

Development of a Success Model for Student Veterans at Community Colleges

by

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## ABSTRACT

As United States veterans transition from their military to civilian segment of their lives, they may face many challenges due to the experiences faced during their military service. These challenges can have a significant impact on the success of the veterans' transition and greatly affect the quality of life the veteran is attempting to build.

Historically, many veterans leaving the service take advantage of educational benefits available to them to pursue higher education degrees. But, the transitional challenges they face may also follow them to the college campus. To assist student veterans in being successful while attending community colleges, student success models can be developed to provide a framework for colleges to adapt to assist their veteran students. Student success models focus on the resources on community college campuses where students can engage to provide momentum in aiding them move successfully forward in pursuit of their education. These models also need to minimize or eliminate any potential barriers that can have an adverse effect on a student's educational track.

The purpose of this qualitative research was to develop a student success model, specifically designed for student veterans attending community colleges. The development of this model was completed in two phases. First, an initial student success model was created based on an in-depth review of literature pertinent to student veteran experiences in higher education. Upon completion of the initial model, additional information was gathered via in-depth interviews with various community college staff, faculty, and administrators. Interviews

were conducted with personnel at four different community colleges across the country that had been recognized as being premier providers of student veteran services by *The Military Times*. The personnel interviewed represented all levels of the college hierarchy to provide different perspectives on issues facing student veterans. The responses from the interviews were analyzed and then used to modify a more streamlined, effective student success model.

KEY WORDS: veterans, community colleges, student success

## DEDICATION

No project of this magnitude can be completed alone, and without the support of those in my life, the process would have been that much more difficult. I would like to thank my wife, Shelli, for all the loving support that she provided during this long process. Also, my son, Colin, and my daughter, Sophia, both of whom gave me the energy to continue on. To my parents, Howard and Lois, whose unwavering support kept motivating me to, as always, do my best in this endeavor. To my colleague, Liz, who was going through the same doctoral program as I and provided a much-needed support system. I would also like to thank Patrick and Courtney, whose friendship and encouragement always provided me with a smile and a laugh when I needed it most.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

### INTRODUCTION

The millions of military personnel who have been serving around the globe will be returning home to rejoin their civilian lives. But for some veterans, this readjustment period can be a difficult undertaking, especially for those choosing to enter a community college to pursue a degree. For many veterans, the transition from military to non-military live can be extremely difficult emotionally (Hutchinson and Banks-Williams, 2006). Research conducted by the Pew Research Center found that “44% of post-9/11 veterans say their readjustment to civilian life was difficult” (Taylor, et al., 2011, p. 1).

### BACKGROUND

The often emotional, traumatic experiences faced by our service personnel in combat leave lasting impressions on them, physically and psychologically, that may affect them for the rest of their lives (Hutchinson and Banks-Williams, 2006). These transitional issues are even more disconcerting for current veterans, as today’s post 9/11 military personnel are reporting having more difficulties in returning to their civilian lives than those who served during the Vietnam, Korean War and World War II eras (Taylor, et al., 2011).

The difficulties of this transition have its roots in many different areas, due to the extreme nature and conditions of combat which often leave an indelible impression upon those who serve and fight. Research has shown that exposure to military combat can result in “considerable risks of mental health problems, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD),

major depression, substance abuse, impairment in social functioning and in the ability to work, and the increased use of health care services” (Hoge, Castro, Messer, McGurk, Cutting, and Koffman, 2004, p. 14).

As a way of transitioning back into civilian life, veterans often use higher education institutions as gateways. Research has shown that an opportunity to get a college education is one of the top three reasons as to why people enlisted in the military (Snead and Baridon, 2010). Higher education can be seen as a way of acclimatizing to the differences between military and civilian life. Specifically, community colleges are playing a major role in supporting our veterans, who are taking advantage of such funding resources as the *Montgomery GI Bill*, and the more recently enacted, *Post 9/11 GI Bill*. In 2009-2010, a total of 270,666 veterans used federal funding to pursue their higher education, with community colleges being the major source for associate degrees for veterans (Sewall, 2010). The degree the majority of military personnel aim to obtain is an associate degree, with 63% of veterans earning an associate degree in 2009 (Sewall, 2010; Snead and Baridon, 2010).

Community colleges have a long and rich history of providing access to higher education to those segments of the populations that have typically been underserved. Community colleges can be areas for educational growth where open access philosophies allow diverse populations to gain training and education, providing opportunities for professional and personal growth (Dougherty and Townsend, 2006). Due to their open access admissions policies, affordability, and convenience (both in location and program/class offerings), community colleges are often seen as gateways for students to begin their educational careers, especially for non-traditional adult learners, such as military veterans.

For most military student veterans, coming on campus can be a culture shock that veterans may have a difficult time acclimatizing to (DiRamio and Jarvis, 2011). Because of this readjustment period, military student veterans may face challenges once they arrive on campus. “Student veterans often face complicated situations—such as:

- working through confusing or perplexing expectations in regard to personal and social roles;
- resolving unpredictable disruptions of their good standing with respect to eligibility for services or financial assistance;
- negotiating, ending, or initiating personal relationships;
- locating or creating comfortable and supportive environments;
- or resuming their life as a student—frequently with greater seriousness of purpose than the student population at large.” (Rumann and Hamrick, 2009, p. 30)

These challenges are often serious barriers to a student’s success, with success being defined as whatever the student veteran needs it to be - completion of a degree or certificate, preparing to transfer to another institution, or gaining valuable skills.

In order to successfully bridge the transition from their military career into educational pursuits, community colleges need to lay the groundwork for student veteran success by developing strong support programs, and services. The likelihood for success with student veterans is greatly improved “by having faculty and staff who are aware of and sensitive to their needs, or who cater services specifically to this group” (Griffin and Gilbert, Center for American Progress, 2012, pg. 8). Specially trained college service personnel need to be buttressed by campus-wide, coordinated services and resources such as those listed in Table 1, below.

Table 1: *Taxonomy of Student Veteran Services*

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• Establishment of a veteran center	• Veteran housing opportunities
• Development of a student veteran task force/advisory committee	• Student veteran groups – Student Veterans of America, etc.
• Veteran specific orientation	• Accelerated application process
• Services for veteran’s families	• Acceptance of military service as credit
• Financial aid counseling – aid with the GI Bill, scholarship program, etc.	• Marketing strategies targeting veteran populations
• Psychological counseling – aid with dealing with PTSD, etc.	• Develop relationship/liaisons with community/federal resources
• Career services for veterans	• Specialized events honoring vets
• Establishment of a veteran center	• VA work study Program
• Students with disability office	• Veteran specific website
• Specialized services for female veterans	• Gender specific services for female veterans
• Academic advising designed for the specific needs of veterans	• Student veteran groups – Student Veterans of America, etc.
• Veteran “Peer to Peer” Program	• Veteran housing opportunities

---

The importance of supporting our student veterans cannot be understated. By providing environments that are accommodating and comprehensive, there is an increase in student success (Tinto, 1990). The level to which the student feels comfortable on campus and is able to connect with social groups can increase integration and potentially positively affect student success (Tinto 1993; Kuh, et al., 2006). Though this is true with all special populations on community college campuses, it is essential for veterans to feel connected to both their institution as well as their comrades on campus, which in turn, can increase persistence and student success (Tinto, 1990).

With a multitude of issues impacting student veterans’ higher education performance and often acting as barriers for success, the need for further research is readily apparent. Community colleges need to have specialized services and programs in place to best serve this population and to promote successful completion within its ranks (Snead and Baridon, 2010). A

specific student veteran model needs to be developed to ensure resources are properly primed and utilized by student veteran populations and at the same time, barriers can be removed that hinder progress and success.

#### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research was to develop a comprehensive and integrative student veteran flow model that identifies the specific and unique programs and services a community college should provide to student veterans at various stages of their community college experience. This model follows the stages that a student travels through, beginning with pre-admissions contacts through completion of a degree or certificate and alumni activities. This research identified effective programs that are unique to student veterans.

This model was based on a review of four effective programs that were specific to veteran students and as a result, a student flow model was developed that focused on the following key points:

- specific stages on the flow of student veterans through the community college, from pre-entrance to completion;
- momentum points (best practices that contribute to student success) and loss points (issues student veterans experience that are barriers to their success) for each stage of the student flow model.

