp. 362-363). Therefore, a learning environment that is neither co-dependent nor a one-sided performance (either student or teacher) may be considered of greatest value. Instead, research has shown optimum learning outcomes resulted from student-teacher collaboration, connections between what is known to new ideas, and student-teacher discourse occurring between the students' known cognitive level and the new desired level, otherwise defined as the learner's zone of proximal development (Doherty, Epaloose, Hilberg, & Tharp, 2002). Last, Arthur Zajonc of Amherst College, would add consideration "to the development of reflective, contemplative, affective, and ethical capacities in our students" (2006, p. 1742) for effective pedagogy to occur.

In conclusion, motivation is viewed as an inner drive that has been theorized to manifest in a multivariate of ways. Educators should seek to understand motivational processes and attend to the diverse ways in which they present. Additionally, familiarity with the diversity of students, in particular their cultural background, may assist educators in responding to the learning needs of students. Therefore, educator responses that prompt and utilize innovative and creative teaching techniques that both engage a student's interests and allow for active learning

are viewed as the most effective techniques in pedagogy. Yet, teachers must be trained, highlighting the importance of professional development in higher education. If educators keep in mind that they are there to teach and accept that charge and then accept the responsibility for learning how to teach, thereby using a student's motivation to take full advantage of the environment with success driving success, then teaching will become fun and effective (Dearnley & Matthew, 2007).

Attrition

Anyone who has ever taught has considered the ramifications of unsuccessful students. Indeed, the costs of students' failing to complete an academic program are both varied and significant. For example, consider a western Virginia community college student who quits. First, the college will reassess the student's financial aid, and any aid previously received is now subject to repayment. The student may find that repayment is expected to be immediate. If financial aid was not used, the cost the student incurred such as tuition, fees, and textbooks is now lost—most likely without possibility of refund. Second, the student will find his or her academic transcript will reflect that incompleteness making it harder to return to college later. In some instances, the student may find himself or herself unable to compete for re-admittance to college. Third, continued tangible effects include the requirement for the student to repay any financial aid—notably student loans. Fourth, the student may find it difficult to obtain employment without an education, and future efforts to find employment may result in low-paying positions. The reduced circumstances of the student then may have a cascade effect resulting in an inability to repay loans, thereby reducing his or her credit trustworthiness.

Last, poor credit today has been considered by many employers and may, in itself, make it harder for the student to find gainful employment. Lack of employment, credit

trustworthiness, and an education coupled with debt places the student at a significant disadvantage at a very early stage in life. Given few options, the student may struggle for years to climb out of this marginalized position. However, what about the social effects? Society? It has been established that “college-educated citizens contribute in multiple ways to the social good and are less likely to engage in harmful behaviors” (Barnett, 2011, p. 193).

As a result, *attrition* was considered negative in that it refers to a student who “does not continue at the community college” (Wood, 2012, p. 304) or “a student’s failure to enroll from one semester to another” (Summers, 2003, p. 64) regardless of reason. Other terms used similarly included *enrollment*, *broken enrollment*, *departure*, and *dropping out*. Meanwhile, the opposite of attrition is generally referred to as *persistence* or *retention*—both used positively. Yet, these definitions of attrition are wanting in that a student may complete their educational goals—yet attrit. Indeed, Fralin (1993), Schuetz (2008), and Summers (2003) resolved this through identification of voluntary and involuntary reasons, positive and negative outcomes, or unplanned academic or non-academic events respectively. A position similarly taken by Bean and Metzner (1985) in their assertion that *dropout* refers to “any student who enrolls at an institution one semester but does not enroll the next semester and has not completed his or her formally declared program of study” (p. 489). Yet, even this is arguably inadequate as Tinto (1975) questioned whether a student’s drop-out decision was temporary, permanent, or a result of transfer (Tinto, 1975). As a result and for clarity, Schuetz’s (2008) definition of “leaving higher education [community college] before achieving one’s educational objectives” (p. 17) referenced here as “discontinued enrollment” guided this study.

From a foundational perspective, much early research into attrition holds true today and as such is appropriate to note. For example, research conducted by Spady (1970) demonstrated

“the student's role in the high school peer group is a definite source of his success goals” (p. 699) and as such perceptions of high status for student athletes, in particular, and other extracurricular activities to a lesser extent. However, in some cases the student may not have the capabilities necessary for “high status” (p. 700) thereby generating an exaggerated perspective of high expectations. The significance of social integration toward college persistence was confirmed by Tinto (1975) in his longitudinal model which theorizes students drop-out as a result of insufficient interaction either academically or socially, both of which are driven by the students’ commitment to either the institution or college completion (Tinto, 1975, Winter). Moreover, Tinto argued a student’s integration in college was significant for the behaviors that follow toward becoming a drop-out (Tinto, 1975, Winter). Although not entirely supporting the theoretical model of Tinto (1983), Pascarella and Terenzini (1983) largely confirmed the assertion that “academic integration was most important for students with low levels of social integration, and vice versa” (p. 215). Finally, Bean and Metzner (1985) built on this work and developed a new model demonstrating nontraditional students’ attrition was associated with external factors over social integration as nontraditional students lacked the integration of traditional or residential students (Bean & Metzner, 1985, Winter). Indeed, this focus on the nontraditional student, as an extension of Bean’s (1980) earlier model of attrition, was significant in that it provided a theory for the community college student veteran—the nontraditional student.

The research provided by Spady (1970), Tinto (1975), Pascarella and Terenzini (1983), Bean (1980), and Bean and Metzner (1985) provided a foundation to more recent research on attrition.

Outcomes

If one assessed community college outcomes by statistics alone, the results would prove dismal (Cho & Karp, 2013). Assuming the successful outcome is completion of a college degree or similar program, western Virginia community colleges (10 western colleges) demonstrated a 23.89% graduation rate for degrees attained within 150% of the normal completion time compared to a statewide graduation rate of 18.2% for the fall 2008 cohort graduating in 2011 (Virginia Community College System, 2014).

Table 1

Student Graduation Rates for western Virginia Community Colleges

Location	Students	Graduates*	Grad Rate
Dabney S. Lancaster	192	54	28.1
Central Virginia	515	122	23.7
Danville	410	93	22.7
Virginia Western	870	165	19.0
Patrick Henry	361	83	23.0
New River	457	102	22.3
Wytheville	475	161	33.9
Southwest Virginia	451	147	32.6
Virginia Highlands	356	61	7.1
Mountain Empire	453	97	21.4
Regional Totals	4,540	1,085	23.9
<u>Virginia Community College System</u>	<u>17,822</u>	<u>3,250</u>	<u>18.2</u>

Note. *Fall 2008 cohort graduating in 2011 within 3 years; 150% (Virginia Community College System, 2014)

Similarly, nationwide for public two-year degree-granting institutions, 20% of students completed degrees comparably with females outperforming males in all categories (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). Meanwhile, the outcomes for four-year degree-granting institutions was 59% for the fall 2005 cohort also graduating in 2011 within 150% of normal

completion time—again, females outperformed males (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014).

Despite the seemingly poor outcomes at community colleges, administrators would argue otherwise. Indeed, community colleges note many students do achieve their educational goals, but graduation may not have been their goal. Studies suggested the majority of students choosing community colleges today do so for alternative reasons, such as transferring to a four-year college, obtaining job skills, and receiving personal satisfaction. For Virginia community colleges alone, the rate of student transfers to four-year institutions for 2011 was 26.5% (Virginia Community College System, 2014). When combined to graduation rates, this demonstrates almost a 45% rate of educational success (Virginia Community College System, 2014). Furthermore, research completed by Fralin (1993) suggested “a majority of college students who drop out of college successfully complete their classes or achieve their goals” (p. 29). Nonetheless, the statistics still pointed to retention challenges at the community college, challenges that many educators and researchers consider beyond the control of the institution—citing attrition as something the student chooses, not something the college does to them (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Capps, 2012; Nitecki, 2011; Schuetz, 2005 & 2008).

For those students who do leave the community college before completing their goals studies suggested a variety of reasons, including low levels of academic preparation such as poor performance in high school, the requirement of remediation coursework, and deficient study skills; low income and employment and financial problems; students who fail to connect socially or do not obtain faculty validation; and personal characteristics such as motivation and commitment and clear goals. Aside from these issues, less frequent issues such as having health or child care problems, taking a break, or lacking transportation were noted (Fralin, 1993). For

the student veteran, lack of academic preparation and social connections were arguably the most significant reasons for attrition.

Summary

Military veterans are transitioning from military service to community college life and are bringing with them risk factors as well as unique needs that are not being addressed. The result is a significant number of veterans discontinue enrollment in the community college system, failing to complete their educational goals. The following review of the literature on the topic of veterans, their culture, motivations and outcomes, under a theoretical framework of transition was explored before proceeding. Influenced by *situation, self, support* and *strategies* as modeled by Schlossberg (1981) in her work on transition provides a well-studied theoretical framework for military veterans as they adapt to transition from military service to community college student. A transition that brings with it benefits, such as medical disability and later educational, that predate the republic. After World War II benefits would be re-assessed, expanded, and offered to men and women alike who would serve their country. As a result, a need to determine eligibility for benefits, among other functional needs, would result in a variety of definitions of the term veteran. Similarly, this study would need to identify and define veterans in transition from the military to the community college for dependability. As such military service of at least 12 consecutive months was indicated to ensure the veteran was in transition. Followed by a review of the various recent military benefit programs offered to assist those transitioning into an educational setting as well as the risk factors resulting from their nontraditional status were then investigated. Next, a review of military culture, simply defined as the veterans' learned collective behaviors were identified and discussed to better understand them and their perspective. Although veterans are long viewed as "combat masculine warriors"

change is necessary, indeed ongoing, despite appearances of cultural group endurance. Connecting with this culture group in a meaningful way through motivation was discussed as a central tenet of student success and further examined through select theories of constructivist, cognitive, and humanistic. Rounded out with a discussion of values and one's generational influences as an impact on motivation, particular attention was paid to the Millennials and the best suited instructional methodologies for this group. Last, the topic of attrition or the student's inability to continue from semester to semester until graduation, was discussed with a focus on outcomes. With success being measured as completion of a degree program the almost 80 percent of all community college students who do not graduate nationally is significant. Indeed, through the lens of transition, community colleges can do more to improve the success of veterans, and this study intended to fill the gap by exploring military veteran experiences, thereby providing them a voice, not yet heard, in hope of improving their experiences and guiding administrators toward improved achievement for this significant marginalized group.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to understand the experience of military veterans who have attended community college and subsequently “discontinued enrollment” without graduating. To achieve this a qualitative design was chosen, one in which rigorous and evolving data collection could be employed. Husserl (1936) would provide an avenue through his work in phenomenology, an idea that meaning could be found within one’s conscious experiences (*transcendental*) and analyzed by phenomenological analysis. The resulting research questions of, *how did military veterans describe their experiences at the community college, and what factors did military veterans identify as influencing their decision to discontinue enrollment,* guide this study through the theoretical lens of transition. Beginning with the setting, western Virginia and associated community colleges was chosen due to its abundance of student veterans. Moreover, data suggest the student veteran population is rising, the colleges are part of a larger system, and regionally there is a significant veteran population. All told the setting should provide sufficient participants. A minimum of five participants, who were student veterans have been purposefully selected from western Virginia community colleges through a recruiting process. The study followed the procedures required by the research university, including proposal acceptance and application to the appropriate IRB’s was outlined and the researcher’s role described. Data collection consisted of one or two personal interviews until saturation, collection of a quantitative questionnaire, follow-up interviews for member checks, and collection of a variety of institutional documents related to the topic. Last, analysis of the data followed qualitative guidelines beginning with the development of themes, followed by coding—in search for the “essence” of the experience. Trustworthiness was discussed to include

credibility; dependability and confirmability; and transferability; followed by a discussion on ethical considerations.

Design

In consideration of the goals of the stated research, the research design best suited to achieve those goals was qualitative. Even though qualitative research methods are in their infancy, when compared to quantitative, Giorgi (2009) has established “qualitative procedures are legitimate procedures that are guided by logic from first reflection upon a research problem until the writing of the report, just as quantitative procedures are” (p. 66). As a type of research, qualitative designs are scientific in that they entail “the production of systematic knowledge which the researcher collects, transforms, and interprets” (Biley & Holloway, 2011, p. 970). Qualitative research became increasingly popular in part because it answers questions that otherwise could not be answered and does so with increasing legitimacy—suggesting it may overtake quantitative methods (Niaz, 2009). Such legitimacy was largely a result of the work of Guba and Lincoln (2000) and their authenticity criteria for naturalistic inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1986; Niaz, 2009). Not surprisingly, the qualitative research design chosen allows for rigorous yet rich detailed data collection from multiple sources that were open-ended and evolving (Creswell, 2007, p. 107). Moreover, phenomenology was chosen due to the goal of analyzing the participants’ experiences of discontinuing their community college educations.

As a philosophy and research method phenomenology was founded by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) (Giorgi, 2009; Moran, 2012; Smith, 2013; and Vagle, 2014). Husserl was a Moravian born ethnic Jew, who demonstrated ability in mathematics. He later converted to Lutheranism, albeit non-practicing. Upon completion of his doctorate in mathematics, more specifically in the calculus of variations, his interests took him to philosophy. Beginning in 1884

at the University of Vienna, Husserl would be influenced by the lectures of Franz Brentano in his development of phenomenology (Smith, 2013). As a philosophy, Giorgi (2009) tells us phenomenology “seeks to understand anything at all that can be experienced through the consciousness one has of whatever is ‘given’...from the perspective of the conscious person undergoing the experience” (p. 4). Meanwhile, Smith (2013) defines phenomenology “as the study of the essence of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view” (p. 1). First introduced in the *Crisis* (1936), Husserl’s last project, his phenomenology developed an *intentionality* (Moran, 2012), or “the internal experience of being conscious of something” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 28).

Husserl’s work in phenomenology would develop with input from his students and change over time, with the exception of his passion for his work. Moreover, as cited in Jones (1980), Husserl stated “Only one need absorbs me: I must win clarity, else I cannot live; I cannot bear life unless I can believe that I shall achieve it.” (p. 254) Not unlike respected philosophers such as Descartes, also a mathematician turned philosopher, Husserl would be influenced by Descartes use of the *ego*, thereby moving from a individual consciousness or ‘lived experiences’ to a shared experience or ‘life-world’ (Moran, 2012, p. 4). Meanwhile, Smith (2013) would argue an adaptation of Kantian philosophy would help meld Husserl’s version of ‘transcendental idealism’ presented in Husserl’s *Ideas I* (1913) (Smith, 2013, p. 20). Regardless of the origins of thought, Jones (1980) would note the argument, calling it “Husserl’s lapse into idealism”, and define Husserl’s meaning of *transcendental* as “disclosed in experience by phenomenological analysis.” (p. 281) In Husserl’s later years, he would struggle with poor health and “the adverse political conditions imposed by the German National Socialist Regime” until his death in 1938 (Moran, 2012, p. 1). Although his two children, and later his wife, would immigrate to the

United States, Husserl would leave behind at least 40,000 pages of unpublished notes which would find their way to the Archives in Louvain, Belgium—safe from the Nazis (Smith, 2013).

It should be noted, in selecting a qualitative research method, ethnography was considered as the participants, as military veterans, do share the commonality of a culture group. Yet, ethnography was dismissed, as prolonged observations within the cultural environment was not practical with this cohort because they were no longer in the community college environment. Furthermore, given the desire to better understand the experiences of these student veterans and the goal of providing them a voice, transcendental phenomenology was selected as the most appropriate method per Moustakas (1994).