This research added to the body of knowledge regarding services to student veteran experiences at community colleges, as well as offering a model of how to better support student veterans as they pursue their degrees at community college.

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Due to the increased number of veterans attending community colleges, there needs to be an increased focus on aiding them to be successful while attending community colleges

(Rodriquez and McCambly, 2015). Presently, literature searches do not produce an overwhelming amount of material on this specific topic for this current population. There is a definite lack of research that has been conducted in the area of supporting student veterans in higher education. DiRamio, D., Ackerman, R., & Mitchell, R., 2008, report, "The amount of scholarly literature studying student veterans is slim and dated" (Diramio, 2008, p. 75). These two factors were the drivers behind the development of this dissertation, specifically researching how community colleges can better serve their student veterans in being successful during their educational pursuits and moving towards completion. The research was significant because the student veteran flow model gives student services personnel, faculty, and college executives a tool for planning, evaluating, implementing and improving programs and services for student veterans. Community college professionals can use the model to assess the scope and quality of programs and services to student veterans in a comprehensive, coordinated, and holistic manner.

Also, the long lasting, positive impacts of attaining a higher education degree are quite evident, especially when examining the lifelong earning potential. Students who attain a bachelor's degree have the potential to earn more than \$2.27 million dollars in lifetime earnings while those students who only have a high school diploma earn roughly \$1.3 million during their lifetimes (Burnsed, 2011). The economic benefits alone show that it is vital to promote degree completion to student veterans as well as all student populations.

An essential component of any college student's path to success while pursuing their education is proper and efficient use of college services, especially those focused on supporting student's academic and personal needs. This is especially true for student veterans, who have

their own specialized needs that could act as barriers to student success. New models need to be designed by both researchers and community college service personnel alike, which can be adopted by institutions in order to help promote and further the educational success of student veterans.

With a multitude of issues impacting student veterans' higher education performance and often acting as barriers to success, the need for further research, is readily apparent.

#### ASSUMPTIONS

In developing this dissertation, there were several assumptions that guided the framework of the research. A key assumption is the respondents will respond to the questions asked thoughtfully, truthfully and to the best of their ability. During this research, it was assumed student veterans would have difficulties in making the transition from their military lives to their civilian lives while in pursuit of their education at a community college. Second, it was assumed these difficulties would impact the student veterans' academic and social advancements in a negative fashion, as indicated in prior research

Additionally, it was assumed the individuals interviewed for this research would have knowledge of the state of student veteran services within their organization and have appropriate knowledge regarding student veterans to add to the depth of the research. Another assumption was there might be a lack of sufficient specialized services on community college campuses to aid student veterans. Finally, it was assumed that community colleges have researched and validated student success flow models to aid their student veterans in advancing towards degree attainment, as indicated in prior research.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this dissertation was based upon a variety of student success models including Schlossberg's Transitional Theories, Kay McClenney's research (2014), the Loss-Momentum Framework (2013), and Tinto's Framework (1997). In these frameworks, it was emphasized that students must be the focus and connected with at the front door of the college (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014). These models also strive for intensive student engagement, which includes support at all stages to help move the student along towards completion, as well as removing barriers to success.

McClenney and the Center for Community College Student Engagement have conducted research on the best practices community colleges employ in helping their students be successful and have developed a model of promising practices for student success (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014). This framework focuses on a student-centered approach with a focus on integrated support, intensive student engagement and high expectation of, and high support for the students (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014). Aspects of other related theoretical frameworks such as Schlossberg's Transition Theory and Tinto's Model of Retention were also incorporated in to the research framework.

## BRIEF METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this dissertation used primarily qualitative research techniques, as this type of research allows for a greater depth of understanding of the concepts being studied (Merriam, 2009). To develop the flow model for student veteran success during their educational pursuits, a series of case studies were conducted that provided deep insight into

how community colleges assist their student veterans in pursuing and completing a program of study. As case studies provide an “intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon or social unit,” it is believed using case studies provided the best method to retrieve the type of information required for this research (Merriam, 2009, p. 203). The case study design was conducted to ensure the focus of the research was on mining the information needed to fulfill the purpose of this research.

Interviews were conducted at four community colleges with key personnel, ranging from student services personnel to executive level administration, to determine what best practices community colleges are engaging in within the field. These community colleges were chosen based on a variety of criteria learned through best practice research, and their status as being “Vet Friendly,” according to survey research conducted by *The Military Times*.

To gain a broader perspective, the community colleges targeted to participate in this research were selected based on a cross section of different types of institutions. Information was collected and analyzed through case study methodology producing a finalized version of the student success flow model.

#### DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

The following is a list of the common terms and their respective definition used within this dissertation:

*Active Duty* - Full-time duty in the active military service of the United States. This includes members of the Reserve Component serving on active duty or full-time training duty but does not include full-time National Guard duty (Department of Defense Dictionary, 2017).

*Base* - A locality from which operations are projected or supported (Department of Defense Dictionary, 2017).

*Deployment* - The rotation of forces into and out of an operational area (Department of Defense Dictionary, 2017).

*Dependent* - An employee's spouse; children who are unmarried and under age 21 years or who, regardless of age, are physically or mentally incapable of self-support; dependent parents, including step and legally adoptive parents of the employee's spouse; and dependent brothers and sisters, including step and legally adoptive brothers and sisters of the employee's spouse who are unmarried and under 21 years of age or who, regardless of age, are physically or mentally incapable of self-support (Department of Defense Dictionary, 2017).

*Reserves* -Members of the uniformed Services who are not in active service but who are subject to call to active duty

*Veteran Friendly* – “refers to marked efforts made by individual campuses to identify and remove barriers to the education goals of veterans to create smooth transitions from military life to college life, and to provide information about available benefits and services” (Lokken, et al., 2009, p. 45)

## SUMMARY

This chapter provided an overview of the unique issues that military student veterans face while attending community college as they transition from the military back to their civilian lives. The author provided information regarding the theoretical make-up of this dissertation, the importance of conducting the study, and the proposed limitations and

assumptions. This chapter also briefly outlined the proposed student veteran flow through model will address the unique needs of student veterans and increase their chances of success at the community college.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### INTRODUCTION

The following chapter contains an examination of the pertinent literature relating to student veterans and experiences while transitioning to civilian life, specifically while attending community college. This review is critical because it is an overview of the impact of community colleges, the experiences of non-traditional students, and student success frameworks. Also included is an examination of the variety of services and resources that institutions can provide their student veteran population to help support them in being successful.

### GROWTH OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Since inception, community colleges have played a prominent role in the educational and economic future of our county. Acting as gateways to accessible education, community colleges provided an opportunity for advancement for those students who, traditionally, did not have access to higher education (Boggs, 2010).

Starting in the early 1900s, our economy has had an increased need for college-level education. The growth of what were originally termed “junior colleges” was also spurred on after World War II, when “millions of former military personnel were given tuition vouchers under the G.I. Bill to attend college” (Kane and Rouse, 1999, p. 64). As a result of this influx of students, community college enrollment nearly doubled (Kane & Rouse, 1999). In the United States, in 1910, 5% of high school graduates entered college, with this number increasing to 45% by the year 1960 (Cohen and Brawer, 2008).

As time passed, students have viewed community colleges as an affordable, accessible option to pursue their education and advance their careers. The reasons for this increase in enrollment include: older students' participation, financial aid, part-time attendance and higher attendance by women, academically challenged, and minority students (Cohen and Brawer, 2008). Also, two-year institutions recruit students aggressively "to an institution that tries to offer something for everyone in the community, everyone is potentially a student" (Cohen and Brawer, p. 45).

The impacts of community college are wide-ranging (Center for Community College Engagement, 2014). The core mission of most community colleges is the communities in which the institutions reside can benefit from a more skilled workforce when local citizens are educated and trained at the college.

#### NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Throughout their history, community colleges have supported missions of open access, where opportunities for higher education experiences are available to all. This open access philosophy is centered on the ideas of affordable tuition, class and course schedules that are flexible and programs and services that are intended to assist at-risk students to aid them in overcoming the variety of barriers within their lives that could impact their educational success (Cohen and Brawer, 1996). The accessibility of quality education to all segments of the population has been a cornerstone for community colleges, and this is especially true for non-traditional students.