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to understand the experience of United States military veterans who have attended community college and subsequently discontinued their enrollment without graduating. The following questions guided this study:

Research Question #1: *How did military veterans describe their experiences at the community college?*

Research Question #2: *What factors did military veterans identify as influencing their decision to discontinue enrollment?*

The theoretical framework for the study follows Schlossberg's (1995) 4 S System: self, situation, support, and strategies.

Setting

According to Marshall and Rossman (1995), site or setting selection should be based on accessibility, a "rich mix" (p. 51) of people; likelihood of trustful participant relations; and credibility and quality of data. Therefore, the setting consisted of up to three western Virginia

community colleges, each part of the Virginia Community College System (VCCS). The VCCS consists of 23 community colleges with 40 campuses throughout the state with an enrollment of 279,970 (Virginia Community College System, 2014). Furthermore, the VCCS saw a 65% increase in student veteran enrollment over the 2008-2009 academic year to a current high of 9,404 student veterans enrolled during 2012-2013 (Virginia Community College System Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness, 2013). Indeed, the VCCS served a record 40,827 students with military status during the 2012-2013 academic year which included active duty service members, reservists, retirees, veterans, dependents, and spouses (VCCS, 2014). As a result, the findings were generalizable to the VCCS as a whole, providing implications for future practices.

For western Virginia specifically, the highest numbers of enrolled veterans centered on Virginia Western Community College, followed by Central Virginia and New River Community Colleges (VCCS, 2014). It should also be noted, Virginia Western Community College was the only Virginia community college to have a chapter of SALUTE: Veterans National Honor Society, had an active Armed Forces Student Association and was in the process of developing a Student Veterans Resource Center (Colorado State University, 2012). All told, the data presented not only an abundant participant sample in keeping with Marshall and Rossman (1995) but also a climate of interest in veteran academic outcomes. In addition, this region had a rich quantity of military veterans supported by the Veterans Administration Mid-Atlantic Health Care Network—one of 23 networks nationwide, including Alaska, Hawaii, the Philippines, Guam, and American Samoa (U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012b, April 21). Lastly, researcher convenience was a factor.

Participants

A purposeful selection of five to 25 military veterans who served a minimum of 12 consecutive months on active-duty with any branch of the U.S. Armed Forces, regardless of combat experience or location of service, who had ceased attendance or participation within the past year at a western Virginia community college for any reason, except graduation, was chosen for study. While Creswell (2007) and Vagle (2014) both made recommendations on the number of participants desired, clearly, the number of participants required was based on the phenomena being studied. As such there were examples of effective qualitative research with as few as one participant or as many as 325 (Creswell, 2007). Yet, most examples of phenomenological research reviewed by this researcher demonstrated a minimum of two participants and a maximum of 15. Moreover, in consideration of the phenomena being studied, its level of complexity, and the goal of collecting rich, detailed data the recommendation provided by Moustakas (1994) of 5-25 participants would appear appropriate (Vagle, 2014). Ideally, this study attempted to select a minimum of eight participants and continue data collection until saturation.

Additionally, the participants had attained the age of 18. Sampling was done initially through “gatekeepers” at up to three western Virginia community colleges, followed by snowball sampling and opportunistic meetings such as through visitation to campus student veteran groups or referral by military recruiters or other local military connected organizations such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars. It should be noted one of the “gatekeepers” was a committee member for this study. Preference was given to those participants who had most recently ceased community college enrollment or who appeared to form a more homogeneous group for focused findings (Creswell, 2007, p. 127).

Procedures

Upon successful defense of this research proposal, application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was submitted. Once approved by the IRB, approval from the individual community colleges selected for data collection was obtained. Once permissions were complete, the gatekeepers of Central Virginia, New River, and Virginia Western community colleges were requested to solicit their veteran populations, through email, for potential participants. Furthermore, requests for participants were made through veteran student clubs, campus flyers and internal information systems such as web television and student email announcements, and snowballing techniques. When insufficient participants were identified the search was broadened to military recruiters, local military organizations, and referrals were requested through gatekeepers.

Upon review by two experts, a senior military veteran with experience in community college education and a qualitative researcher, interview questions was forwarded to the research committee for approval. Upon receipt of IRB approval, the interview questions were piloted by two student veterans who were currently attending for validity. Currently attending students were selected to pilot interview questions due to the similarity to study participants, knowledge of current transition services, and availability. Piloted questions provided a mechanism to investigate and practice analysis processes. Upon validation of the interview questions participant interviews proceeded. Potential participants were provided informed consent forms and subsequently delimited through the questions identified in Table 2. All interviews were recorded with the participant's permission and subsequently transcribed by the researcher or transcriptionist for analysis. Identified participants were informed they may be needed for a second follow-up interview and provided a self-addressed stamped envelope to complete and

return the identity scale. Once interviews were completed, follow-up interviews were scheduled to provide participants an opportunity to respond to the findings as a form of member checks on data collected from interviews. Once data collection was complete, analysis and conclusions were written up.

The Researcher's Role

The role of this researcher was to understand the experiences of the participants as they transitioned from military service to community college and through their influences to discontinue community college enrollment. Employing a theoretical lens of transition and “insider experiences,” the researcher will describe the “human predicament” (Flowers, Larkin, & Smith, 2009, p. 5) of the military veterans involved through their voice. Yet, Moustakas (1994) reminds that one must first discover the truth within before “the point of view of others” (p. 62). To achieve this ambitious goal Husserl (1936) “has in mind the specific *bracketing* of a psychological interpretation of what is given in the acts of knowing” (as cited in Moran, 2012, p. 24). Not surprisingly, Husserl’s description of bracketing, also referred to as the *epoché* by Husserl, has been misunderstood (Giorgi, 2009; Smith, 2013). Perhaps Giorgi (2009) described bracketing best when comparing it to a judge who tells a jury not to consider evidence they have already heard (Giorgi, 2009).

Giorgi (2009) argues that Husserl only advised something doable, in this case through a “shift in attitude”, despite claims otherwise (p. 92). Indeed, Biley and Holloway (2011) were more unequivocal in that they argued the reflexive nature of qualitative research insists “researchers cannot exclude themselves” resulting in auto ethnographic essentials in data collection, analysis, and conclusions (p. 971). This argument followed Schwandt’s (2007) belief that what one has learned will clearly influence their research conclusions (Schwandt, 2007).

Taken together, one's own values and experiences may cloud the data in that this researcher has learned not all community college students were motivated to complete a degree, despite the belief that completion of a community college degree was within the capability of all Americans. Furthermore, the researcher's own experiences in the U.S. Armed Forces and the community college not only provided a basis for establishing common ground with participants but also potentially painted the final analysis if intensive reflection was not first carried out. Therefore, bracketing was carried-out with the intention to "suspend everything that interferes with fresh vision" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 86) over and over again until the researcher reached what Husserl (1931) advised as a "stream of pure consciousness" (as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 92) and the researcher was confident "past knowledge or nonpresented presuppositions" (Giorgi, 2009, p. 91) of the object were adequate (Moustakas, 1994; Smith, 2013).

Data Collection

Prior to any data collection, permission from the IRB was attained. Moreover, permission to solicit recent military veterans who have ceased attendance or participation in their classes was attained from the appropriate IRB or institutional administrator. In the case of VWCC, institutional review board approval was required and granted. Both Central and New River community colleges required approval letters in the absence of a formal IRB of which both approved. In keeping with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) the researcher requested the "gatekeepers" of these institutions to solicit former students, by email on behalf of the researcher, with a request they contact the researcher if they were interested in participating in the study. In all cases, the participants were required to read and sign informed consent forms which as a minimum explained the purpose of the study, acknowledged confidentiality and the use of pseudonyms, advised them of their right to withdraw from the

study at any time, and explained how the data was utilized. It should be noted that recruiting in this manner did not produce any study participants. Indeed, all study participants were identified from word-of-mouth and recommendations from those familiar with the study.

In keeping with the rigor of qualitative research, multiple sources of data collection were used. First, personal interviews with each participant were conducted at a location of mutual convenience. Participants were interviewed at least once or until saturation—after which token \$35 gift cards were presented to show appreciation for their contributions. All interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher or transcriptionist for later analysis. In the event a participant could not be interviewed in person, Skype, Adobe Connect, or similar technology was prepared to be employed. In the end, only one participant was not able to meet in person so their interview was completed over the telephone and recorded for transcribing. Second, upon conclusion of the first interview, a questionnaire on the aspects of identity was provided to each participant to collect quantitative data with a self-addressed stamped envelope for confidential reply. Third, follow-up interviews were scheduled, by telephone, to enrich the data collection and serve as member checks on the results from the sharing of experiences. Last, various institutional documents relevant to veteran's programs within the Virginia community college system were collected and reviewed.

Prior Knowledge

As was previously indicated, any phenomenological analysis of data begins with an identification of what the researcher already has knowledge and experience regarding the phenomenon to be studied. Indeed, as previously mentioned, Moustakas (1994) reminds that one must first discover the truth within before “the point of view of others” (p. 62). Therefore, the researcher conducted a self-investigation on the topic of veteran community college students and

the difficulties they encounter, thereby resulting in failure to reach their objective. This self-investigation was conducted through an audio recording the researcher conducted during periods of intense self-investigation. Indeed, such self-investigation was done prior to conducting the interviews to prevent any subsequent impact on the analysis to follow.

Interviews

The interview is the most common method of data collection for qualitative researchers, and as a result, researchers must be cognizant of the practices that give “validity” to their work (Coughlan, Cronin, & Ryan, 2009; Roulston, 2010). Interviews are used to obtain in-depth meanings of participants’ experiences and as such were the focal point of data collection and analysis for this study (Coughlan et al., 2009). Interviews may be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured in design, each of which has advantages and disadvantages. To that end, the semi-structured interview was used for this research study as it allowed for a pre-established set of questions designed to solicit responses specifically chosen to address the research questions (Coughlan et al., 2009). Yet, the semi-structured interview was flexible enough to allow for exploration of spontaneous ideas generated by the open-ended questions (Coughlan et al., 2009). Ideally, interviews were face-to-face to allow for observation and analysis of nonverbal communication as well as investigation of those clues, but if required other mediums were employed to include the telephone, Skype, or similar technology (Coughlan et al., 2009). Interviews were structured in that they followed a pre-established schedule of questions beginning with easy, rapport building questions, and becoming progressively more sensitive or personal (Coughlan et al., 2009). The researcher used strategies such as prompts, probing questions, active listening, uninterrupted talking, silence, and repeating interviewee statements in an effort to facilitate in-depth information gathering (Coughlan et al., 2009). Furthermore, the

researcher attempted to limit interviewee anxiety by being understanding of the myriad of motivations for volunteering for the research as well as demonstrating nonjudgemental behaviors or disapproval (Coughlan et al., 2009).

Interview questions were developed to achieve an investigation into the experiences of student veterans. Open-ended questions were developed as a result of the literature review and the experiences of the researcher after which they were compared to previous quantitative instruments developed by Capps (2011), Doenges (2011), Hayek (2011), Miller and Vance (2009), and Morreale (2011). The questions were expected to evolve from one interview to the next as the participants' experiences were advanced. Interview questions were reviewed by experts in the field, piloted by at least two military veterans currently attending community college and not otherwise involved in the study, for validity prior to use.

Table 2

Initial Interview Questions

Questions

Qualification for the study

1. Are you over the age of 18?
2. Have you ever served in a branch of the U.S. Armed Forces?
3. How long did you serve on active-duty?
4. When were you discharged?
5. Have you ever attended a western Virginia community college? Which one?
6. How many credits did you register for per semester?
7. When did you last attend classes?
8. Have you discontinued enrollment, or are you still in attendance?
9. Did you graduate or complete your educational goals?

Demographics

10. Are you male or female?
11. What race or ethnicity do you identify with?
12. In what branch of the U.S. Armed Forces did you serve?
13. What was your military occupation?
14. Where did you serve?
15. Please describe any medical or emotional problems resulting from your service.
16. Please tell me about your service (what experience(s) stood out?).

The purpose for the qualification and demographic questions were to ensure the participants met the delimitations of the study and provided background to assess the homogeneity of the participants with an emphasis on placing them in the transition setting.

Table 3

Second Interview Standardized Open-Ended Questions

Questions

Experience(s) and meaning for the study

1. Why did you join the Armed Forces?
 2. Please describe any preconceptions you may have had about the Armed Forces from relatives, friends, or other sources.
 3. Did your experiences match your expectations or where they different?
 4. What goals, if any, did you have for yourself upon completion of your tour of duty?
 5. Describe any training or assistance the Armed Forces provided for your transition to civilian life.
 6. Please describe your transition experience.
 7. When and why did you choose to attend community college?
 8. Thinking back to high school, in what ways did high school prepare you well and how did they fail?
 9. What is your first thought when asked if you are a veteran?
 10. Please describe your experiences and challenges in attending community college (administration, faculty, and institutional)?
 11. How do you identify yourself or what “hat(s)” do you wear: as a military member, civilian, college student, mother/father, or other identity?
 12. Why did you choose to cease attending or participating in community college?
 13. What community college programs or assistance might have improved your experience?
 14. What have you learned or taken away from the experience?
 15. Lastly, please describe the meanings you took away from your community college experience and how your military service either helped or hindered your success.
-

The purpose for the open-ended interview questions was to encourage the participants to describe their experiences as they initiated their service to the Armed Forces, their expectations, and their findings. The questions purposefully avoided assigning any branch of service because the limitation of an equality of participants among military service branches or gender was not anticipated.

Pilot interviews. Upon approval of the study by the Liberty University Instructional Review Board (IRB) application #1934 two pilot participants were identified and scheduled for interviews. Both participants for pilot interviews meet all the parameters for study inclusion except that neither would discontinue enrollment and would indeed continue their community college through graduation. To protect their identities their specific affiliations and community college data will be withheld, but both were veteran leaders in positions that brought them in contact with other student veterans in the community college arena in valuable ways. Their cumulative insight on the needs of the veteran population was useful in evaluating the interview questions and for preparing the researcher for the forthcoming task of data collection. Both provided informed consent prior to interview. As a researcher, it is tempting to view the pilot data obtained in terms of analysis. However, pilot interviews were done for the purpose of evaluating interview question validity and providing interview experience, not data collection. This later point is important especially given the pilot participants did not discontinue enrollment and therefore did not meet the parameters of the study for data collection.

Surveys/Questionnaires

An Aspects of Identity Questionnaire (AIQ-IIIx) by Cheek, Chen, Troop, and Underwood (1994) was used to describe the participants' orientation of personal, social, or collective identity. The reliability of the 35-question scale had a correlation of .87 for social identity and explored the role that motives can be used to assess future behavior of the military veteran group as a whole (Goodman, Seta, & Seta, 1998). The use of the scale was consistent in affirming the participants' self-identity as posited by Schlossberg's (1995) transition theory. Permission to use the scale was granted. Questionnaires were received from three of the eight participants and opened in accordance with an IRB approved process. To prevent from inadvertently identifying

the participants from their anonymous questionnaire the researcher opened the sealed envelopes without viewing the postmark and shredded the envelopes. The questionnaires were completed with no personally identifying data and scored.

Document Analysis

Institutional documents relative to military veteran programs or services at western Virginia community colleges were collected for comparison to the participants' experiences and used in validating emerging themes.

Follow-up Interviews

Upon completion of interviews and data analysis, follow-up interviews were scheduled to enrich the data collection from the sharing of experiences and allowed the participants to respond to the findings. Participants were contacted individually and requested to participate in member checks via personal meeting. Scheduling conflicts of the participants and physical distance made this impractical so telephone discussions were scheduled. Again, the goal was to present the findings to the participants and obtain their feedback as either validation or disapproval and their potential comments for improved validity. Member checks were conducted with four participants' in which they were presented the findings and asked to comment. Findings were presented in such a manner as to encourage negative comments.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data was expected to be fluid in that it would follow an "emergent conceptual framework" (Saldana, 2009, p. 48) of the participants' experiences. Beginning with bracketing out the researcher's personal experiences, as recommended by Moustakas (1994) in "a process of setting aside predilections, prejudices, [and] predispositions" (p. 85), similarly the *epoché* is a process allowing one to see something for the first time (Moustakas,

Phenomenological research methods, 1994). Followed by the development of phenomenological reduction of experience statements known as *horizontalization*, or open coding, each phenomenon was further developed into statements (Moustakas, Phenomenological research methods, 1994). During this early stage of analysis, strategies for visualizing the data through the use of mapping or matrices was investigated. Given qualitative data can be reduced and focused to enhance understanding and identify dominant patterns by separating “words, sentences, themes, or less often, whole narratives” the use of visualizations was exploited (Henderson & Segal, 2013, p. 56). The resulting visualizations and coding experience statements formed a horizontal list of equal statements that were “non-repetitive” and “non-overlapping” (Creswell, 2007, p. 159). Those experience statements were grouped into larger themes followed by a “what” and “how” description of each statement, a process Moustakas (1994) identifies as “imaginative variation” (p. 98) thereby providing the researcher with a world where “anything whatever becomes possible” (p. 98). From these textural and structural statements, the “essence” of the experience was described in detail (Creswell, 2007, p. 159; Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). Moreover, the coding process followed the method “most likely to yield a substantive analysis” (Saldana, 2009, p. 47) as well as “allow another researcher to verify the findings” (Doody, Slevin, & Taggart, 2013, p. 267); therefore, the researcher reserved the right to adjust the method through data collection.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the accuracy and credibility of the data analysis and is inherently dependent on the data. Moreover, within phenomenology Husserl would argue bracketing, or the *epoché* is first necessary to abstain from what one knows (Moustakas, 1994; Smith, 2013). To achieve this Grbich (2011) recommended a four-step process:

- 1) Identify the phenomena or object.
 - 2) Identify a recent experience of your own of this phenomenon in terms of how it appeared to you.
 - 3) Take certain features of this experience, develop variations on aspects of this bracketed experience, and then delete these from the object.
 - 4) Continue the process until you arrive at the essence or essential features of the object.
- (p. 86)

With the Grbich (2011) method of transcendental phenomenological reduction in mind, this study employed an adapted method. Beginning with the phenomena identified as “discontinued enrollment” the researcher reflected on “what is known and what has been experienced” within one’s own consciousness related to the phenomena—in this manner I adopted the phenomenological attitude (Giorgi, 2009). Next, I responded to each question listed in Table 3 regarding the phenomena and made detailed notes on past experiences (object). As an alternative, I could choose a single experience to focus upon. Then, I used free imaginative variation to identify that which was essential. This can be done by asking “Does it arise from my own experiences or from past knowledge or my reading?” (as cited in Grbich, 2011, p. 87). Last, I set aside or abandoned all that was known about the object to allow for a description of the essence of an experience to be seen (Moustakas, 1994). Giorgi (2009) cautioned that bracketing is not a process of forgetting one’s past, but highlighting the present. To that end, it was expected the above steps would need to be completed multiple times for the essence to become clear (Grbich, 2011). Furthermore, to ensure trustworthiness; trust building, prolonged engagement, and checking for misinformation from the participants, as well as member checks were conducted to review the findings for credibility as described below (Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Creswell, 2007).

Credibility

As a component of trustworthiness, credibility is an internal validity or is a measure of the data's likeliness to be true (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Bernard, Wutich, & Ryan, 2017; Creswell, 2014). Techniques to enhance credibility may include prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, and member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Bernard et al., 2017). Given the credibility of research hinges on the data, the setting and participants were selected in a manner to increase validity. Indeed, the setting provided for a significant pool of random participants that could be screened to meet the study parameters and therefore provide a "purposefully drawn" cohort for study (Poortman & Schildkamp, 2012, p. 1728). To achieve credibility the researcher used 'best practices' as recommended by Kvale (1996) of asking specific and brief questions, yet flexible enough to allow for spontaneity on the part of the participant, follow-up questions, and question clarification (as cited in Roulston, 2010, p. 202). Furthermore, the researcher attempted to interpret the data and where possible, verify interpretations during the interview (as cited in Roulston, 2010). Such interview techniques helped encourage prolonged engagement with the participant and included the researcher taking notes on the participants' non-verbal behaviors. Additionally, comparison of interview data with the Aspects of Identity Questionnaire to confirm the participants' own perspectives of self-identity, made the research *complementary* (Poortman & Schildkamp, 2012). Peer debriefing was utilized to assess themes, and coding employed during analysis to avoid bias or emotional attachment to an idea. Last, negative case analysis was employed where practical to further develop any participant responses that may have opposed a developing theme. (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Bernard et al., 2017)

Dependability and Confirmability

Lincoln and Guba (1986) would define dependability and confirmability as analogous to reliability and objectivity (p. 18). While Poortmann and Schildkamp (2012) acknowledge this definition, they offer an alternative for *objectivity* of “assessing whether the data are interpreted in a logical and unprejudiced way” (p. 1730). Furthermore, Poortmann and Schildkamp (2012) turn to Mertens (1998) to explain *reliability* as consistency of data interpretation regardless of by whom, when, or how the data was collected (p. 1730). To that end, dependability was maintained through auditing all interviews, comparing interview notes to transcripts, and development of a documentation trail (Creswell, 2007).

Transferability

As a threat to validity, transferability refers to parts of the research not studied, and where the researcher may draw conclusions out of context, such as applying results to non-studied individuals, settings, or situations (Bernard et al., 2017; Creswell, 2014). For example, in the case of this study data was collected from community colleges in western Virginia. Since all the colleges involved in the data collection are operated and managed under the leadership and policies of a statewide system, one might think the findings of this study would apply to other community colleges in the state. However, the uniqueness of the participant cohort, potential differences in the *support* and *strategies* portions of the “4 S System” modeled in Goodman et al. (1995), and setting preclude such transferability. Indeed, the value lies in the descriptions that others may use to understand the participants and their experiences. From these descriptions one must compare the research participants and the setting to determine for themselves how the participant descriptions may be applied (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2011; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtler, 2010).

Ethical Considerations

The ethical provisions outlined by the American Educational Research Association were strictly followed to include IRB approval prior to any data collection to avert any harm to the participants. Informed consent was attained from each participant using an informed consent form (see appendix B), which the participant had an opportunity to read and have any questions explained. Upon agreement, the participant was asked to sign the informed consent form which was subsequently handled pursuant to guidelines for personal identifying data indicated below. The participants were advised interviews were recorded, they may withdraw from the study at any time, and their confidentiality would be protected through the use of pseudonyms, nondisclosure of their college of attendance or any names of individuals or institutions, such as employers, or any other personally identifiable data (Kaiser, 2009). Digital data storage was protected through the use of two layers of access passwords, and printed materials were maintained in a locked steel cabinet. To further protect personally identifying data the researcher considered the potential effects of deductive disclosure, which could potentially identify participants through associations, specific events, or other traits (Kaiser, 2009). Given the population size of the U.S. Armed Forces and the community college system under study as well as the potential publication audience of this scholarly research deductive disclosure was deemed unlikely (Kaiser, 2009).

All participants were provided two counseling resources upon initiation of any interview question from Table 3 above—one resource from a local agency and one from the Veteran’s Administration (Strike, 2002). In the event any interview question prompted a significant emotional response, the interview was to be terminated and the participant referred for counseling. This never became necessary. In addition, if admission of a criminal behavior was

anticipated during any response the participant would have been asked not to disclose such behavior. Again, this never became necessary during the interviews. Finally, at the conclusion of the study, all personally identifying information was destroyed. Digital files were erased with a minimum of DOD compliant erasure methods and printed materials were physically destroyed through a minimum of a crosscut shredding method.

Summary

The methodology selected for this research was transcendental phenomenology—a qualitative method that is scientific and respected. Although other methods were considered the method chosen was expected to provide the rich, detailed data required to answer the research questions. Accordingly, the research asked *how did military veterans describe their experiences at the community college, and what factors did military veterans identify as influencing their decision to discontinue enrollment?* The research focused on a setting in western Virginia with a strong student veteran population and regionally centered on the largest community college in the western region of the commonwealth. Student veterans were purposefully selected for a homogenous cohort. The research procedures and the researcher's role of understanding the participant's experiences were elucidated as was the data collection. Data was collected through participant interviews, a questionnaire, document analysis, and member checks for trustworthiness followed by a discussion of ethical considerations to avert any harm to the participants.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

Analysis of the data focused on resolving the research questions. To that end, for the research question, *how did military veterans describe their experiences at the community college*, three major themes were highlighted and identified as roles of influence, transition, and perspective. For the second research question, *what factors did military veterans identify as influencing their decision to discontinue enrollment*, the themes were identified as roles of preparedness, motivation, and connectedness. From these emergent themes, coding was employed with the assistance of NVivo 11 for Windows computer software, particularly for visual affect (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2017). For example, an illustration of the most common words taken from the participant interviews can be illustrated as seen below in *Figure 1*. Such illustrations can infer meaning and highlight themes within the analysis to follow, such as with the word “researcher”, used over 600 times in the participant interview transcripts suggest the depth at which the researcher attempted to attain. Last, the participants were described and the AIQ questionnaires were analyzed.



Figure 1. Word cloud. Most commonly used interview words

Participants

A total of 14 interviews were scheduled from identified participants. All scheduled interviews began with presentation and acceptance of informed consent as approved by the Liberty University IRB under application #1934. Upon completion of the interview all participants were assigned a pseudonym that reflected their cultural background without compromising their identity. Of these 14 scheduled interviews two included pilot interviews of one male and one female participant. It is important to note gender at this stage, because of the participants who qualified for this study, none were female. However, as indicated one pilot interview included a female veteran and two scheduled interviews of females were not included in data collection as they did not meet the parameters of the study and were subsequently disqualified; one who did not serve post 9/11 and the second graduated from a western Virginia community college and then progressed to complete a four-year university program. Of the 11 male veterans scheduled for interviews, one was a pilot as previously noted, and two were disqualified upon determining they did not serve post 9/11. Thus, a total of 8 veterans were determined to meet the parameters for data collection—and, all 8 were male. A pseudonym was assigned for each participant relevant to their gender and ethnicity. The chart below illustrates the cohort demographics followed by an introduction of each participant.

Table 4

Demographic Description of Participants

Name*	Gender	Ethnicity	Branch	< Age 49	Post 9/11	Credits	Discontinued	MOS Code**
Caleb	M	Caucasian	Marine	Yes	Yes	15	Yes	Combat Engineer
Isaac	M	Black	Navy	Yes	Yes	12	Yes	Boatswain
Peter	M	Caucasian	Marine	Yes	Yes	17	Yes	Rifleman
Felix	M	Caucasian	Marine	Yes	Yes	12+	Yes	Infantry
Ethan	M	Caucasian	Army	Yes	Yes	16	Yes	Military Police
Daniel	M	Caucasian	Army	Yes	Yes	15	Yes	Cannon Crew
Stephen	M	Nordic	Marine	Yes	Yes	14	Yes	Rifleman
Clement	M	Caucasian	Army	Yes	Yes	12	Yes	Signal Support

*all names are pseudonyms and are listed in the order they were interviewed

**Military Occupational Specialty

+ indicates participant claimed more than full-time registration, but did not specify

Caleb

Not an uncommon response, Caleb joined the Marine Corp out of feelings of patriotism and served as a combat engineer for four years. He served in Okinawa, Japan and Camp Lejeune, North Carolina from where he was discharged. Growing up in a farming family, Caleb identified with the tasks of his Corp occupation and noted a nostalgic view of his service as absent of any medical or emotional issues yet fulfilled with a sense of comradery. He describes his transition experience as mainly attending required “counseling” and acknowledges it may have been minimal as he was transferring to the reserves where he would serve another four years. Knowing hard work most of his life, Caleb pondered achieving an education for many years before acting and considered some form of a teaching occupation. As the oldest of the cohort in his mid-forties, he finds himself in transition from the reserves to community college, and then perhaps a four-year college (Caleb, personal communication, November 16, 2014).

Isaac

Lured by a promise to “get paid to see the world, and...learn a job skill”, Isaac joined the Navy Reserve at age 17 to get away from home. He served on five ships, based from Virginia, California, and Iceland as a boatswain, or what he calls “the Popeye” for ten years before being discharged under high year of tenure guidelines. This means he was unable to achieve a high enough test score relevant to his occupation to be promoted, in his case beyond E-4. After his initial discharge, he was recalled to active-duty and served another 2 years after 9/11 before being discharged, again due to non-promotion. Isaac would attend over three years of community college and trade schools before attending a western Virginia Community College. Due to low grades, he would quit following a couple of semesters of full-time classes. Isaac hopes to someday graduate with his associates degree as he believes it will improve his employment outlook (Isaac, personal communication, March 30, 2015).

Peter

Having thought about joining the military for a while, Peter joined the Marine Corp out of high school when he was age 17. As an infantryman, Peter served 4 years stationed at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina but was deployed to Iraq for the majority of his service. He suffered PTSD as a result. He describes his transition assistance as hurried since he had just returned from a third tour with the Marine Expeditionary Unit, which pushed him over his 4-year mark. Upon his discharge, he looked for a job unsuccessfully before deciding to go to a western Virginia community college since “a lot of jobs require an education”. Recruited by a local prison while attending classes in criminal justice he would accept the offer of employment over continuing his education. However, he would at least initially attempt to follow through with his

college goals through taking online classes but his job took priority (Peter, personal communication, April 1, 2015).

Felix

Not unlike Peter, Felix would quit college where he majored in criminal justice full-time to accept a job in corrections. Desiring to play the video game *Call of Duty* for real, Felix would join the Marine Corp where he would serve 4 years and complete two tours in Iraq as an infantryman stationed at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. With a goal of becoming a police officer he describes his service as “fun” and other than some mild hearing loss he felt the experience “made me grow up”. He did attend a transition class upon leaving the Corp which he described as financial management and resume writing. In his attempts to find a job in law enforcement he observed that “they take kids out of college over combat vets” so he attended a western Virginia community college and majored in criminal justice. He reports doing well in college, in fact, he stated “community college seemed like a cake walk”. Nonetheless, during one class a local prison recruiter visited and hired him, so having achieved his goal of a career in law enforcement he quit college without graduating (Felix, personal communication, April 2, 2015).

Ethan

Joining the Army to achieve his dream of working in law enforcement, Ethan served as a military policeman and K-9 handler at Fort Carson, Colorado for almost 8 years. Injured in a vehicle explosion in Bagdad, Iraq in 2004 resulted in a post-concussive disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Discharged via medical board the transition process was much quicker and ended his dream of being a civilian police officer. Ethan would be provided transition assistance but he felt the process was rushed. After a few years of not being employed

he “went to college because it’s what people say you are supposed to do”, and besides “I had these benefits”, he said. After about three semesters at a western Virginia Community College where he studied administration and management he would change majors to radiology and then quit to accept a job that he “could do...with the current skills I had” (Ethan, personal communication, April 11, 2015).