The largest growing student population on college and university campuses in the United States today is the non-traditional student population (Brown, 2002). "These students

now make up at least 50% of higher education enrollments in colleges and universities” (Brown, 2002, p. 67). Colleges have seen an increase in enrollments in students who are older, first generation, and single parents. Concurrently, there was a change from an “elite to a mass higher education system in the late twentieth century,” the result was a “significant increase in the number of students historically considered nontraditional” (Schuetze & Slowey, p. 309, 2002).

The non-traditional student population is made up of those who are adult learners or those older than 25 years of age (Kim, 2002), those who delayed their post-secondary education, first generation students, those who work full-time while pursuing a degree, single parents, and those who have a family or dependents (Horn and Carroll, 1996). Also within this population are men and women who are on active duty and military veterans.

Research has shown that nontraditional students are twice as likely as traditional students to leave college within the first year of enrollment (Brown, 2002). A variety of barriers can have a negative impact on a student as they progress towards degree completion. These barriers can include:

- Situational – those barriers that limit a student’s ability to access a college education including lack of time and funding and transportation and child care (Cross, 1981).
- Institutional – those college procedures that may exclude or dissuade students from pursuing their education such as issues with scheduling and lack of courses (Cross, 1981).
- Dispositional - those student perceptions regarding their own educational abilities to be successful. (Cross, 1981)

Brown, 2002 states:

If nontraditional/adult students who are pursuing degrees are going to develop and prosper on college and university campuses, then creation of special support

programs for these students must be seen as a critical part of the entire lifelong-learning, degree-seeking enterprise (p. 72).

Certain initiatives need to be undertaken by the college to support their non-traditional populations, including:

- Recognize of those unique characteristics of non-traditional students and developing a culture to support that community;
- Develop of specialized services to meet the unique needs of non-traditional students;
- Properly train those student services personnel who advise non-traditional students to be perceptive and aware of their specialized needs;
- Establish specialized orientations and student success workshops or courses to employer students to navigate “the culture of higher education”;
- Provide dedicated career services to aid non-traditional students with their post-graduation career goals, focusing on their “higher-ordered needs.” (Brown, 2002, p. 73)

Military student veterans constitute “a distinctive and potentially vulnerable higher education population” (Steele, Salcedo, and Coley, 2010, p. 1). In 2007 – 2008, 85% of all military student veterans who enrolled in higher education were 24 years or older, 62% had a family and were more likely to be employed full- or part-time (Steele, Salcedo, and Coley, 2010). Research has also shown a strong negative correlation between negative student experiences and their chances of dropping out of college (Steele, Salcedo, and Coley, 2010).

The need to support non-traditional students at community colleges is readily apparent, as often life barriers, both on- and off-campus can have a significant impact on this population’s academic success and degree completion. Essential support services that are designed and implemented specifically with non-traditional students in mind needs to be of primary concern to community college institutions and their administrations.

## TRANSITIONAL THEORIES

When serving older, nontraditional students, one must take into account a variety of transitional theories that attempt to explain the factors encountered by nontraditional students. It is true that, change in life is inevitable. The changes can take the form of marriage or divorce, gaining or losing a job, a birth or death in the family; there are a multitude of changes that could have significant impact on an individual's life. The majority of life transitions that individuals will face center around major life events. These changes often require a restructuring of the individual's viewpoint and the world in which they live (Williams, 2008). How one reacts to these life transitions depends upon the individual and the circumstances.

The process from transitioning from one life stage to another can be stressful and potentially traumatic. This can be especially true for military student veterans. As a veteran moves from being a soldier to a community college student, the institution must be committed to understanding how student veterans develop their identity and make meaning as it relates to their transition (Green and Van Dusen, 2012).

### **Faulkner and McGaw's Stages in the Reentry Transitions of Vietnam Veterans.**

A seminal paradigm that focuses specifically on the unique transitional issues veterans faced was developed by Faulkner and McGaw (1977). Examining the personal experiences of veterans returning from active duty after the Vietnam War, this paradigm developed a series of stages veterans progress through as they become re-acclimatized to civilian life, or coming back to "The World," as it was termed by Vietnam veterans (Faulkner and McGaw, 1977).

The first stage is "Moving from the War," which is characterized by a feeling of loss on the part of the veteran as he or she returns to civilian life. Faulkner and McGaw believed that,

at this stage, the veteran's identity is shaped by "loss of time, self and others," as he or she "struggle with a transient identity of civilian to soldier back to readjusted civilian" (Holloway, 2009, p. 13). This period is marked by:

- The acquisition of new goals and purposes while in the service and the newly discovered means to realize them.
- A primacy of self-interests, but often combined with the deep bonds to one's closest friend(s) in the military.
- A shared meaning of the war experience among these friends.
- A loss of something valuable. (Holloway, 2009, p. 13)

"Moving back into the World" is the second stage and can be a difficult transitional period for the veteran as he or she faces issues related to differences in civilian and military systems (Faulkner and McGaw, 1977). There are three issues that make up this stage:

- A discontinuity in the systems of relevance;
- The un-sharability of the war experience;
- Various forms of exclusion by the 'home' society. (Faulkner and McGaw, 1977, p. 13)

For some veterans, this stage can be "difficult, time-consuming, and often acrimonious" (Faulkner and McGaw, 1977, p. 312). Because of the difficulty, "it is important that student-veterans have a support network in place to ease the transition" (Holloway, 2009, p. 14).

The third and final stage of Faulkner and McGaw's theory is "Moving Toward Reintegration," where the emphasis is placed on the veteran's rebuilding of his/her identity in the civilian world as well as building relationships and becoming at ease with his/her environments (Faulkner and McGaw, 1977). A key for success in this transitional stage is

successes for the student, in both the classroom and the workplace (Faulkner and McGaw, 1977). The building of relationships is important for the veteran, so it is important for an institution to establish “meeting places” for veterans to congregate and “network with student veterans with similar experiences” (Faulkner and McGaw, p. 15 1977).

While Faulkner and McGaw’s theory focused on Vietnam veterans, the challenges that are faced by that particular time period have been apparent in veterans from other wars. Similar veteran transitional theories to Faulkner and McGaw’s, such as the Homecoming theory to describe the re-entry issues faced by veterans post-World War II, have been developed to describe the disconnect that veterans feel after their time in the service and re-entry into their civilian lives (Ahem, et al., 2015). Research into these experiences find that, no matter the time period in which the individual served, similar experiences are faced upon returning home (Ahem et al., 2015)

In comparison to other forms of transitional theories, Faulkner and McGaw’s Theory may have a lack of application when explaining the experiences of the larger population of veterans, as their research was based on subjects who were male, younger in age (in their 20’s), and primarily middle class (Holloway, 2010). Because of this, their theory is not universal in relevance as it cannot be truly applied to females, soldiers with disabilities or veterans from multi-cultural populations. Other transitional theories can be more universal in their relevance as they are able to take in to consideration different populations and eras the subjects were from, thus making them more applicable to a wider population. Faulkner and McGaw’s theory focused primarily on veterans of the Vietnam War, and while there might be shared experiences with veterans from other eras, there are specific incidents those veterans faced

that are not universal. This can have an impact on how applicable this theory can be to the broader populations of veterans.

### **Schlossberg's Transitional Model**

Schlossberg's Transitional Model "provides a systematic framework for counselors, psychologists, social workers, and other helpers as they listen to the many stories – each one unique – of colleagues, friends and clients" (Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman, 1995, p. 26). Each individual will have a different, specific transitional experience than anyone else, but the process of transitioning is stable, and Schlossberg's model can be applied to all (Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman, 1995, p. 26). The Transitional Model is composed of three parts:

- Approaching Transition
- The Transition Process
- Taking Stock of Coping Resources

Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995), defined transitions as "any event, or nonevent, that results in changes to relationships, routines and roles" (Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman, 1995, p. 26). During the "Approaching Transition" Stage, the individual in transition begins to understand the nature of the transition he or she will be facing and the best strategies to employ to successfully cope with the transition (Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman, 1995). In regard to the transition event, "Even more important than the mere identification of the change is the specifying of the degree to which the particular transition changes the client's life" (Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman, 1995, p. 26).

The types of events that an individual may face during transition include:

- Anticipated transitions – these transitions are made up of “gains and losses or major alterations of roles that predictably occur in the course of the unfolding life cycle.”
- Unanticipated transitions – these types of transitions comprise of “non-scheduled events that are not predictable.”
- Non-event transitions – there are events that an individual had expected to occur but did not happen, and thus affected their lives by not occurring. (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 29)

The next phase is the “Transition Process,” during which the individual is in the midst of the transition event. But it is important to realize that the process of moving from one role and establishing a new one can take a great deal of time, varying from person to person.