Daniel

Following his uncle’s footsteps, Daniel joined the Army after high school in lieu of college. He would serve primarily overseas in Kuwait, Somalia, and South Korea first as a cannon crewmember and later as a fire support specialist or artillery observer as Daniel describes the occupation. As a result of a head trauma he would later experience short term memory loss, have panic attacks and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Although he thought of perhaps serving a full career he would separate after 4 years—returning home to find a new life. Upon separation, the Army did provide Daniel transition assistance but he admits bitterness over his separation distracted him. He would ultimately attend a western Virginia community college to “find something”, but in the end, would quit without finishing his goal—perhaps because he identified no goal, except to say, “the value of education was very important in our household” (Daniel, personal communication, April 12, 2015).

Stephen

From a young age Stephen was motivated to join the military as a member of his family had “served in various branches and various ranks and jobs”. He went on to say, “I wasn’t too enthusiastic about being in the peace time military”, but when 9/11 happened he knew the time was right. He joined the Marine Corp and became a rifleman stationed at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina where he would serve two tours in Iraq and a tour in Afghanistan. He was particularly

proud of serving as a sniper team leader. Although he states he is physically fit he wonders if his experiences have caused him to get angry faster than he remembers. He recalls attending transition assistance training but states it was hurried as he had just returned from overseas and was hung-over most days and only interested in seeing his buddies, visiting family, and experiencing America. Upon discharge, he returned to volunteer fire-fighting which gave him some stability followed by attending a western Virginia community college full-time majoring in engineering. He states confidently that he will complete his degree, but also agrees that he “was trying to bite off more than he could chew”, but nonetheless plans to return to college and transfer to a four-year college even though he was initially turned down by a state university (Stephen, personal communication, April 15, 2015).

Clement

Perhaps the drollest answer to the question, why I joined the military, was Clements response of “shits and giggles”. He stated he was age 20 at the time and working in fast food, so why not. He would serve 8 years in the Army as a Signal Support Systems Specialist which he commonly described as network line installation and maintenance. He would serve in South Korea and at Fort Sill, Oklahoma where he would be injured in a line of duty fall. Although he does not state any specific goals toward his Army service he does describe the importance of his family to him and his decision to separate after 8 years. The Army did provide transition assistance however, he described it as “a waste of time”. He had registered for a western Virginia Community College before his discharge went into effect and majored in culinary arts. Although, he is working, going to college full-time, and raising a family simultaneously he is both pragmatic and positive about the future, despite deciding to quit college for at least the summer semester (Clement, personal communication, April 20, 2015).

As a cohort, homogeneity was evident in a variety of ways. Demographically, all were male, mostly Caucasian, under the age of 49, served post 9/11, discontinued attendance at a western Virginia community college, all were in transition, and all but one had served in a combat zone. Other similarities included participants were eligible for and did receive some form of financial aid through the GI Bill. Admittedly, not each case went smoothly but benefits were eventually paid. Also, the participants responded similarly when queried regarding how they fit in. Clearly, the cohort was more mature, disciplined, and took responsibility for their education, whereas they all described their classmates in opposite terms. Most also consciously selected their seating in the classroom based on some tactically sound decision rather than to accept their position by chance—with most concerned about their own protection. Although each participant was asked what “hat” they considered the most important their answers were inconsistent and seemingly unsure, despite the fact each participant appeared to understand the question.

Results

Upon analysis of the data, the presentation of primary themes targeting the research questions would seem a proper beginning followed by coding to better develop those themes. Participant interviews highlighted a number of major themes, including experiences from childhood which influenced their later thinking and goal choices, pride of the accomplishments and the level of responsibility they attained while serving in the military, employment outlook, their motivations—such as why they went to college, the connections they made with others, their perspective of the community college, and their adaptations to dynamic environments, including organizations, and people. In response to the research question, *how did military veterans describe their experiences at the community college*, several themes presented themselves, including what I will call a role of influence, transition, and perspective. The role of

influence describes the participants' experiences relative to those factors involving their initial decision to attend college in the first place—their motivations. Next, are their experiences relative to the transition process from high school to military service and then on to their community college experiences, followed by their experiences while in attendance, or perspective.

Role of Influence

Cumulative life experiences have an impact on decision making whether it be our early home life, experiences from high school, or the military. As a result, these experiences are described here. One area of difference was immediately identified as ones' reason for joining the military. We could surmise that their experiences may be affected by their expectations. It follows then, one's reasons for attending college may affect his or her experience. Of the study participants, there were a variety of reasons for joining the military, including patriotism, to get away, occupational experience for a specific career, the excitement of playing out a video game live, and because they always expected to join and now the timing was right. Furthermore, participants described their rationale for attending a community college to improve their employment outlook, to improve their education, attending college was expected by society, and because they had college financial aid benefits and could not secure employment or had nothing else to do. For the study participants, the decision to join the military or attend a western Virginia community college was a next step. Indeed, none of the participants verbalized any concern or thought relative to whether or not they had the skills, were capable, or were in any way prepared for this next step of either military service or college attendance even if they had already experienced obstacles. As a result, this analysis needs to first investigate their path to the community college.

Why join. Of the myriad of reasons a person may have for choosing to join the military Clement's was unique—"shits and giggles". Yet, when you dig deeper you learn that Clement was working in what he called a "fast food joint...flipping burgers" and was influenced by the Army's "be-all-you-can-be" commercials. This suggests that perhaps Clement felt that at age 20 he wanted more from life. Meanwhile, Ethan describes his desire to become a police officer and his belief the occupational specialty of military police in the Army would "be a good way to get headed in that direction". Yet, several describe the values of family behind their decision. For example, Stephen speaks of knowing from a young age that he "wanted to be in the military" and the events of 9/11 said to him "this is the time to be in the military". A position also described by Peter who recalls "playing with GI Joe's and stuff" and acknowledging he was "going to do it anyways", that he enlisted when he turned 17. Similarly inspired by playing video games and watching the *History* channel with his friends from school, Felix would join to "do what I do in the video games for real". Caleb also was looking for acknowledgment of his decision and states it was "a sense of pride or patriotic duty" to join the military. Indeed, Daniel was encouraged by his Dad who he says, "gave me \$200, my clothes and told me that he taught me everything I needed to survive life, hope I paid attention, there was no retest, and sent me on my way". Ultimately, a few weeks later Daniel would find his Dad sitting at the kitchen table with an Army and Air Force recruiter. Last, Isaac states I joined the military "to get away from home".

Video games. Video games were brought up initially by Felix who stated video games, such as *Call of Duty*® inspired him to join the military. He said, "it's kind of like I wanted to do...what was in the video games for real". This, combined with the positive nature in which the *History* channel portrayed Marines further inspired Felix to join the Marines. According to the official website for *Call of Duty*®, which is a series of multiple games, the *Advanced Warfare*

game is described as "...envisions the powerful battlegrounds of the future, where both technology and tactics have evolved to usher in a new era of combat" (Activision Publishing, Inc., 2017). Stephen also played *Call of Duty*®, but indicated he played mostly after he joined the military as he was not allowed to watch television nor have video games growing up. Meanwhile, Daniel stated emphatically about video games that "I don't waste my time on things that are pointless".

Location of service. The cohort has homogeneity regarding location of service as all participants served at least one tour overseas, including generally non-hazardous duty assignments to Iceland, Japan, and the Republic of Korea (ROK). It should be noted that although the ROK is not an active combat zone it does maintain a state of warlike readiness with many service members serving unaccompanied tours (without family members), making it dissimilar to other overseas assignments. Their location of service implies the potential they may have suffered mental or emotional trauma that potentially could impact their community college performance. Ethan, Daniel, and Clement would serve in the ROK. By far the most common overseas service was in Iraq with Peter, Felix, and Stephen serving two tours each, and Ethan serving once. Daniel would serve in both Somalia and Kuwait while Stephen would also serve in Afghanistan. It should be noted that service in Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Kuwait during the periods encountered by these participants made them eligible for Hazardous Duty Pay or Imminent Danger Pay (HFP/IDP) (Military.com, 2017; Military Times, 2016). Eligibility to receive HFP/IDP, of \$7.50 per day (\$225 per month), is defined by service in an area "subjected to hostile fire or explosion of a hostile mine" or "On duty in an area in close proximity to a hostile fire incident and the member is in danger of being exposed," or the military member was "Killed, injured, or wounded by hostile fire, explosion of a hostile mine, or any other hostile

action” (Defense Finance and Accounting Service, 2012a; Defense Finance and Accounting Service, 2012b, p. 1). It should be noted that changing conditions over time as well as governmental regulation changes affect not only the amount received but also eligibility with some areas being paid lesser amounts starting at \$50 per month, such as in Kuwait, to a maximum of \$225 (Military Times, 2016). It is assumed that Isaac also received “sea pay” for arduous duty, as well as Peter, who was assigned at one time to a Marine Expeditionary Unit. The most commonly referred to stateside location was Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. The following figure visualizes their service by areas of hazardous duty and non-hazardous duty overseas locations.

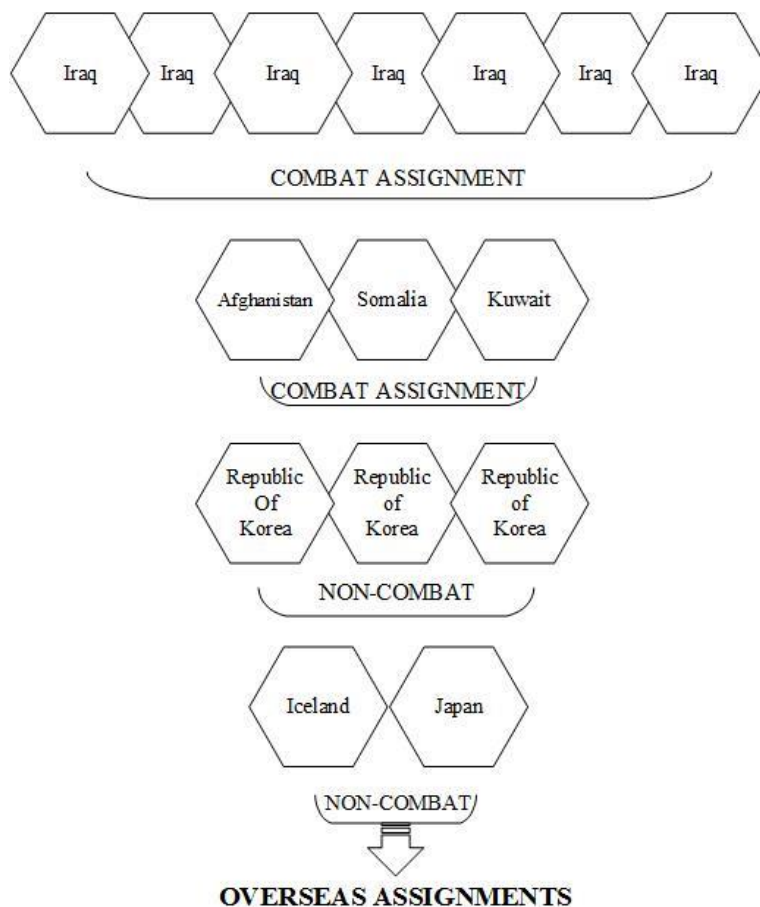


Figure 2. Overseas Assignments. Illustrates combat service assignments v. non-combat.

Medical/psychological. None of the study participants described any severe medical or psychological problems resulting from their military service. Physically, Clement, Daniel, and Ethan all described head injuries of varying severity, but none exhibited any symptoms during interviews. Clement describes a head injury from an occupational fall (non-combat), while Daniel claims he was struck in the head during a combat operation, and Ethan describes a “post-concussive” combat injury. Furthermore, Clement described a shoulder injury, of unknown etiology, which required surgical intervention. Less severe physical complaints included hearing loss, reported by Felix. While Caleb, Isaac and Stephen did not report any medical or psychological issues, Isaac described personal challenges resulting from a divorce during his military service while Stephen noted “maybe I get angry a little faster than I used to”. Meanwhile, Peter, Ethan, and Daniel all described psychological difficulties including PTSD, panic attacks, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and short-term memory loss. None of the participants described any learning challenges or complained of any obstacles to their education because of their medical or psychological problems. However, at one-point Isaac mentioned he suffered from attention deficit disorder as he was describing his experiences in the community college classroom.

Role of Transition

Each study participant couched their separation from the military and eventual attendance in a western Virginia community college as a transition. Although called by many names and couched under many different programs depending of branch of service or the military installation involved the program most commonly known as the transition assistance program or TAP was experienced by most of the participants, except Clement who refused to attend. All participants acknowledged the military provided transition assistance, primarily described as

training in job services and focusing on resume development. Although some indicated the training included counseling, job interview techniques, financial management, and adapting military skills to civilian terminology. The length and depth of the training provided was described variously, from counseling, briefings, to a two-day class with half of the participants describing the training as rushed or quick. There were some similarities in their experiences in that, most felt rushed through the program and most did not take advantage of what was being offered—instead viewing the classes as a requirement to fulfill to separate from the military. Two participants would refer to transition assistance using the acronym TAP (transition assistance program) and one ACAP (Army Career and Alumni Program). None of the participants described transition training relative to an educational environment, but in all cases, it was referred to as job placement training. This is not consistent with the goals previously identified for transition assistance training which “could include transition to college and the use of veterans’ educational benefits” as described in Chapter 2 (U. S. Department of Labor, n.d.a).

Participants generally described their transition as a process that was most likely rushed and boring but minimally acceptable. At least one participant refused to attend the training citing bitterness over the conditions of his separation while another noted he needed more time to decompress and visit with family after returning from overseas resulting in his attending training hungover from drinking. It can be stated that the study participants did not report any transition assistance relative to college.

Identity. The concept of identity or the participants’ perception of the “hat” they predominantly wore, be it that of a veteran, father, or college student to name a few was largely difficult in that many did not have an answer. To that end, many did not choose a specific identity. Nonetheless, father/family, veteran, and academic/student were used by the participants

to describe their identity. It should be noted that several requested clarifications of the question and the “hats” listed were used by the researcher as examples thereby perhaps inadvertently leading the participants. This question was also the topic of the questionnaire that was given to each participant. The table below illustrates the results of the questionnaires, of which there was a 37.5 percent return rate, or 3 of 8. The questionnaire and scoring rubric are shown in Appendix G. However, the scale is scored on a rating of 1 to 5 as follows:

- 1) not important to my sense of who I am
- 2) slightly important to my sense of who I am
- 3) somewhat important to my sense of who I am
- 4) very important to my sense of who I am
- 5) extremely important to my sense of who I am

Overwhelmingly study participants P1, P2, and P3 identified with a personal identity orientation as *very important* to my sense of who I am, as defined by Jonathan R. Cheek (1982) as “one’s private conception of self and feelings of continuity and uniqueness” (Cheek & Briggs, 1982, p. 401). Moreover, on the special items portion of the scale, on academic identity, participants also identified as *very important* to my sense of who I am. The special items portion of the scale was adapted by Dollinger (1996) to highlight academic identity. Using three items from the scale, Dollinger’s (1996) measure yielded the following coefficient $\alpha = .70$ ($M = 11.9$, $SD = 2.0$, range = 4-15) (Dollinger, 1996, p. 388). Those items included “my academic ability and performance such as the grades I earn and comments I get from teachers,” “my role of being a student,” and “my occupational choice and career plans (Dollinger, 1996, p. 388).” These findings are consistent with responses from the study participants in that academic and conceptions of self, such as father and veteran (personal identities) were selected. Conversely P1, P2, and P3 only indicated their social and collective identities were *slightly important* to my sense of who I am. Last, the balance of the special items on the scale were not used.

Table 5

AIQ-IIIx Scoring

PI = Personal Identity Orientation				CI = Collective Identity Orientation			
<u>Question #</u>	<u>P 1</u>	<u>P 2</u>	<u>P 3</u>	<u>Question #</u>	<u>P 1</u>	<u>P 2</u>	<u>P 3</u>
2	5	5	5	4	4	4	5
5	5	4	5	7	5	1	2
8	5	5	5	10	4	4	1
11	5	1	3	13	3	3	3
14	4	5	5	23	4	3	3
17	5	4	4	26	4	4	4
19	3	4	4	31	2	3	2
21	3	5	4	33	3	3	1
24	5	4	4	Totals	29	25	21
28	4	4	5	AI = Academic Identity			
Totals	44	41	44	<u>Question #</u>	<u>P 1</u>	<u>P 2</u>	<u>P 3</u>
SI = Social Identity Orientation				30	5	4	5
<u>Question #</u>	<u>P 1</u>	<u>P 2</u>	<u>P 3</u>	32	4	5	5
3	2	1	3	34	3	5	4
6	4	2	4	Totals	12	14	14
9	4	4	3				
12	3	4	4				
15	3	4	3				
22	3	5	2				
25	4	5	3				
Totals	23	25	22				

Role of Perspective

In the words of Ethan, “You have to have perspective on some things that is going to make you better”. Indeed, one could say perspective is necessary to describe the various experiences of the study participants in attending community college. Clearly, each participant viewed their experiences from a different lens thereby providing the multiple views described.

Why college. The potential to open doors for the future was the main idea described as why I went to community college. Caleb, from a farming family, wanted to further his education

because he “literally, physically worked hard most of my [sic] life, and now that I have the opportunity I want to try to go a different route”. Similarly, Isaac was thinking about what he would do upon retirement from the military and his aunt’s words about college opening doors influenced him. Meanwhile Clement had already decided upon a career in culinary arts and applied before he left his post in Korea. Despite not articulating a specific reason for attending community college Isaac would describe his efforts to find gainful employment with a distinct voice of frustration. Clearly, he described how his 10 years’ service and education to date warranted a full-time position with a future but he had not realized success, nor had Caleb who spoke of someday teaching college. Only Clement seemed content with his occupational choice in the culinary arts. Yet for Peter, Felix, Ethan, Daniel, and Stephen the realities of finding employment with a future after their completion of service weighed on them. Perhaps Peter’s words speak for the group when he stated, “I wasn’t having any luck finding a job and I had the GI Bill and pretty much a lot of jobs require an education so I needed to go.” Felix reiterates that sentiment when he stated “I couldn’t find a job. So I was like screw it, I’m not doing anything else so burn up that GI Bill”. Indeed, Felix described his thoughts relevant to working at Walmart or McDonalds as potentially “beneath” him, although he was careful to admit “I’m not saying this is the proper way to think”. Ethan, who was concerned his combat wounds might preclude him from a law enforcement position went to community college “as kind of something to do more than anything else, to fill the hole of not being employed...to kind of figure out what to do next”. Ethan spoke at length about his rationale and it included the notion that he went to college “because it’s what people say you’re supposed to do. If you don’t know what to do, go to college”. He followed this by saying he had no other options and “tens of thousands of dollars for school, so why not use that and see what comes of it.” Meanwhile, Daniel realized he

“wasn’t going anywhere...had no more goals” and “felt that I let myself down and needed to find something...find that direction.” Whereas Stephen, who had stable employment, although volunteer with free housing, referred to attending college “like a check in a box”. He was surprised when he applied for admission to a State University and was turned down for poor high school grades. He acknowledged he “didn’t understand the process or the options” but went to community college as a means to work his way up to a four-year college.

Technology. The use of the internet to learn about options available for college and more specifically to answer questions about a chosen college and available programs of study was a common activity for study participants. In fact, Clement investigated, chose, and applied for admission to a western Virginia community college before he ever separated from the Army. So, he made a decision about his future goals and knew where he was going in life, unlike most of the cohort who were unsure about what the future held for them. Indeed, most knew they wanted to expand their education but most were also focused on finding gainful employment at separation and attending college became something they did when their employment efforts failed. By and large the cohort describes using the college’s website to explore the college, find answers to common questions, and apply for admission. After the initial online application they would follow-up with a visit to campus and talk with admissions representatives. Clearly, the college’s website was the first contact most had with their college of choice, and undoubtedly the effectiveness of the website facilitated their decision to attend and the application process. All participants found the admissions process went without difficulty, with the exception of application for GI Bill benefits. Some indicated they could have used more assistance in selecting a major and choosing classes, which appears to stem from the absence of an educational goal.

GI Bill. Although it may be assumed that all participants were eligible for community college financial aid under the GI Bill based on their periods of military service, as a reminder chapter two indicated varying eligibility and programs. Nonetheless, only Caleb and Isaac did not directly speak of their GI Bill benefits. For the other participants, there was an acknowledgement that GI Bill benefits were available and perhaps they should use them. Peter and Felix both described their decision to use their GI Bill in terms of “why not”. For example, Felix stated “So I was like screw it, not doing nothing else so burn up that GI bill.” Furthermore, Ethan described his use of the GI Bill as a benefit saying, “I knew I had my GI bill benefits”. Otherwise, the balance of participants acknowledged their GI Bill benefits as a matter of fact, such as Daniel and Clement who both stated, “I had/have the full GI Bill”.

Admissions. The study participants’ admissions process was described similarly, so much so that the schools could be identified by the participants’ likes and dislikes during the process. Generally, the technology employed by the community colleges was helpful and most indicated a positive experience, especially the convenience of applying online. Nevertheless, most had actual contact with the colleges’ admission office, placement testing center, financial aid office, or veteran’s representative, and some also spoke with an advisor. Yet mostly, the admission process was handled by admission personnel. Isaac, Stephen, and Ethan all spoke fondly of the veteran’s advisor that assisted them and this person, according to participants, was knowledgeable and helpful—making the process go smoothly. Isaac used the word “love” to describe this individual while Stephen said, “got me squared away pretty quick” and Ethan pointed out “the real help had kind of started to come in when I had talked to some of the veteran service people”. However, the actual admissions people who counseled them on program choice and class selection was described as not as helpful. Ethan elucidated the process, explaining first

he had to take a placement test, followed by an appointment with an admissions advisor, and then off to see the veteran's advisor. The difficulty for Ethan was he did not know what he wanted to go to college for, therefore he described the admission advisor as not helpful. He said, "it was almost like when I sat down he just expected me to know...what I was there for...what I needed to take...what degree I wanted." In the case of Felix and Peter, they both described a financial aid office that "didn't know much about the GI Bill", according to Felix. Felix was referred to the VA, and Peter described feeling like they were not interested, "didn't pay no attention to anything". In the end, Peter noted "I ended up buying, paying all the tuition and books" but the following semesters both Felix and Peter indicated the GI Bill process was working.

Educational format. While all study participants attended community college in a face-to-face format, both Isaac and Peter attempted online courses with limited success. Isaac, who admittedly struggled in college, earning mostly "D" grades attempted online classes but found the format difficult, as he "knew nothing about online". He suggests his lack of familiarity with the technology was the main hurdle, requiring some form of one-on-one assistance that was not available to him. Peter, on the other hand, attempted online classes once he found employment so he could continue working towards his degree. He noted that online courses with discussion boards that encourage interaction among the students were easier to do than online assignments that you had to complete on your own. He points toward his work schedule as the reason for his lack of success but also stated "I've got other stuff I got to do" and the online format "left [sic] all up to yourself to do". Meanwhile, Felix, who stated "community college to me was easy", made the decision to complete his college degree at some future date through an online only format—he believed completing a bachelor's degree was necessary for him to advance in his

current job. He would have taken online classes to complete his degree after he found employment but he stated the specific classes he needed were not available online. If they had been he indicates he would have completed them as he believed “the online classes were a cake walk”.

Instructional methodology. Although study participants did not elaborate much on instructional methodologies they have a direct impact on student success and are therefore of concern. Generally, participants respected the faculty but had some recommendations. For instance, Peter believed that professors “would start off at a slower pace than just dumping off”. A feeling resulting from his time in the Marine Corp he believed lecturing “wasn’t a match for me”. He further elaborated that in online classes the “professor would show up like once a week and dump like 8 assignments for you to complete”. Similarly, Felix added some professors “rolled in taught his class and that was it. You know he wasn’t very helpful”. A sentiment expressed also by Ethan and Daniel although more on this topic will be described under faculty/staff interactions, leaving the final descriptions of life in the classroom to Daniel who perceived some faculty as “ignorant on some of the things that they were using to teach us with.” He felt professors should “be progressive” and stay up-to-date on teaching. In particular, he wondered why most were still using PowerPoint when a new presentation software entitled Prezi was available. He viewed this as a symptom of a larger problem.

Classroom seating. Location of seating in the classroom was a concern for every participant, and equally divided by rationale—concern about classroom interactions or about safety. Indeed, Ethan, Daniel, and Clement specifically described their thinking relevant to a tactically safe position where the exits were in view and accessible. Clement, who did not serve in any combat zones, thought he had been “brain-washed” to sit in the back facing the door.

Daniel described sitting in the back of the room where he could study the other students for signs that might indicate “bad things”, similarly to Ethan who also sat in the back of the classroom and referred to the other students as “sheep”. He believed that perhaps he alone was qualified and capable of handling an active-shooter situation. Specifically, he referred to himself as a “lion” of which there was probably only one other in most classrooms he attended. All three suggested it was habit to assess their environment or maintain situational awareness routinely. On a side note, this phenomena is known as *hypervigilance* in the literature and is usually seen as a symptom of PTSD or traumatic brain injury (Messinger, 2013). Meanwhile, Caleb, Isaac, and Felix all sat in a front row of the classroom. Isaac explained this was due to him having attention deficit disorder while Felix was more vocal and felt “you go to the front so you can see and pay attention”. Felix also believed other veterans most likely sat in the front, as well as, “mostly I was surrounded by the people who just wanted to come in and get the class done”. Meanwhile, Peter and Stephen preferred the back of the classroom, with Stephen simply stating his choice of seating was due to “personal preference” and Peter indicating his position varied, but was predominantly in the back of the classroom.

Faculty/staff interaction. Participants describe a generally mixed response to community college faculty and staff. Indeed, several described faculty who were interested in them and their education. For example, Ethan indicated, “they were always willing to go out of their way if you came to them and said, sir, mam I have an issue”, and they were “all about veterans”. Similarly, Isaac stated, “they really helped me” and that one professor in particular “was very profound.” Also, Stephen would indicate “I think like I get along really well with...the teachers I have”. Conversely, Peter would tell us “Some of the faculty was pretty good but they weren’t really put together” and “I don’t even know what half of them were saying

some of the time just lines just spewing whatever”. Followed by Daniel stating, “Sometimes I felt that the faculty were there to pick up a paycheck” a response made more in the context of methodology than effective teaching. Last, Clement seemed pleased overall with his community college experience yet conflicted with a department policy that required near perfect attendance, which he explained was to mimic actual work experience in the culinary field. In his words, “I feel like...[redacted] community college as a whole is doing great things for the military...”, and “I really don’t have anything bad to say about any of the faculty.”

Discipline. In regard to completing the goal of one’s education the participants uniformly expressed their behavior in terms of discipline, focus, and tenacity. Felix describes a lack of discipline inherent in the transition process from the military to the civilian world as somewhat unsettling and notably different than his experience in the Marine Corps. He further advised that his high school experience was not unlike college in that there was an absence of discipline and more of a culture of just doing enough to get by. Not unlike Felix, Daniel and Stephen describe the discipline of the military as a significant behavior that helped them to succeed in college. Daniel also refers to the structure as a form of discipline, and this is reinforced by Ethan who expected the military to provide discipline. Furthermore, Stephen would note how tenacity, “like suck it up you can sleep when this is done kind of attitude” provided a reward for good discipline. He would describe the Marine Corps as “a lot more instantly gratifying” than attending college which takes a long time in comparison. Meanwhile, focus was a common descriptor used by the participants to describe discipline. Caleb and Isaac would describe how “focus” was a necessary attribute to complete their educational tasks. Caleb described the task of community college in this way, “If you can stay focused and want it, it can

be very rewarding”. Indeed, Peter would extend the attribute of focus to not only education but his employment efforts as well.

For the second research question, *what factors did military veterans identify as influencing their decision to discontinue enrollment*, the roles of preparedness, goal attainment, and connectedness were identified. As it implies preparedness refers to one’s academic preparation to attend college, followed by their personal goals for attending college or perhaps described as what they hoped to attain from the experience, and culminating with those factors involved in the decision-making process to discontinue enrollment.

Role of Preparedness

It is well established that nontraditional students, which includes students whose parents did not attend college, are at a disadvantage when attending college. And although participants were not specifically asked about their childhood experiences or academic influences prior to high school, some volunteered. For example, Caleb described coming from a farm family while Isaac described a father who was a blue-collar worker that provided well for his children. Isaac also spoke of his aunt who advised him, “son I’m not going to tell you that school don’t, she says a college education doesn’t guarantee you a job, but what it does do is knock down one door down to opportunity.” Yet, Isaac also described a father who was stern and a verbally abusive mother when he stated “when dad said something it was meant to be done. If by heavy hand or not. So that kind of prepared...me and with my mom screaming at me all the time, it pretty much prepared me for the military.” Last, Daniel states “the value of education was very important in our household” and notes how his family upbringing “made me more adaptable to deal with rules and structure”. He describes this as doing chores and homework after school before free time and completing a “reading list and would go over next year’s studies” during summer vacation.

All the participants were post high-school by at least 4 years, and their life experiences had not only matured them, but from a cultural perspective altered their perceptions of life and their identities. So, were they prepared for college? The data would show differing levels of academic preparedness. For example, Caleb believed the educational system he experienced growing up was “good” and as a result must have prepared him well as he saw himself as “a pretty good student”. Similarly, Felix describes himself “as a straight A student” who graduated early at age 16 and supposes his high school prepared him adequately. Ethan thought “high school gave me a good basic foundation”. Daniel, who felt high school “definitely” prepared him for college added “high school should’ve probably, should’ve showed you, how to use the two different formulas for writing a paper”. Daniel went on to discuss the format for writing a paper while identifying the difference in style between the one used in high school versus college. Ethan would describe somewhat bumpy high school years as he attended three different high schools yet indicated “I feel high school was pretty effective for me. Uh, I didn’t commit myself like I should have.” He would additionally note the format difference between high school and college in that you did not attend 8 hours of classes each day and that “you needed to be more self-sufficient, more responsible” to be successful in college. Meanwhile, Isaac stated “I was probably about 13, 14 mentally because I was; all I wanted to do was wrestle, nothing else.” and despite graduating a semester early, Peter felt high school did not prepare him for college. Nor did Stephen, who indicated “I wish I could’ve dropped out of high school when I was like 14 or 15 and like worked on a job site or driven a dozer or something” as high school was uninteresting and considered himself in the wrong place at the wrong time. Last, Clement was indifferent about high school in that admittedly his focus was on his friends and the social aspects of high school, so he did not give academics much consideration. Despite the varying

experiences in high school preparation none of the participants considered whether or not they had the aptitude for college. Clearly, several not only had the aptitude for college but show some potential for future success in college, while a few admittedly were poor students, and were required to complete preparatory classes in math and/or English before registering for freshman level classes.

Role of Goal Attainment

Educational/vocational goals. None of the participants have completed their educational goals. First and foremost, none of the study participants completed their associates degree at the community college, although several indicated they wanted to complete a degree (associates or bachelors) at some future point. Clement had plans to complete a degree in the culinary arts, Caleb desired to become a teacher, Stephen dreamed of a degree in mechanical engineering, Felix still pondered a four-year degree, and Isaac wanted to just complete something. Overall, several participants were attending college until they could obtain gainful employment, and once that goal was met education took a backseat in their lives. This suggests their true goal was related more toward gainful employment and not education as they expressed—while simultaneously reinforcing the cohort’s belief in the importance of education.