The Transitional Model that Schlossberg developed also consists of three stages – “Moving In,” “Moving Out,” and “Moving Through.” It should be noted that, while in transition, an individual could find himself or herself in any of these stages:

- *Moving In* – As someone finds themselves moving into a new situation, they need to be aware of the rules and norms that regulate this new situation. With regards to higher education, this phase would typically take place during admissions and orientation
- *Moving Through* – This is a period of learning, where an individual becomes accustomed to the new parameters of his or her role
- *Moving Out* – this stage can be described as a period of loss and disequilibrium, as the individual is leaving one role and moving on to another. (Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman, 2006, p. 49)

The final Phase is “Taking Stock of Coping Resources.” During this phase, Schlossberg developed the “The 4S System” in which she classifies “the potential resources someone

possesses to cope with the transition” (Schlossberg, 1994, p. 32). Schlossberg identified these four stages as:

- Situation – this is the event that the person is transitioning through and how it impacts the individual.
- Self – this is the individual himself or herself and an examination of the strengths (physical, psychological, etc.) the individual possesses that will allow him or her to be successful in transitioning.
- Support – this focuses on where the individual can find help in transitioning.
- Strategies – this focuses on the types of coping resources the individual can rely on to be successful in transitioning. (Schlossberg, 1994)

When applying the ideas behind Schlossberg’s Transition Theory to student veterans and their move from service personnel to college student, it’s evident there is a need to assist as “people in transition are often preoccupied and a little confused” (Sargent and Schlossberg, 1988, p. 59). The traumatic effects of military deployment can act as a barrier towards student veterans’ success and therefore transitional issues for this population need to be examined (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008).

In relation to other transitional theories, Schlossberg’s Theory is similar in that it focuses on a multi-level system of transition that can be applied to a variety of different types of transitional periods over the course of an individual’s lifetime. Schlossberg’s research in development of the theory was based on adult populations, thus allowing an application to veteran populations. Although, by focusing on a singular population, it could also be viewed as a weakness of the theory as it cannot be applied to other age ranges, such as juvenile and adolescents. One critique of Schlossberg’s approach is that it can be difficult to determine an

individual's stage. Also, the cycle of transitions that Schlossberg developed could be ongoing and difficult to determine when an individual has moved from one transition to another.

### **Bridge's Model of Transition**

William Bridges developed a model of transition that centered around the idea that every transition in life begins with an ending of one phase of an individual's life (Bridges, 1980). Bridges' framework consists of three parts – Endings, Neutral Zone, and Beginnings. Bridges noted that during the "Endings" phase, an individual will feel disengaged, disenchanted and disoriented (Bridges, 1980). It is during this phase that individuals began to move away or disengage from their previous roles. In this phase, an individual may become, as Bridges wrote "a person floating free in a kind of limbo between two worlds" (Bridges, 1980, p. 98). In the "Neutral Zone" stage of Bridges' model, an individual will find themselves in between two points of his or her life and takes time to "smell the roses" before deciding where to move on to next (Schlossberg, 2006). The third phase, "Beginnings," is when the individual moves into and embraces his or her new role and "when endings and the time of fallow neutrality are finished" (Bridges, 1980, p. 134).

When applying Bridge's Model to the transition process for student veterans, it is important for the campus, especially during the early stage of "Endings," to be supportive as "to increase the probability of his or her academic and personal success" (DiRamio and Jarvis, 2011, p. 9). The "Neutral Zone" stage can be incredibly important and impactful on military student veterans' transitional progress as this adjustment period acts as bridge between the military and their educational career and veterans may "rush right into school after discharge," which may impact their success in pursuit of their education (DiRamio and Jarvis, 2011, p. 9).

When examining Bridge's Model, a similar theme to those other theories discussed is that it incorporates a stage model of the transitional process. In this type of model, individuals move from one phase of their lives to another. These stages can be at several, different points within individuals' lives, and can be experienced multiple times across a person's lifetime, making Bridge's Model very similar in theoretical structure to other transitional based theories. With this type of theoretical structure, you can see that individuals are constantly going through transitional stages in their lives, thus there is a need for a model to help describe these transitional issues.

### **Validation Theory**

Laura Rendón's Validation Theory focuses on the experiences of non-traditional students in higher education, specifically in how the college can take steps in aiding its students in being successful, by "validating" them (2011). For Rendón, this validation consists of two parts:

- Validate students as creators of knowledge and as valuable members of the college learning community.
- Foster personal development and social adjustment (Rendón, 2011, p. 12).

Rendón believed that the key for non-traditional student success was institutional validation, and this validation comes in two forms: academic and interpersonal. Academic validation involves "in- and out-of-class agents" helping students"; interpersonal validation occurs when these same agents aid students in their "personal development and social adjustment" (Rendón, 2011, p. 12).

Rendón developed these elements to validation:

- The community college and its “institutional agents” need to initiate contact with nontraditional students as they enter into the community college to introduce them to the services available and avoid confusion.
- The institutional agents need to serve to “confirm that the student brings knowledge to college and has the potential to succeed.”
- Students need to be validated on a consistent basis in order to increase their confidence.
- This validation process needs to take place within the classroom as well as out of it.
- Validation is a process that begins early in the students’ time on campus and needs to continue throughout their education.
- Opportunities for validation need to occur at various opportunities through a student’s education to create a “rich college experience.”
- Validation is at its most critical, especially for non-traditional students, when applied early in their educational career – “especially during the first few weeks of class and the first year of college.” (Rendón, 2011, p. 16)

The validation theory allows for enhanced student success as it can

serve researchers and practitioners alike with a framework to create laboratory classroom environments, work compassionately with students as whole human beings who can best function with an ethic of care and support and transform underserved students in to powerful learners who overcome past invalidation and oppression (Rendón, 2011, p. 20).

Validation theory’s strength, as applied to students, is that it views students from a holistic perspective, in that it incorporates not only the academic progress, but also social and emotional development. By providing this type of perspective, in contrast to other transitional theories, Rendón is able to apply this theory to a variety of different individuals, despite their demographic background, thus creating a more universally applicable theoretical model.

## MODELS PROMOTING STUDENT SUCCESS

Pursuing a college education can be a difficult task – dedication, endurance, and commitment to the learning process are all factors that successful students need to embrace to move towards completion. In as such, it is important that community colleges develop success models to aid their students in completing their degree.

Kay McClenney's 2014 research highlights the need for student success models to be developed and initiated by community colleges. McClenney has determined that to support student success, a series of principles have to be instituted by community colleges to help foster student success:

- A Strong Start – Institutions need to connect with students as early as possible in their educational careers in order to lay a strong foundation;
- Clear, Coherent Pathways – the number of choices that students face while pursuing their education can be daunting, and often act as barriers towards moving forward in the pursuit of a degree. To alleviate these issues, institutions need to develop tracts that provide clarity in terms of steps to complete in pursuit of certifications and degrees;
- Integrated Support – To move students towards completion, colleges need to provide student support options that are incorporated into academic programs and coursework;
- High Expectations and High Support – Colleges need to “set the bar high” for their students to allow them to reach their full potential, but also providing the essential support systems that will allow them to do so;
- Intensive Student Engagement – Programs and services must be designed and implemented with the student's needs in mind to provide wrap-around support;
- Design for Scale – Colleges need to take the long view when developing supportive services for their students; including appropriate financial backing and institutional buy-in;
- Professional Development – In order to serve their student populations appropriately, institutional administration, faculty and staff must all be currently

trained in the most effective methods for improving student success. (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014)

Research has shown principles such as those McClenney has developed must be instituted campus wide with a high degree of collaboration occurring between the different sectors of the college (McClenney, 2014).

### **The Loss/Momentum Framework**

The Community College Research Center (CCRC) developed the Loss/Momentum Framework, based on the Completion by Design Initiative (Rassen, Chaplot, Jenkins, and Johnstone, 2013). This Initiative was designed to assist students in being successful in completing their education by developing “coherent pathways of study” that focused on three completion goals:

- Earning certificates and degrees;
- Transferring to four-year institutions;
- Raising their value in the labor market.