Employment. One could state the primary goal of military veterans is to secure gainful employment that provides an opportunity for a secure future. Such gainful employment may look commensurate to what the study participants experienced during their military service, specifically a fair wage with benefits in compensation for authority over others and responsibility for significant resources within a corporate family. Peter stated this emphatically when he said, “get a job was my main focus”. To that end, education is viewed as a means to not only obtain employment, but through the use of GI Bill benefits a means of temporary financial security until

employment can be obtained. As a result, the participants in this study turned to college attendance to help fill the void due to a lack of employment options. For example, Felix learned that in his quest to obtain employment in law enforcement, “they were taking 21-year olds who had the college degree and no experience over us [combat vets]”. So, his “goal of going to school” was “to get that degree so I could get that career”. Ethan’s experience is similar to Felix in that he also desired a job in law enforcement and enlisted in the Army “to try to help get me into that career field”. Meanwhile, during his service Ethan indicated the Army gave him the added benefit of “full-time employment,” a benefit desired by both Isaac and Daniel who had originally planned to serve in the military for a career or in the words of Isaac, “I wanted to do my twenty years”. As a reminder, Isaac was not given the chance to stay beyond 10 years as he had reached high year of tenure for his rank and Daniel perceived his separation as “bitter”. Daniel joined in part due to his uncle being an Army Lieutenant Colonel but “felt they did offer me a chance to stay, but they were going to put me into supply and due to that fact, I felt it was a slap in the face and I was upset at that point.” Upon separation, not unlike Stephen, Daniel admitted he “had no more goals”. Meanwhile, Clement’s focus was on his family. He stated he enlisted in the military “for 4 years and ended up doing 8,” realizing the importance of military benefits such as health care caused him to stay in the military longer than he expected. He would register for community college before his separation and work full-time while attending the culinary arts program, yet ironically states, “I had no goals”.

Role of Social Connectedness

When asked “what stood out, about their service” two distinct words were used; camaraderie and pride. Caleb, Peter, Daniel, and Clement all used the word camaraderie to describe the significance of their service. Indeed, Isaac boasted about the five ships he had

served on and their home ports thereby describing the pride he took in those ships and the people associated with them. Felix described it as “growing up” through shooting a lot of guns and serving overseas twice. Similarly, Ethan spoke of his tour in Iraq while Stephen took pride in his accomplishments as a young sniper team leader—a position and level of responsibility of which he was proud. Indeed, the level of responsibility these men achieved with their military duties far exceeded their current positions in civilian life while their military occupational specialty (MOS) defined who they were and combined with a shared purpose enhanced the experience of *esprit de corp*.

Objection to disclosing veteran status. When asked if they would volunteer their veteran status, perhaps during their college admission process or to other students in the classroom all participants indicated they would disclose. Clement, reiterates “I’m proud”, while Isaac quickly states, “Yes Sir, absolutely I’m a veteran”, with Felix proclaiming “hell yeah”. However, there was some hesitation in that statement for half of the participants, mainly due to curiosity as to why they were being asked. Yet, in the end they agreed to disclose their status once they judged the reason as benign. Perhaps Ethan’s response demonstrates this feeling best with his response of “I’m wondering how they’re going to judge me?” Meanwhile, Stephen was concerned with the potential for gossip over his experiences as he preferred not to have his service glamorized, while Daniel states “I’m very careful how I interact”, suggesting he wants control over how others view him.

Fitting-in. Generally speaking, the participants described the differences they felt between themselves and their classmates as significant enough to cause them to feel out of place. Although some acknowledged the diversity of their classmates, especially age, the general feeling was one of being older than most their classmates, despite the community college

environment included older, nontraditional students and a higher average age than four-year colleges. Clearly, the increased average age of the community college was not significant enough to allow them to feel more like their classmates. For example, Caleb stated “it’s pretty diverse in age breakdown so you know I think it helps that you had other people that could relate, being a veteran and being older as well.” Again, age was the most commonly described difference and in their view, was the cause of inappropriate behaviors. Felix describes this best when he stated, “even though the age isn’t that big of a difference, the maturity levels—you could see it”. Felix went on to describe his classmates, “They treated it just like they were back in high school, where they want to talk in class, they want to goof off.” Isaac describes feeling like he needed to assist the professor with classroom management because his classmates would at times be disrespectful by talking and interfering with his ability to learn. As a peer to his classmates he felt “some of the other students...were too immature to be here” and “they’ll be like disrespectful and I’m like whew hold me back”. Both Ethan and Stephen described themselves as “odd balls” in that the age difference of at least 10 years was partly to blame. They also expressed different beliefs, and thought their classmates should have in some way acknowledged their experience or status. Ethan describes his classmates as “right around my age, you know a little older a little, a little younger, around the same age because some of them were continuing education, some of them were teachers, things like that, they were required to take so many classes, you know I felt that they were right around my age but I felt that I had different sets of beliefs so I definitely felt very, very different”. Clement notes concern over the tardiness of his classmates and states “some days I felt angered...ain’t in tune with everybody else...it bugs me when people just stroll in class...it really aggravates me, like you know, it to me just doesn’t show any self-motivation.” Lastly, Peter felt disconnected entirely, stating

“because I didn’t even make any friends, two semesters, I didn’t even associate with anybody there.”

Extracurricular activities. Western Virginia community colleges offer various sports and student clubs for students. Peter, Felix, and Daniel all denied having any association with any clubs and only Felix acknowledged he was aware of a criminal justice club after being advised by his professor. But, Caleb and Clement were both members of a chapter of SALUTE, a veteran’s national honor society based out of Colorado State University (SALUTE National Honor Society for Veterans, 2017). Caleb, Isaac, Ethan, Stephen, and Clement were all members of a veteran’s club, more formally known as the Armed Forces Student Association (AFSA), while Caleb and Ethan were both members of the Madison Society, a student club that focuses on political science, oratory, and debate. Caleb was the most active with involvement also in the International Student Club and Phi Theta Kapa.

Summary

Analysis of the data collection resulted in an introduction of the participants and the primary results. The participants were introduced to include a demographic table presented for quick comparison. The major themes identified were the role of influence, transition, and perspective for the research question of *how did military veterans describe their experiences at the community college*. Followed by the major theme development of roles of preparedness, motivation, and connectedness for the question *what factors did military veterans identify as influencing their decision to discontinue enrollment*. From these emergent themes, coding was employed with the assistance of NVivo computer software. The AIQ-IIIx Aspect of Identity questionnaire was scored and the participants were found to identify themselves with an academic identity, as *very important* to their sense of who they were.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this study was to understand the experience of military veterans who have attended community college and subsequently “discontinued enrollment” without graduating. To that end, what follows is a summary of findings, discussion, and implications. The findings highlight a known risk factor for college students—unclear goals. Followed by factors relating to preparedness for college and social connectedness, a model of discontinued enrollment for student veterans was developed and presented. Implications, most notably for community colleges and student veterans is presented as well as recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

Upon analysis, the findings of each of the research questions follow. For the research question, *how did military veterans describe their experiences at the community college*, three major themes were identified and named: the *role of influence*, *transition*, and *perspective*, as illustrated below.

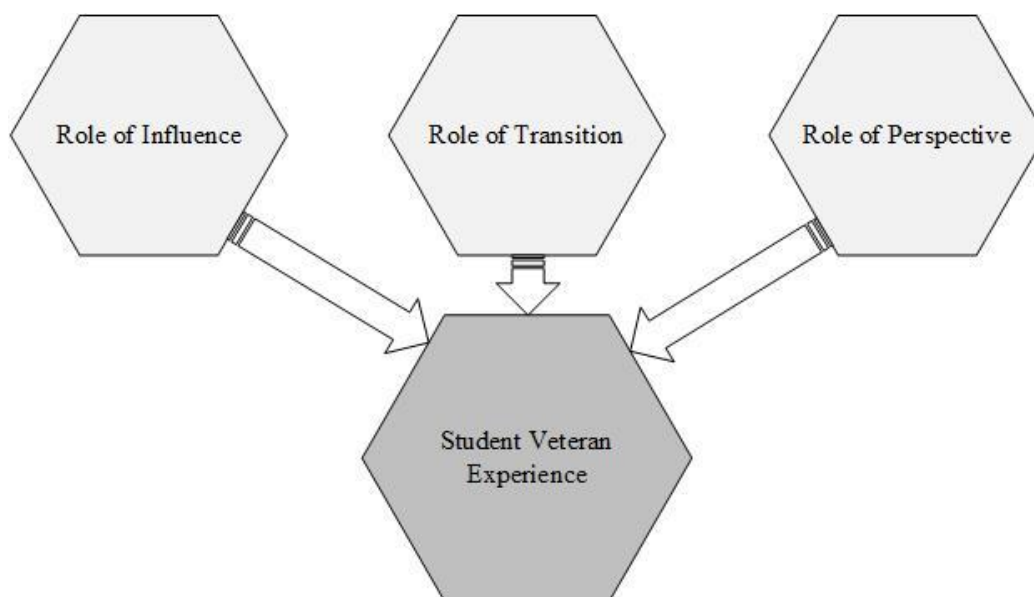


Figure 3. Illustration of experience themes.

The role of influence was one of the many factors influencing participants' individual decisions to join the military or complete an educational program. As such, these influences set out expectations that directly impact their experiences at the community college. For example, early familial influences regarding the value of education and the role of military service as well as value systems and interpretations of *self* may measurably effect how participants describe their community college experiences. Coding identified influences over the value of education within one's family, the decision to join the military, the impact of media, the participants' location of military service, and medical or psychological challenges relating to their service. These experiences later affected the participants' decision to enroll in a western Virginia community college and their impending experience. Meanwhile, the role of transition and the associated importance of how one perceives himself, or identity, were explored. All participants were in transition from the military to the community college and were offered transition training prior to their discharge from the military. Despite recent improvements in the military TAP training, most described the training as rushed minimally useful. The one major concern was the lack of any training on educational programs, especially in lieu of the requirement by the DOD to provide training in this area. In regard to specific identity, the AIQ-IIIx questionnaire revealed a correlation between the participants and a very important sense of who they are toward academic identity. Similarly, a correlation existed with a personal identity orientation while social and collective identities were only slightly important to their sense of who they were. Last, the role of perspective describes why they attended college in the first place, their experiences using technology, applying for the GI BILL, and the process of admissions. The educational format described by the participants as most useful was inclusive and preferred multiple methodologies. Also described were a tactical choice of classroom seating, a mixed

response to faculty and staff interactions, and the importance of discipline in the learning environment.

For the research question, *what factors did military veterans identify as influencing their decision to discontinue enrollment*, similarly three major themes were identified and named the: *role of preparedness, goal attainment, and connectedness* as illustrated below.

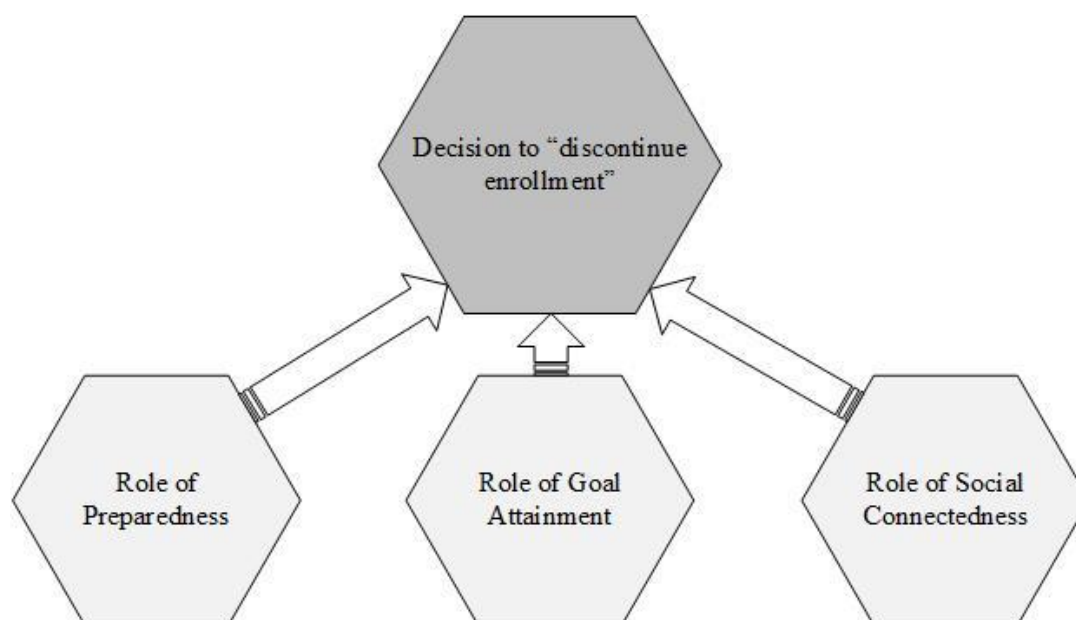


Figure 4. Illustration of decision to discontinue enrollment themes.

Further defined as nontraditional students, the role of preparedness investigated their ability for academics. Given the participants had at least a four-year break before attending college, some were first generation college students, and some had family responsibilities; these attributes were viewed as risk factors. Clearly, the cohort did not express any concern over whether they had the ability to perform well in college, even if they admitted they had not done well in school in the past or had not done well on admission testing or were previously refused admittance. There was an expression over the value of education and its potential to open doors as a motivating factor. Yet, the role of goal attainment would be described as most significant.

Indeed, the essence of this impact on the participants' decision to discontinue enrollment was profound. Overall, several participants were attending college until they could obtain gainful employment, and once that goal was met education took a backseat in their lives. Education was seen as a springboard toward gainful employment and therefore was the main reason for discontinued enrollment. Since the goal was gainful employment, not to complete a degree, it is not surprising none of these participants completed their education plan. Last, the role of connectedness has been viewed as especially important, yet this research describes the role as potentially improving the academic experience but not impacting the decision to discontinue enrollment.

Discussion

The background literature on the subject of community college discontinued enrollment was limited in that most previous research focused on the four-year college. Moreover, the literature available on the community college focused on students still in attendance, not those who had already discontinued. Therefore, while this study fills a gap in the literature, it also takes a first look at the newly revised TAP program and the potential impact on the various military services. Moreover, military veterans have previously met educational requirements as well as completed occupational testing and passed medical physical evaluations. Upon meeting rigorous screening, military personnel then complete training in their assigned occupations and much of their training meets the standards for college credit. Through this process, those unable to meet training requirements or who had difficulties learning were subject to discharge. As such, it should be noted that military veterans have already demonstrated capabilities and were therefore targeted by colleges and universities simultaneously as the military services. Upon their subsequent discharge from military service they are again targeted for marketing by

colleges and universities for the resources (GI Bill) they bring with them. These realities plus financial incentives for their attendance encourage them to enroll in college. What follows is a discussion of both the theoretical and empirical findings.

Theoretical

This research follows a well-studied theoretical basis of transition. Whether studied at the four-year college or the community college Schlossberg's (1981) *4 S System theory of situation, self, support, and strategies* modeled in Goodman et al. (1995) provides an approach to analyze those in transition. Used broadly, Schlossberg's (1981) model identifies transition as any event, or non-event, where an adult experiences change. In the case of this research, the *situation* is the change from the military to the community college. The *self* is the individual the change is happening to or the veteran in this case. Followed by the *support* mechanisms such as the TAP program, the GI Bill, or veterans' services at the community college, and the *strategies* are the coping mechanisms employed by the veteran. Moreover, the *self* is linked to one's identity which may affect how an individual copes with a transition. As a result, this study employed the AIQ-IIIx: Aspects of Identity questionnaire to assess the preferred identity of the participants. While humans in general have shown a unique ability to adapt to their environment, the ease with which someone can traverse this change is thought to be controlled in part by one's identity, or their perception of who they are (Goodman et al., 1995; Murphy, 2011).