This framework is based upon higher educational components are “universal” to student experiences education (Rassen et al., 2013). The CCRC believed that there were four key phases that students move through while pursuing their degrees:

- Connection – in this phase, students begin to formulate the idea of attending college to pursue their higher education at a community college. This is a research and information gathering stage as they begin to focus on the community college they wish to attend and the particular program of study they wish to pursue;
- Entry – the students begin their educational career by completing gatekeeper and general education courses, as well as employing such college resources as admissions, financial aid and counseling department;

- Progress – this phase is highlighted by a focus on a educational goal, such as selection of a program of study, enrollment in courses to fulfill program requirements; learning of the support systems in place to aid the students in moving along, and moving closer towards completion, “both inside and outside the classroom”;
- Completion – this is the final phase of a student’s educational journey towards degree attainment with completion of their program and post-graduation pursuit of further education or employment. (Rassen et al., 2013)

Throughout each of these phases there are key momentum and loss points which are interactions that a student has with their institutions. “Each of these interactions can boost students’ momentum toward completion or cause them to lose steam in pursuing their goals” (Rassen et al., 2013, p. 15). Community college leaders need to be keenly aware of these factors as to “strive to facilitate effective, efficient advancement and create a structure that, by default, puts students in a position to succeed” (Rassen et al., p. 15, 2013).

As a reminder, momentum points are seen as those interactions with the college that “facilitate and encourage the completion of programs, achievement of credentials and transfer to four-year institutions” (Rassen et al., 2013, p. 17). Loss points are “junctures at which students often delay or decide not to continue with postsecondary education” (Rassen et al., 2013, p. 15).

Examples of Momentum Points include:

- High school students dually enroll in community college courses, giving them a jump-start on their educational goals;
- Students work with an advisor to create an educational plan and receive follow-up support;
- Students receive support in transitioning to advanced study and/or career pathways. (Rassen et al., p. 15, 2013)

Examples of loss points include:

- Students do not get information about postsecondary options that help them select the college that is the best fit for their skills and goals;
- Students are unclear on the requirements for success in their program of study and do not enroll in the right courses in the right sequence;
- Students receive limited guidance in their choice of courses and accumulate credits that do not lead to a credential. (Rassen et al., p.16, 2013)

Colleges need to be able to identify the various Momentum and Loss points on their campuses to “expand and replicate effective practices,” while identifying barriers to student empowerment and taking steps toward removing them (Rassen et al., 2013).

A thorough examination of the Loss/Momentum framework highlights the strengths this particular model has in identifying those elements of a student’s higher education pursuits. The universality of this model allows for its application to different types of students, despite their background (age, previous educational attainment, etc.), the educational track they are pursuing, or the type of institution they attend. A key, standout element of this model is an examination of those “loss” points that may hinder a student’s academic success. By providing pathways for students to overcome success barriers, the Loss/Momentum Framework system is strengthened that much more, as it allows community college’s to not only determine those positive aspects of their institutional structure, but also determine where improvements need to be made.

## **Tinto's Retention Framework**

Vincent Tinto (1997) developed his integration framework to help describe how college students persist in pursuit of their degrees or certification, or what keeps students from “dropping out.” Tinto posited that students are more likely to remain enrolled at community colleges if they are able to become connected or integrated to the social and academic lives of their college: “high levels of involvement prove to be an independent predictor of learning gain” (Tinto, 1997, p. 600).

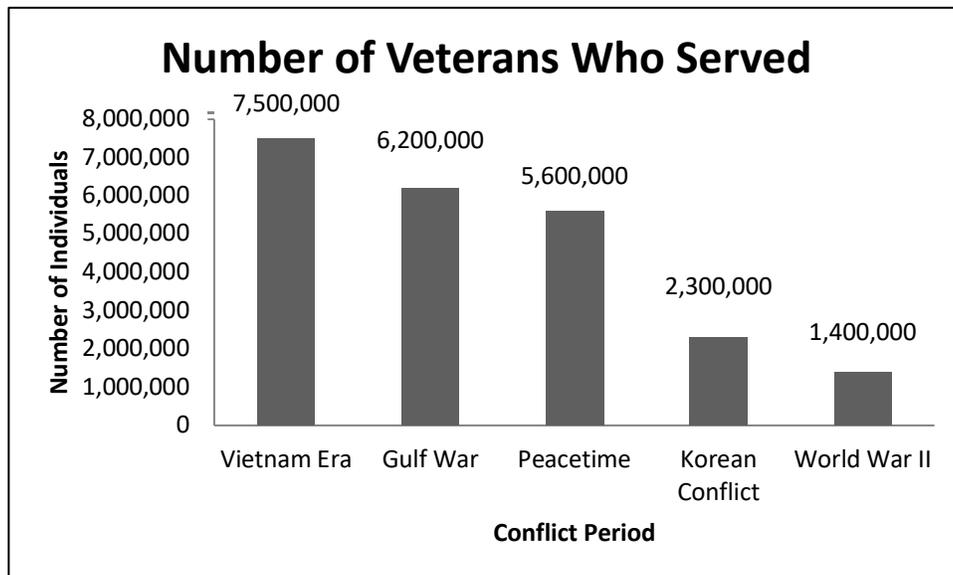
Tinto believes that a student's “attributes,” or personal characteristic, such as socio-economic status, educational attainment and skill sets, have a significant impact on student retention, as well as on the transition period between the military and civilian lives of student veterans (DiRamio, 2008). Students entering community colleges also need to have “commitments” established to aid in pushing them along to be successful. Tinto identified two key commitments – goals, which he defined as “a student's dedication to his or her occupational goals and the resolve to achieve the educational objectives to reach those goals,” and institutional, “which symbolizes the student's loyalty to the college or university that he or she chooses to attend” (DiRamio, 2008, p. 41).

## **CURRENT PROFILE OF VETERANS AND STUDENT VETERANS**

According to O'Herrin (2011), “Veterans, by their definition, are nontraditional students” (p. 15). In as such, it is important to realize the demographics of veteran students that student services will encounter on community college campuses. This section will provide a brief overview of the current profile of student veterans in higher education in the United States.

According to the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the current veteran population is 22,328,000 (Profile of Veterans, NCVAS, 2013). Of this population, 10% represents female veterans (Profile of Veterans, NCVAS, 2013). Within this population, the median age for male veterans is 64, while for female veterans, the median age is 49 (Profile of Veterans, NCVAS, 2011). In terms of ethnicity, 80% of veterans have been identified as Caucasian, with 10.8 % African American; 6.0 % Hispanic; 1.3 % Asian; and 1.4 % some other race (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2011).

Figure 1 provides an estimate of the number of veterans that served in following time periods and conflicts:



(Source: Profile of Veterans, NCVAS, 2013)

*Figure 1. Number of Veterans Who Served.*

When specifically examining the student veteran population, as of 2007-2008, nearly 657,000 undergraduate students were classified as veterans (Radford, 2011). This number made up approximately 4% of all undergraduate students at U.S. two- and four-year colleges and universities (Radford, 2011). Approximately 215,000 undergraduate students are military

service members on active duty or in the reserves, constituting about 1% of all undergraduates (Moseman, 2013). Within the current veteran student population, 73% are male and 27% female (Moseman, 2013). It is interesting to note that due to the fact that 10% of the overall living veteran population are female, female student veterans are now over-represented within higher education (VA Campus Toolkit, 2014).

In terms of age range of student veterans, 15.0% of student veterans fall into the span of traditionally aged students between 18 and 23 years of age; 31.4% are 24 to 29; 28.2% students are 30 to 39 with 24.9% being older than 40 (VA Campus Toolkit, 2014).

*Table 2: Age Ranges of Student Veterans*

AGE RANGE	PERCENTAGE OF VETERAN STUDENTS
Students (between 18 & 23 years of age)	15.0
24 to 29	31.4
30 to 39	28.2
Older than 40 years of age	24.9

In terms of marital status, 47% of veterans are married; 47.3% are married with children; while only 35.3% of veteran students are unmarried and have no known dependents (VA Campus Toolkit, 2014). The majority of student veterans are enrolled in public two-year institutions (43.3%) and four-year institutions (21.4%) (VA Campus Toolkit, 2014). Private, not-for-profit institutions and private for-profit schools, make up 13.5% and 12.4% of enrollment numbers, respectively (VA Campus Toolkit, 2014).

#### STUDENT VETERAN EXPERIENCES

The transition that veterans face as they leave their military service end re-enter their civilian lives can be one of the most challenging anyone ever confronts (Gettleman, 2005). The effect of this dramatic life change is felt in every area of an individual's life - personal, social,

occupational and academic. As more and more veterans appear on community college campus, there needs to be a concerted effort to develop strong support systems provided by the institution (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008).

Almost all service personnel returning from active duty will face some form of difficulty during this transition. Of veterans surveyed by the Pew Research Center, 27% claim to have had a difficult time with re-entry (Morin, 2011). This number drastically increases to 44% for post-9/11 veterans: “Veterans who served in the post-9/11 period also report more difficulties returning to civilian life than those who served in Vietnam or the Korean War/World War II era, or in periods between major conflicts” (Morin, para. 7, 2011).

A variety of factors can have an impact on the ease to which veterans re-enter their civilian lives serving within a combat zone; knowing someone who was killed/injured in the line of duty or having “an emotionally traumatic experience while serving or had suffered a serious service-related injury were significantly more likely to report problems with re-entry” (Morin, 2011, paragraph 5). Surprisingly, for post 9/11 veterans, those who reported having strong religious beliefs as well as those veterans who were married, have a more difficult time adjusting to civilian lives than their single or non-religious counterparts (Morin, 2011). Another interesting finding was that veterans who had previous college experience before they entered the service had an easier time with re-entry (Morin, 2011).

There are several challenges veterans returning from active service face as they re-enter the civilian sector including:

- Finding employment (the challenge most often identified by veterans);
- Dealing with a loss of purpose and isolation after leaving the military;

- Navigating the complex and confusing network of benefits, services and support available to veterans;
- Having long waits to obtain disability and other benefits from the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) as a result of significant backlogs in processing claims;
- Getting ready access to healthcare, including behavioral health services;
- Coping with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and/or major depression that are prevalent among veterans who have served in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan;
- Accessing and having success with postsecondary education;
- Dealing with housing and financial instability that could ultimately lead to homelessness for some;
- Accessing resources that uniquely address the needs and challenges of female veterans;
- Finding support for family members of veterans—spouses, children, siblings—who may be dealing with caretaking and other reintegration issues, including relationship issues with the veteran. (Morris, 2012, p. 4)

The difficulties of this type of transition has its roots in many different areas, primarily the extreme nature and conditions of combat often leave an indelible impression upon those who serve and fight. Research has shown that exposure to military combat can result in “considerable risks of mental health problems, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), major depression, substance abuse, impairment in social functioning and in the ability to work, and the increased use of health care services” (Hoge et al., 2004, p. 14). These issues can manifest into in increased divorce rates (with research finding the divorce rate for veterans is 62% greater than that of the civilian population), higher incidents of verbal and physical abuse and they often “suffer in silence” from such conditions as “alcohol and drug abuse/dependency

suicidal and homicidal behaviors and depressive, dissociative, anxiety, and psychotic disorders” (Hutchinson and Banks-Williams, 2006, para. 12).

Returning soldiers also have a difficult time seeking help for any issues they might be facing post-deployment, with the belief that, “Tangible injuries are perceived as valid, while invisible injuries are not. Physical damage suggests strength, fearlessness, sacrifice, and honor. Mental damage may suggest weakness and dishonor” (Hutchinson and Banks-Williams, 2006, para. 12). Because of this perception, often times soldiers do not seek out the necessary aid needed to help them become healthy and successful.

Transition to life on community college campuses is fraught with its own personal and academic barriers. On campus, military student veterans will find themselves facing expectations that are very different than those they have become accustomed to in the military (Steele, J. L., Salcedo, N., & Coley, J., 2010). Nearly 60% of student Veterans report concerns about balancing school and other life issues (VA campus Toolkit Handout, 2012). They may have a difficult time developing social relationships due to age differences from their peers as well as the life experiences that they have faced and perceived biases against those who have served in the military. Veterans also may be unaware of the services available to them, and therefore do not take advantage of these services during their education.

#### INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Support for our military student veterans needs to be a priority for community college leadership. Since September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, 65% of community colleges have placed an emphasis on establishing or strengthening the military student veteran services they provide (American Council on Education Veteran Success Jam, 2010). Top down support is essential in fostering a

strong level of commitment on the part of an institution's administration: "Demonstrating high-level support for veterans and the policies aimed at helping them connect and succeed will encourage participation and trust from staff, faculty, and the veterans themselves" (American Council on Education, 2013, paragraph 3).

To support and nurture the military student veteran while pursuing his/ her education, it is important for community colleges to develop an environment that is welcoming and supportive. In other words, to develop into a "Veteran Friendly" campus. An institution needs to be "where programs and people [are] in place to assist with the transitions between college and the military" (Griffin and Gilbert, 2012, p. 5). To foster a campus environment where student veterans thrive, the institution needs to provide, at a minimum, the following elements:

- *Personnel and services*— the existence of offices, services, and professionals that can meet and understand unique issues and concerns of student veterans.
- *Institutional structures*—the existence of campus policies and procedures related to administering student veterans' information, benefits, and services.
- *Social and cultural support*—the extent of student veteran representation in the student body, veteran-specific groups and services, and quality relationships between student veterans, their peers, and faculty. (Griffin and Gilbert, 2012, p. 3)

Campus-wide collaborative practices also need to be established in order to provide an atmosphere of support where the institution is able to assist its student veterans, and their family members, by networking with all relevant individuals, campus departments/offices and external stakeholders (Consortium of Michigan Veterans Educators, 2013). These collaborations can aid in properly disseminating information to student veterans regarding veteran-related campus services and other campus resources.

The issue of supporting our military student veterans at community colleges has become so paramount, in 2013 the Obama Administration developed a series of “8 Keys to Success,” that will “help veterans and service members transition into the classroom and thrive once they are there” (Baker, 2013, paragraph 1). These success factors include:

1. Create a culture of trust and connectedness across the campus community to promote well-being and success for veterans.
2. Ensure consistent and sustained support from campus leadership.
3. Implement an early alert system to ensure all veterans receive academic, career, and financial advice before challenges become overwhelming.
4. Coordinate and centralize campus efforts for all veterans, together with the creation of a designated space.
5. Collaborate with local communities and organizations, including government agencies, to align and coordinate various services for veterans.
6. Utilize a uniform set of data tools to collect and track information on veterans, including demographics, retention and degree completion.
7. Provide comprehensive professional development for faculty and staff on issues and challenges unique to veterans.
8. Develop systems that ensure sustainability of effective practices for veterans.  
(Baker, 2013, Para. 2)

Institutional support for student veterans is imperative as more and more veterans use the financial support provided to them via such programs as the Post 9/11 benefits and other forms of financial support. Developing services and systems for the specific educational, personal and social support of an institution’s specialized populations needs to be a priority for higher educational institutions. The preceding list highlights some of the services that need to be provided to student veterans by community colleges.

## VETERAN TASK FORCE

As an institution prepares to develop student veteran initiatives, a needs assessment normally is completed to determine how the community college can best provide for its student veterans. These committees will provide a collaborative environment made up of representatives from across the college in order to provide a more holistic vision of what is needed of student veteran services and programming on campus. (Consortium of Michigan Veterans Educations, 2013). Key members of an advisory committee need to include academic affairs and counseling personnel, certifying officials, members of financial aid staff, disability services, career services, and faculty. It is also important to have student veterans included on the task force as their perspectives on what they require from the institution. This task force will be charged with establishing and developing a campus-wide community for its student veterans and developing the services and programs to support them.

## STUDENT VETERAN SERVICES

As with any specialized, non-traditional student population, student veterans have specific needs that are required of their host educational institution. The transition from military service to the civilian, classroom environment is arguably the most difficult barrier that student veterans may face (Kirchner, 2015). Because of these difficulties, community college institutions need to provide specialized services and environments to allow student veterans to connect with the campus community and move forward in being successful as a student: “These students appreciate the opportunity to meet and interact with others on campus, which helps make the college environment feel less isolating” (Kirchner, 2015, p. 116).