In the case of the participants of this research, the questionnaires showed that at least three of the eight participants thought "academic" was very important to the sense of who they were. Given the consistency of these responses, albeit a low *n*, and their associated responses during interviews, this seems plausible. Indeed, the participants would also demonstrate that a "personal" identity was also very important to the sense of who they were. This "personal"

identity correlates with *intrinsic* motivation and may explain why participants, such as Peter, made no relationships during his time at the community college. Whereas, students involved in extra-curricular activities or had access to a veteran's service center were more connected, perhaps resulting in greater satisfaction, yet all still discontinued enrollment.

Empirical

Not unlike the findings of previous research on student veterans, the participants had risk factors noted of nontraditional students. Specifically, the participants did not attend college immediately following high school, were older than age 24, did not live on campus, some were married or had dependents, and most described themselves as not fitting-in. One may also expect that the participants identified with a military view of themselves at the time they transitioned to the community, given their extended service. In fact, the participants did transition and experience an event, as they adapted to the community college. Perhaps most unsettling was the dramatic change in culture from what Dunivin (1994) called a "combat masculine-warrior paradigm" to a community college with an environment of high diversity (p. 534). Indeed, the experience of a life changing event coupled with a simultaneous change in self-identity did create "disorienting dilemmas" for the participants (Smith & Wilson, 2012, p. 67).

Despite the militaries providing for transition services and recent expansion of those services in 2012, the participants describe this effort as marginal. Moreover, there was feeling of being rushed through the training with a focus on resume building. As a result, the participants do not describe any training relative to higher education or the experiences they may encounter at the community college. Clearly, the participants knew little about what to expect at college and most did not know that they would later go to college to study. With the exception of those

who had a long-term interest in law enforcement, most describe not knowing what classes to enroll in or the goal they were attempting to attain. As a result, there is a clear need for occupational interest assessment during military transition training as well as basic information on how colleges work, what some common processes are, and degree types.

While the literature on this topic took the researcher to risk factors, cultural changes, motivation, and attrition issues, the issue of motivation was most compelling for this research. Indeed, the very essence of what it means to discontinue enrollment as a student veteran appears to be the result of misguided goals. The research does show motivation on the part of the participants, in particular, motivation that was strengthened by their previous culture of discipline and mission completion. Yet, if the motivation does not help them to adapt to their new environment or they chose the wrong goal, motivation alone is insufficient. For example, as a young member of the Air Force I was once advised by my commander, Lt Col R. Smith, that a military career is similar to that of an Olympic athlete. He told me, first you must identify your goal, then you must accept you will have to sacrifice something to achieve that goal, and then you go after that goal. Using this analogy, if the Olympian was a community college student and his goal was to win the “gold” then it is not surprising that he may choose to discontinue enrollment to go after the true goal of a gold medal.

Since the benefits of a college education are well known and the student veterans of this research hold cultural values that place importance on education, it is not surprising these participants turned to education as a means to reach their goals. Their attrition would seem to be a result of a deviation from a peripheral goal of earning a community college degree and from their primary goal of finding acceptable employment. As such, their educational goals, if one

could use the same word, were peripheral to the more important primary goal of gainful employment as illustrated in *Figure 5*.

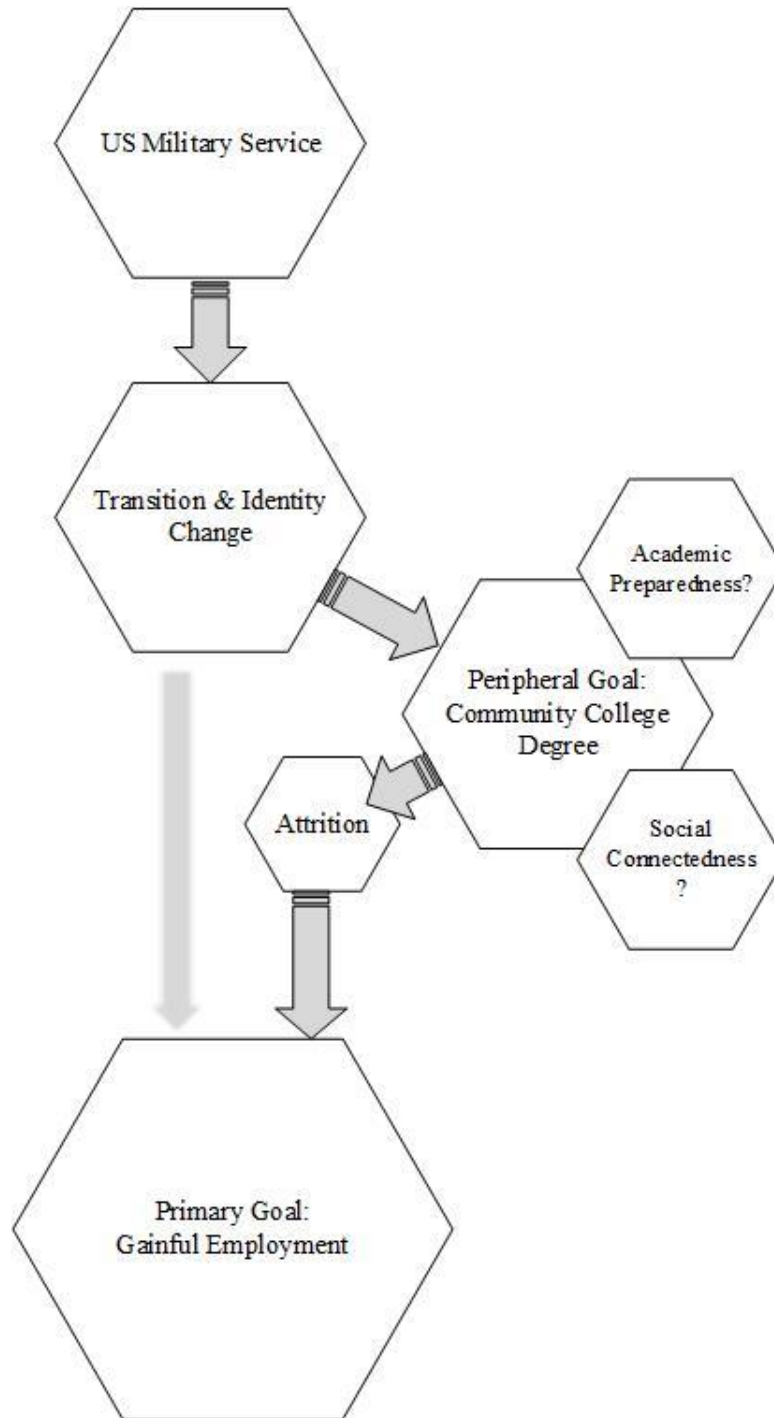


Figure 5. Illustration of peripheral v. primary goal of gainful employment.

Yet, how can we assist student veterans to achieve their educational goals?

Reinforcement of several factors already identified in studies surfaced within these research findings as well. Although you cannot state that improvement in these areas will reduce attrition, since this is based on a distinctly different factor, student veterans can see benefits in their performance and transition from these factors. For example, the literature has identified those students who do leave the community college before completing their goals do so for a variety of reasons, including low levels of academic preparation, such as poor performance in high school, the requirement of remediation coursework, and deficient study skills; low income and employment and financial problems; students who fail to connect socially or do not obtain faculty validation; and personal characteristics such as motivation and commitment and clear goals. For the student veteran, lack of academic preparation and social connections were arguably the most significant reasons for attrition that educators can address.

Peer debrief. Peer debrief was conducted with three reviewers for validity. While two reviewers largely agreed one reviewer questioned the argument of goal attainment. This was welcomed as a possible negative case requiring additional investigation. Indeed, this peer reviewer stated that for himself, the goal of completing his college degree was paramount; of which he achieved. He therefore questioned whether community college student veterans were more affected by preparedness and social connectedness, both of which he viewed as problematic. However, he states emphatically the importance of earning his degree before he sought gainful employment. Based on the above argument this means his primary goal was to complete a degree and as such is consistent with the study's findings in that earning his college degree was not a peripheral goal.

Member checks. Member checks were conducted with four participants and unanimous agreement was found in regard to goal attainment. Upon describing the argument of *peripheral v. primary* goal attainment Ethan was quick to reply with “spot on” while Peter exclaimed “that is exactly what happened to me”. Felix would use my words of “plausible” with some hesitation while Isaac would comment it was “definitely a struggle” as part of a lengthy affirmative response. Participants clearly acknowledged the significance of gainful employment above community college graduation. Meanwhile Felix’s hesitation was a result of him quickly segueing to the issue of fitting-in before I could present it. He had prioritized the issue of social connectedness ahead of my primary argument. Next, all participants spontaneously cited the significance of not fitting-in with their classmates. Indeed, Isaac acknowledged his professors asked him not to chastise his classmates for immature and rude behavior after cursing a classmate for inappropriate talking. Ethan reiterated his concern that some professors seemed indifferent toward students and was unsure if that indifference was a result of his veteran status. Last, participants acknowledged the difficulty of a several year break between high school and college requiring each of them to complete developmental course work before normal college level classwork. These hurdles made persistence more difficult. Interestingly enough the member checks were consistent with the participants’ initial interviews with some using quotes similar or identical to their original ones. Military veteran students overall viewed themselves as more disciplined, responsible, and capable of completing a mission.

Implications

Qualitative research oftentimes leaves the researcher wanting as results can be difficult to interpret or to provide a direct answer to a problem. Yet, qualitative research does provide data distinctly different than quantitative methods and as such the value is often questioned. To that

end, the researcher attempts to answer the question “So what?” about their results (Wolcott, 2009). But in the end it will be the stakeholders and administrators that decide how best to use the new found knowledge in solving problems. What follows are arguably one researcher’s notions of how best to use what was learned.

Theoretical

This studied applied Schlossberg’s (1995) “4 S System” of *situation, self, support, and strategies* as its theoretical underpinning. Therefore, study participants had experienced a life event, or non-event and responded accordingly. Furthermore, the study focused on the importance of self or ones adopted characteristics. Indeed, the data showed most participants were not fully able to describe their identity until prompted, demonstrating an unawareness of who they were. Yet, on the scale of academic identity all measured participants identified with academics. As a result, one may question if the process of transition is so unsettling as to confuse or blind an individual to their identity, how may this impact other areas of their life? Alternatively, the researcher considered using identity theory alone given the strength of one’s identity may impact ability to change roles. Given the connection between intrinsic motivation and identity the stronger ones identity perhaps the stronger their motivation. Nonetheless, it was the transition itself, marked by the components of change that now make one ponder if transition in and of itself is a risk factor—confirming it was the right choice for this research. Additionally, one may question, based on the definition of transition, if humans ever really are not in transition. All told, in the context of this research the effect of transition on the participants’ was described but not fully understood.

Empirical

Previous research on student risk factors highlights the potential for difficulties for student veterans at the community college, especially since student veterans usually have multiple risk factors. Yet, the participants did not describe any difficulties from most of these risk factors, with two exceptions; not fitting-in and having a break after high school before continuing community college. Could the lack of description nullify these risk factors? Indeed, in the case of being older than age 24 most participants saw their maturity and greater life experience as a positive especially since they felt more focused and disciplined after their military service. However, the break between high school and college was acknowledged as a setback in that most had to take developmental classes in order to catch up as freshman. Which begs the question, would these student veterans have needed to take developmental courses without the break? Anecdotally, as a community college professor, many students do require these developmental courses so no evidence exists from this study to make a determination if a break between high school and community college was detrimental.

In the case of the second exception, fitting-in, we have more to work with. We know the military branches are required to provide transition assistance and did so. What we also know from the participants is the training was sometimes rushed and participants did not describe any higher education training as mandated. We also know the culture of the military is distinctly different than at the community college so it would seem some form of preparation would be useful. Sometimes a back to basics approach works best whereby the military could provide training on what to expect in the community college perhaps provided by guest speakers from a college local to them. Despite one of the goals of the military TAP program is to assist veterans in accessing higher education or pursuing career technical training study participants did not

demonstrate knowledge of these processes. This could be the result of recent changes to the TAP program that were not available at the time study participants attended training or that these topics were not covered adequately or at all. Furthermore, occupational and interest inventory testing may be indicated during the TAP program as study participants lacked employment, occupational/vocational, or education goals in many instances. Further assistance in redefining one's identity during the transition process may prove beneficial toward improving goal success. Clearly, the current TAP is research based and the various branches of the military demonstrate a responsible transition but this study indicates more needs done. Such as interest inventory testing to help veterans understand what type of occupational choice is best for them. Or, a description of degree programs and training in what one can expect to achieve from a college degree including the types of certificates and degrees as well as the differences between regionally accredited colleges and for profit colleges without similar accreditation. Indeed, providing veterans with skills to make good life choices and prepare them for what lies ahead seems rational.

Yet, despite these recommendations this cohort did not represent all the military branches, occupations, genders, physically handicapped, or service locations. Indeed, those who serve combat assignments experienced a life altering event compared to those who did not and as such may have different needs. Interestingly enough it appeared from this cohort the more combat service the participant had the better they performed in college, or at least reported. Perhaps it could be stated those who were more academically prepared and with stronger coping skills were able to outperform those who may have had weak academic skills or lacked coping skills prior to their military service? Although randomly chosen the cohort for this study was unique in design and therefore its generalizability is limited.

Practical

Within western Virginia community colleges, it was clear that all colleges were not alike—despite all being part of a larger system. While use of and improvements in technology to provide information and access through websites, to include the application processes are both being used and with positive experiences by most, a few are finding this technology a barrier. So what can be done? Many colleges are now adopting dedicated staff to the student veteran as well as dedicated space for admissions counseling, financial aid, advising, tutoring, and student organizations. In some cases colleges are adopting one-stop centers for “all things veteran”. In this way they are being proactive and attempting to address the issues of discontinued enrollment. Through identification of veterans, which is seemingly already being done as a result of applications for financial aid, and detouring them to an admissions, counseling, or mentorship track designed for their needs thereby improving community college retention and overall performance. Next, introducing student veterans to college activities that improve their connectedness, ideally through a veteran club or similar activity will help develop a sense of belonging perhaps similar to the *esprit de corps* they experienced in the military. Last, involvement in regional or national organizations such as the SALUTE veterans national honor society may help motivate student veterans to success—graduation. But are these actions benefitting the student veteran? More research needs done to answer that question but I surmise from the data collected for this research that, yes, they are having a positive impact. But we can do more. Perhaps providing cultural information on the issue of fitting-in would be useful for all faculty during conferences and in-service training opportunities. Indeed, while America’s colleges are more diverse as ever the student veteran is a part of this diversity.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations

This study delimited the sample population to any person who served a minimum of 12 consecutive months active-duty service in any branch of the U.S. Armed Forces, National Guard or Reserve, and was enrolled in a western Virginia community college and discontinued enrollment—ceased attending or participating within the past year for any reason other than graduation. The rationale behind these delimitations intended to situate the student veterans in transition from military service to community college as well as a corresponding change in self-identity, while attempting to obtain the most recent perspective of their experiences as it is expected that memories will fail through time-distance decay.