## ESTABLISHING A STUDENT VETERAN CENTER

One of the key elements to serving our student veterans on community college campuses is the establishment of a student veteran center. Veteran's centers are an essential component in the educational, social and transitional support of student veterans. Current research shows that, as of 2012, 74% of two-year schools have a dedicated office or department for veteran students (McBain, Kim, Cook, & Snead, 2010). These centers need to be staffed by dedicated personnel that have been trained in dealing with the academic, social and personal needs of the veteran students. It may also be advantageous to have the college's veteran documentation certifying official located in the veteran's center, as well as having the center near other student service related areas (McBain et al., 2010).

The center should also be a place that student veterans can view as a "safe zone," where the veteran students can congregate and share their experiences. The physical space should have a "lounge" feel to it, and it is important to note that the center should be a "dedicated" space, in order to make the student veteran to feel as if he or she is respected and part of the campus community (McBain et al., 2010).

To aid them in feeling they are a part of the campus community, a sense of safety and belonging needs to be instilled in student veterans. The development of a vibrant, resourceful and accepting veteran's center is one strategy to create this sense of belonging and increase student success by aiding in removing the variety of social, personal and academic barriers student veterans might encounter (Rattray, 2010).

## VETERAN-SPECIFIC ORIENTATION

As a way to acclimatize student veterans on to campus, community colleges are providing new student orientations that have been designed specifically with their student veterans in mind. During these orientations, student veteran personnel network with the new students and introduce them to others on-campus, as well as off-campus services that they could employ to be successful while attending classes. To ease in the transition, these orientations often use military terms and phrases to which the veteran students may be accustomed. Veteran specific orientations are also excellent opportunities to introduce new student veterans to their point of contact on campus, which is an essential element of student veteran services in helping student veterans be successful (ACE, 2010). This point of contact should be knowledgeable of services available to student veterans and in helping students navigate any barriers the student may encounter in pursuit of his or her education (ACE, 2010). If schools are unable to provide a singular orientation specifically for veterans, it is suggested that providing breakout sessions during general orientation for student veterans can also be a successful on-boarding tactic (ACE, 2010).

## STUDENT VETERANS WITH DISABILITIES

It is estimated that between 712,800 and 840,000 veterans who were engaged in the Global War on Terror will apply for disability benefits (Stiglitz & Bilmes, 2008). The most common disabilities that current veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan report having include traumatic brain injury, hearing impairment, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Shackleford, 2009).

Not all disabilities are physical; mental and emotional disabilities such as depression and suicidal thoughts plague returning veterans. Of all the veterans who serviced in *Operation Enduring Freedom* and *Operational Iraqi Freedom*, 18% report suffering from such symptoms as PTSD and depression (McBain et al., 2010). According to the Pew Research Center (2001), 72% of veterans surveyed reported having “flashbacks, repeated distressing memories or recurring dreams of those incidents” (p. 52). It is important to note that “certain disabilities may take time to develop, and even the student may not easily recognize the effects of such disabilities” (Shackleford, 2009, p. 36).

These disabilities often have a negative impact on the student’s performance on campus. Physical disabilities may require additional time to physically to get to class and to complete exams, and may also hamper their ability to take notes, while musculoskeletal problems may cause the student difficulties in sitting for long periods of time holding writing instruments and remaining focused in class, due to hyper-arousal (VA Campus Toolkit Handout, 2012). Students may need to sit in certain areas of the classroom due to their hearing loss or issues with their vision. Students with disabilities may require frequent medical appointments which could result in missing classes that may further impact their studies.

“Invisible wounds” such as PTSD may also have an effect in the classroom. Topics of discussions in class or on assignments, and questions from classmates, fellow students or faculty and staff may cause the veteran student to relieve any traumatic experiences from their time in the military. Veteran students may begin to miss or skip classes as an avoidance tactic if they feel uncomfortable or feel threatened by the classroom environment.

Trained personnel are essential when dealing with student veterans who have either a physical or mental disability. Within two-year institutions, 51% report offering counseling assistance to their military student veterans (McBain et al., 2010).

#### FEMALE STUDENT VETERANS

Since the United States' military ended conscription and began to move towards developing an all-volunteer force in 1973, the number of female military personnel has grown substantially (Patten & Parker, 2011). Between the years 1973 and 2010, the number of women in the military has grown from 42,000 to 167,000 individuals, while there was an overall decrease of 738,000 service personnel overall (Patten & Parker, 2011).

The face of today's military forces is also changing as the ranks become more diverse in terms of both race and gender: "Nearly one-third (31%) of active-duty women are black compared with only 16% of men, and a smaller share of active-duty women than men are white (53% vs. 71%)" (Patten & Parker, 2011, p. 2). Female veterans are also more likely to have children and be single parents (Sander, 2012).

With a larger percentage of today's service members being female, it is important to understand that female veterans will return to civilian life with similar experiences as their male comrades, but also have additional factors that may affect their success in community college (VA Campus Toolkit, 2012). The Pew Research Center found "that women veterans are just as likely as men to experience the struggles and benefits of service upon discharge — fully half say they experienced strains in family relations and 42% feel they have suffered from posttraumatic stress" (Patten & Parker, 2011, p. 2).

It has been reported that 22% of women veterans have suffered “Military Sexual Trauma” during their military service, which can include sexual assault or sexual harassment (VA Campus Toolkit, 2012). After their military experience, research has shown that women veterans receive less social support than those of their male counterparts (VA Campus Toolkit, 2012). Because of these factors, the transition back to the civilian sector can be incredibly difficult, even though the majority of female veterans are proud of their services to their country (VA Campus Toolkit, 2012).

With these factors in mind, it’s important for college campuses to provide specialized services for their female student veterans. What is especially disconcerting is that, even though more than 750,000 veterans have used their benefits to attend two and four year colleges, only a small percentage of these students take advantage of the campus services available to them (Kim & Cole, 2013).

It is important for all parties assisting veterans, both male and female, to realize that the transition period from military to civilian portions of their lives can be difficult and often traumatic. Other campus resources such as support groups for female student veterans and personnel that have been specially trained to deal with female student veteran issues is also essential (Student Affairs Today, 2011). Some colleges have “unofficial rules” to make sure they have female personnel available to meet with female students (Sander, 2012). “Camaraderie” can be key for female veterans, so connecting with other veterans, especially female veterans, can aid in helping them overcome the barriers they might be facing.

## CAREER ADVISING

A main issue that many military student veterans face is finding employment after their military service and trying to translate the experiences that they had in the military to the civilian workforce. The unemployment rate as of 2010, as reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, for recent veterans was 11.5% — a higher rate for veterans than from all other eras combined (Taylor et al., 2011).

Specific career transitional issues that student veterans face include:

- Mental or physical disabilities that may preclude them finding self-supporting employment, or that require specialized accommodations in the workplace.
- Veterans or reservists may have multiple re-deployments which can interrupt standard work schedules and have an impact on the stability of employment.
- Veterans may have pensions which may be affected by post service employment and may cause veterans to decide not to pursue employment.

In light of these issues, it is important for student veterans, employers and community colleges to realize that this population of students have a large amount of qualified skills that can be used to further their careers after college, especially as the world becomes more global. Advising and assessment provided by the community college through specially trained college personnel can provide valuable insight into the student veterans career-related skill sets, as well as ability to identify strengths and weaknesses the student veterans possess in terms of adapting to the current career market (Rottinghaus et al., 2012).

Assisting student veterans in moving on to the next stage of their lives, especially in pursuit of their future careers, providing career advising to aid student veterans in translating their military experiences to the civilian world is necessary. Finding alignment between

interests, abilities and professional experiences, and career sectors is an essential piece of student success that educational institutions should be involved in while supporting their student veterans.

#### STUDENT VETERAN ORGANIZATIONS

An important element of student success is social integration (Tinto, 1990). In as such, it is critical that an institution provide opportunities for student social interaction for their student veterans: “Student veteran organizations can help student service members and veterans feel more included and reduce their marginalization” (Sternberg et al., 2009, p. 20). Veteran-friendly campuses need to provide a supportive climate, where the student veterans feel that they can be open regarding their military affiliation

Student Veteran Organizations allow student veterans to connect with other students with the same experiences as them, and “provide a vehicle through which veterans can express a collective voice of advocacy while also supplying a setting for learning, reflection, and participation beyond the traditional classroom” (Summerlot, Green, & Parker, p. 74, 2009). These types of organizations allow student veterans to have an impact on the campus environment to make positive changes for their population by acting as “political action groups and transition aids, supplying links to the campus community like those that other student organizations provide for their members” (Summerlot et al., 2009, p. 74).