Limitations

While the purposeful sampling of participants provided a homogeneous cohort it also produced a unique sample from the population. As such, the participants do not represent the military veteran student population at all community colleges or even within the Virginia Community College System. Ideally, qualitative research should be reproducible and given a similar cohort similar findings are possible. Nonetheless, given the study parameters it was not the intention of this research to statistically represent equally participants from the various branches of the military nor occupations or severity of medical or psychological issues or service locations such as combat or non-combat assignments. Furthermore, the random nature of the sampling did not allow for equality of gender or ethnicity. Moreover, the cohort sampled was predominantly combat experienced soldiers with only minor medical or psychological issues. The cohort also consisted of a single non-combat veteran and one who had less than an ideal period of service. These men had already been vetted by their respective branches and all had

performed well under arduous combat duty. They had similar experiences and now in the community college the only significant variable difference was their college of attendance. While the college of attendance was redacted for the protection of the participants it was possible for the researcher to identify their selected community college based on their descriptions alone—demonstrating significant differences in how individual community colleges serviced military veterans. Last, the cohort was one in which the military student veterans, all male, did not complete their educational goals, therefore as a sample their experiences may have been exclusive to the community college population. This begs the question, would military student veterans who did graduate describe a substantially different experience?

Recommendations for Future Research

This study sought to look at veteran attrition within the community college which has been neglected in recent years with most studies focusing on the four-year college. Despite the addition of this study to the academic field of knowledge the study was focused and exclusive in that participants were selected based on the potential for rich data collection. As a result, the cohort does not equally represent all student veteran characteristics, most notably their decision to discontinue enrollment. This study found recruiting participants challenging, presumably because the participants were no longer enrolled and therefore difficult to identify. As a result all participants were identified from word-to-mouth from individuals in college social organizations. This researcher believes the uniqueness of the cohort is in part a result of friends-referring-friends of which may have led to similar traits as many people have friends of similar interests and values. The lesson learned is to consider other forms of participant recruiting mainly through social media or veterans organizations. In doing so future researchers may also experience higher levels of participation in data collection.

Future studies are also needed in other areas of the Virginia Community College System that have high concentrations of student veterans such as Richmond and Norfolk. It would be interesting to compare findings among geographical areas or from different cohorts. Indeed, this study hinted that veterans who experienced combat conditions were more successful in college and that a correlation between the extent of combat service and improved performance in college may exist. Moreover, research into the effectiveness of veteran service centers or similar models to determine effectiveness would be useful. Future research would also prove useful in areas of veteran employment opportunities and vocational occupations resultant from community college success as this study indicated some goal orientation in these areas. Furthermore, this research included military veteran students from multiple generations spanning at least two decades. Clearly, the educational traits of each generational group may affect findings in a meaningful way. And, then there are cultural challenges—perhaps significant. Participants in the above research were clearly part of a military culture of which is significantly different than the community college of today. Research studies designed to identify and describe the culture of today's community college compared to that of the military may provide additional answers to the problem of discontinued enrollment especially given the significance this cohort gave toward the issue of fitting-in. Last, as colleges move toward more online classes the success of military veterans as a student group needs to be addressed. This study noted that at least one veteran had difficulty with the technology used in computer based learning platforms, such as Blackboard, while a second found availability of required classes insufficient and experienced issues with persistence.

Summary

The research concludes with a summary of the findings which identify six themes: the role of influence, transition, perspective, preparedness, goal attainment, and social connectedness. As a result of these themes and coding analysis a model was developed and presented as *Figure 5* depicting an illustration of peripheral v. primary goal of gainful employment. The study argues that the participants' goal of community college completion was a peripheral goal and not a primary goal. Therefore, when the participants achieved their primary goal of gainful employment they no longer needed to continue at the community college thereby resulting in discontinued enrollment. The study also found that academic preparedness and social connections were necessary for improved college performance and persistence. Last, a discussion of both the theoretical factors of transition and to a lesser extent self-identity were discussed as well as the empirical findings. Empirically, the literature reviewed the impact of risk factors for the participants resulting from their nontraditional student status. The culture of the student veteran experienced in the military of a "masculine warrior" and their ability to adapt or fit-in a dramatically different community college environment was discussed as problematic. Last, the student's motivations were discussed and the argument that while their military discipline was useful in the quest for a community college degree, ultimately, they needed a clear goal for success.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.**
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

October 16, 2014

Gordon F. Cavendish, Jr.

IRB Approval 1934.101614: Military Veterans: Understanding the Experience and Meaning of Community College Casualties

Dear Don,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

LIBERTY
UNIVERSITY.

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APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved this
document for use from
10/16/18 to 10/15/19
Protocol # 1924-101619

CONSENT FORM

MILITARY VETERANS: UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCE AND MEANING OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE CASUALTIES

Gordon F. Cavendish, Jr.
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of community-college, student-veteran attrition. You were selected as a possible participant because you are veteran who previously attended community college. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Gordon F. Cavendish, Jr., a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to understand the experience and meaning of student veterans who do not complete their educational goals at a western Virginia community college.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

I will begin by asking you questions to determine your eligibility for the study. If you meet the guidelines, I will ask you to participate in an interview in which I will ask you questions about your experiences as a military veteran and while attending community college. I will audio record the interview. The interview should take between 1 to 1½ hours, and there may be a need for you to return for an additional interview. I will ask that you complete a self-identity questionnaire which should take less than 10 minutes; you will mail this to me after the interview. Last, I will ask you to attend a focus group with other participants, which will also be audio recorded, and should take no longer than 1 hour.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The study has several risks: Some of the questions may result in the recall of bad memories or cause emotional upset. You do not have to answer any questions that bother you. I do not want you to admit to any criminal activity. If you tell me you intend to harm yourself or others, I am required to report those statements. I do not anticipate that you will experience any significant emotional upset, but if you do, I will terminate the interview and refer you for counseling.

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved this
document for use from
10/16/14 to 10/5/15
Protocol # 1934.101614

The benefits to participation are indirect. My goal is to identify methods the community college can use to improve services and the veteran experience at community colleges. Therefore, the benefits are to future student veterans.

Compensation:

You will receive payment of a \$35 Kroger gift card for your participation and time. You will receive the gift after completion of the interview. This is not compensation so much as it is my gift to you for your help.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I publish, I will take measures to reduce the possibility that you could be identified. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

Audio and digital files will be stored on my home computer and require two password levels to access. In the event I need to move files with a thumb drive, files will be encrypted and password protected. Any printed information will be stored in a steel, locked cabinet. Audio recordings will be destroyed when the study is complete. I am required to maintain collected data for three years. Printed materials will then be shredded with a minimum cross-cut capability and digital files will be erased using a minimum of three overwrites. Aside from myself, access to audio recordings and printable transcripts will only be provided to members of my research committee for the purposes of reviewing my work. Your confidentiality will be protected through the use of pseudonyms, nondisclosure of any names of individuals or institutions, such as employers, or any other personally identifiable data you provide me. I do intend to publish this research in a scholarly journal and may present my findings at conferences. I will most likely quote some of your comments; however, I will take measures not to publish any personally identifiable information as stated above.

For those participants of focus groups; I cannot guarantee confidentiality of comments you make to others who are present nor protect your identity from others present. I will ask that all participants respect the privacy of others.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with Liberty University or your community college. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study:

Participants may withdraw at any time by notifying the researcher. Participants who withdraw will have their digital audio file erased and any transcribed data erased or

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved this
document for use from
10/16/14 to 10/15/15
Protocol # 1934-101614

shredded as appropriate. Anonymous questionnaires cannot be withdrawn once completed, as the researcher cannot identify ownership.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Gordon F. Cavendish, Jr. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at gcavendish@liberty.edu or (540) 759-4878. You may also contact my committee Chair,

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked any questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

I consent to audio recording of my personal interview and focus group participation.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C: RECRUITING FLYER**Student Veterans,**

Is someone you know a military veteran who previously attended a community college?

Please ask them to consider participating in a research study that hopes to benefit future student veterans. A retired Air Force sergeant and doctoral candidate at Liberty University is interested in learning about these experiences. Participants will receive a \$35 gift card.

For more information contact Don Cavendish, MSgt, USAF (retired) at GCavendish@liberty.edu or call/text **STUDY** to (540) 759-4878.

Redacted

APPENDIX D: VWCC IRB APPROVAL LETTER

VIRGINIA WESTERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

WE'LL TAKE YOU  THERE

INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS OFFICE

October 14, 2014

Approval date: October 14, 2014

Expiration Date: October 13, 2015

Gordon F. Cavendish, Jr.
GCavendish@viriniawestern.edu

RI: Protocol Title: **Military veterans: Understanding the experience and meaning of community college casualties**

IRB Number: 14-050

Dear Mr. Cavendish:

I am pleased to notify you that the Virginia Western Community College Institutional Review Board (IRB) has granted expedited approval to the above mentioned research. Approval to the study is granted for a period of twelve months, effective today. This letter conveys IRB approval and separate arrangements must be made with the appropriate academic division, department or program.

This expedited approval was possible because the protocol:

- has been reviewed and approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board, and
- meets the procedures under 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.100.

The research was determined to present no more than minimal risk to human subjects and was found to have appropriate protections so that risks related to breach of confidentiality are no more than minimal.

Per 45 CFR 46.111, the following requirements were satisfied in order for approval to be granted:

- Risks were minimized;
- Risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to anticipated benefits, if any, to the subjects, and to the importance of the knowledge that may reasonably result from the study;
- Selection of the subjects was equitable given the purpose of research;
- Informed consent will be sought from and documented for each prospective subject unless the conditions for a waiver of documentation for consent were met;
- When appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure safety of subjects; and
- Adequate provisions to protect the privacy of the subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of the data were made.

Your responsibilities include:

We do require that subjects be provided with a written information and documentation of informed consent regarding the research.

Additionally, the following documentation must be provided to Virginia Western Community College IRB:

- Completion of Close Out Report, due 30 days after the expiration date, providing a summary of the project. This report is available at <http://www.viriniawestern.edu/about/ie/resources.php>.
- Any unplanned protocol variance that could adversely affect the safety or welfare of subjects, or the integrity of research data, within ten days of becoming aware of the variance.

P.O. Box 14007, Roanoke, Virginia 24038 • (540) 857-7277 • Fax: (540) 857-6297 • crowlett@viriniawestern.edu

Committed to Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action and Diversity

VIRGINIA WESTERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

WE'LL TAKE YOU  THERE

INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS OFFICE

The Virginia Western IRB thanks you for permitting us the opportunity to review the protocol. We look forward to learning of your results.

Sincerely,

Virginia Western IRB Co-Chair

APPENDIX E: CVCC IRB APPROVAL LETTER



3506 Wards Road, Lynchburg, VA 24502-2498
434-832-7600 • FAX: 434-386-4681 • www.cvcc.vccs.edu

OFFICE OF INTUITIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

September 11, 2014

Gordon F. Cavendish, Jr.
Adjunct Professor of History and Geography School of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences Virginia
Western Community College

Dear Don,

This letter serves as approval required by Liberty University's Institutional Review Board for your request to recruit and interview community college student veterans who have quit attending Central Virginia Community College (CVCC) as part of your dissertation research study concerning military veteran attrition. Your research will include 15 participants across western Virginia, some of whom may have been CVCC students. You will require informed consent of research participants as outlined in your request.

This approval is valid for one year from the date of this letter. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Interim Dean

ALTAVISTA CENTER
701 5th Street
Suite 100
Altavista, VA 24517
434-832-7280
FAX: 434-309-2247

AMHERST CENTER
200 Richmond Highway
Suite 103 • P.O. Box 1006
Amherst, VA 24521
434-832-7898
FAX: 434-946-0681

APPOMATTOX CENTER
136 Carver Lane
P.O. Box 457
Appomattox, VA 24522
434-832-7200
FAX: 434-352-5268

BEDFORD CENTER
1633 Venture Boulevard
P.O. Box 925
Bedford, VA 24523
434-832-7284
FAX: 540-586-7969

APPENDIX F: NRCC IRB APPROVAL LETTER

5251 College Drive

Dublin, Virginia 24084

Phone (540) 674-3600
or (540) 674-3619 (TDD)

FAX (540) 674-3642

September 8, 2014

Mr. Don Cavendish
Virginia Western Community College
PO Box 14007
Roanoke, VA 24038

Dear Don:

I am writing to offer my support for your dissertation study at New River Community College (NRCC). I understand that you will be looking to recruit about 15 students who were also military veterans, and have quit attending community college to interview for your study. I understand that this research is for your dissertation research titled "Military Veterans: Understanding the Experience and Meaning of Community College Casualties."

I am aware that for this study you are only requesting permission to work with our Activities Counselor, _____ and our Veterans Services Career Advisor, _____ to set up strategies and placement of posters and other recruitment materials.

Since you are seeking formal approval from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, I realize you will have agreed to emphasize that participation in your study is entirely voluntary. Additionally, please remind participants that their responses will remain entirely anonymous, that confidentiality will be maintained throughout the collection and reporting process, and that their academic status will not be affected by refusing to participate.

Thank you for seeking my approval for this dissertation research project.

Sincerely,

President

APPENDIX G: ASPECTS OF IDENTITY SCALE (AIQ-IIIx)

The Aspects of Identity Scale and subsequent scoring can be found at:

<http://academics.wellesley.edu/Psychology/Cheek/identity.html>

http://academics.wellesley.edu/Psychology/Cheek/aiqiii_text.html

APPENDIX H: PERMISSION TO USE ASPECTS OF IDENTITY SCALE

Re: ASPECTS OF IDENTITY SCALE (AIQ-IIIx)

Jonathan Cheek [mailto:jcheek@liberty.edu]

Sent: Monday, October 21, 2013 7:40 AM

To: Cavendish, Gordon [gcavendish@liberty.edu]

Attachments: AIQIV 2002 SPSP.pdf (333 KB) (Open as Web Page); AIQ Psychologies mag April-1.pdf (846 KB) (Open as Web Page); The distinction between sub-1.pdf (181 KB) (Open as Web Page); AIQ Bibliography with DRAFT.pdf (316 KB) (Open as Web Page)

Yes - you have permission to use the AIQ in your research

Jonathan M Cheek, PhD
Professor of Psychology

<http://academics.liberty.edu/Psychology/Cheek/Identity.html>

[Attachments]

Links > http://www.academia.edu/4491708/Identity_Orientations_and_Self-Interpretation
http://www.academia.edu/4072694/Identity_authenticity_and_maturity

On Mon, Oct 21, 2013 at 12:15 AM, Cavendish, Gordon <gcavendish@liberty.edu> wrote:

Dr. Cheek and Dr. Troop,

During my research on identity I ran across your aspects of identity scale (AIQ-IIIx). It appears use of your scale would assist me in describing a population I am studying. Therefore, I would like to request your permission to use the scale for that purpose. I would eventually hope to publish that description as part of my dissertation and of course you would be given mention/credit.

I am attempting to describe ones self-identity as it pertains to a tenet of Schlossberg's transition theory. The exact argument follows: Lastly, ones experiences are linked to self-identity and "often determines how a person approaches a current transition" (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995, p. 92).

I have posted my dissertation abstract below and would request your favorable consideration.

Regards,

Don Cavendish
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

MILITARY VETERANS: UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCE AND MEANING OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE CASUALTIES

ABSTRACT The following study investigates United States military veterans who have ceased attending or participating in western Virginia community colleges, and hence are casualties of the system. The study provides a voice for the military veteran to describe his/her experiences and meaning as viewed through Schlossberg's (1985) transition theory. This qualitative transcendental phenomenology follows a rigorous structure and data collection methods including, interviews, a questionnaire, focus groups, and collection of related documents to develop and describe the "essence" of the participants' experience at western Virginia community colleges. The purpose of this study is to understand the experience and meaning of "discontinued enrollment" for military veterans at western Virginia community colleges thereby improving outcomes.