#### SUMMARY

This chapter provided an overview of the pertinent literature related to the experiences that student veterans encounter while pursuing their education at community colleges. In higher education, community colleges have provided an affordable, accessible source of higher

education. With the abundant funds available to them via various funding sources, an increased number of military veterans are attending community colleges, both to pursue their education and as a way of re-entering civilian society. But student veterans often face many barriers in pursuit of their education, some of which could negatively impact their success with attending classes. In as such, a variety of specialized support services need to be developed and provided to their military student veteran populations.

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

### INTRODUCTION

In higher education in the United States, community colleges are finding that an increased number of students attending their institutions are veterans. Because of this, community colleges are responding by developing specific programs and systems to increase the success of their student veterans. To assist community college institutions in their support of their student veterans' academic pursuits, this research is designed to develop a student success flow model. This model will be focused specifically on the needs of student veterans, with supportive structures being developed even before they enroll into college, continuing through their experience at college, and after they have graduated and attained alumni status.

### RESEARCH DESIGN

As the focus of this dissertation was to develop a student success flow model through the use of case study interviews, a qualitative research design was chosen for this dissertation. By its nature, qualitative research allows for a researcher to discover the meaning behind a particular phenomenon that affects an individual or population, over determining the cause and effect of behavior (Merriam, 2009). According to Denzin and Lincoln, qualitative research gives investigators the opportunity to study phenomenon within its natural environment and allows for interpretation of the phenomena and its meanings (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). In this regard, the overall goal of qualitative research is to provide meaning and understanding to individuals' behavior (Merriam, 2009).

## PILOT STUDY

Before the interviews for this study were conducted, a pilot study was begun in March 2016 to determine the validity of the interview questions derived for this dissertation. Pilot studies are a crucial piece of research design as they allow a researcher to conduct pre-testing of the research instrument to determine any significant issues or problems that may impede data gathering:

One of the advantages of conducting a pilot study is that it might give advanced warning about where the main research project could fail, where research protocols may not be followed, or whether proposed methods or instruments are inappropriate or too complicated. (van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001, p. 1)

Six higher educational professionals were contacted via email and sent a copy of the research interview questions. The individuals involved in the pilot study were selected based upon their positions within their organizations and their experiences working with student veterans. The pilot study participants were asked to provide feedback on the instrument, with a focus on looking for clarity of questions asked, and what, if any, additional questions could be asked that would elicit information pertinent to the focus of this research.

Feedback received from the participants of the pilot study focused on providing more clarity in the interview questions being asked as well as providing interview questions that would deliver more insight to other segments of community college student services areas, such as career services. All feedback offered was incorporated into the interview questions.

A second pilot study was also conducted. The second draft of interview questions were altered based on the feedback received from the first pilot study. Feedback from the second pilot study was received and changes to questions were made accordingly.

## RESEARCH PROCEDURES

The focus of this research was to develop a student success model that community colleges can adopt to aid their military student veterans in being successful. This model describes the flow the student veteran will follow as he or she pursues a certification or degree. The research sought to identify the following key points through interviews with crucial community college personnel:

- Identify specific stages on the flow of student veterans through the community college, from entrance to completion;
- Identify momentum points and barriers for each stage of the student flow model;
- Identify institutional level momentum points and barriers at each stage of the student flow model;
- Develop pre-research model based on a literature review and post study model based on results of study.

The researcher was the primary instrument for all data gathering and analysis of that data, through the use of interviews. Interviews were chosen as the data gathering tool as they allow for in-depth examination and collection of information on a subject (Turner, 2010). Interviews also included the perspectives, viewpoints and experiences of the subjects, which allow for a more well-rounded cache of data (Turner, 2010).

### **Research Sites**

Community colleges were chosen as research sites due to the accessible and affordable nature of the institutions and as a large number of veterans use community college institutions as gateways to re-enter civilian life, as outlined in the literature review.

The institutions involved in the research were also selected based on their classification of being *Vet Friendly Schools*, as determined by *The Military Times*. Additional data for The Military Times research was also gathered through the Veterans Affairs and Defense departments, the IEPDS Data Center, College Scorecard and the Cohort Default Rate Database (The Military Times, 2015). To determine which U.S. two-year schools were to be classified as being military friendly, *The Military Times* methodology was based on a 100 plus question survey that was submitted to colleges and universities across the country (The Military Times, 2015). These survey questions focused the institutional services and operations that involved current and former military members as well as their family members and dependents.

Institutions that were surveyed were evaluated in five categories:

- University culture
- Academic quality
- Student support
- Academic policies
- Financial aid (Military Times, 2015).

The following are descriptors of the institutions that were focused on as interview sites for this research:

- College A: College A is a multi-campus college located in the Central United States, covering a 25-county area. College A offers 33 educational programs to approximately 22,000 students per academic year.
- College B: College B is located in the Eastern United States, and one of the largest community colleges in the country, with an enrollment of nearly 40,000 students annually.
- College C: Located in the Pacific Northwest, College C has an average student enrollment of close to 8,000 students, with nearly 500 student veterans pursuing their education at the institution.

- College D: College D is located in the United States' northern mid-west, with 60 plus programs of study being offered to an average of 6,300 annually enrolled students

### **Interview Subjects**

From the selected institutions, a minimum of three staff members were contacted to conduct interviews. The individuals represented various areas of their respective institutions, including executive level administration and student services. The professionals chosen to take part in the research were selected due to their direct contact with student veterans, or, in the case of administration, they oversee those areas that engage student veterans. The interview subjects were divided into two broad categories. One segment of subjects could be described as "Front Line" personnel – these were college staff such as advisors, counselors and direct student veteran personnel. The secondary group of subjects were classified as "Administration" and included individuals in a leadership capacity.

### **Interview Process**

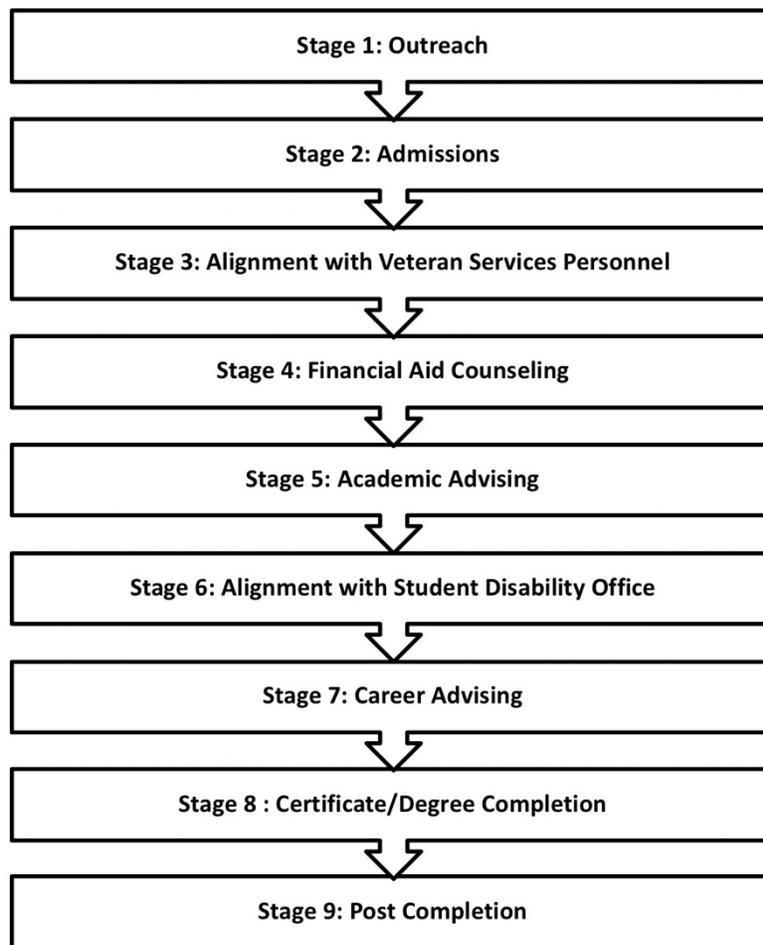
Interviews were 45-60 minutes in duration and with a consistent question format with each participant based on his/her position at the academic institution. This time frame allowed sufficient time to complete the interview and any follow-up discussions without interruption. All interviews were conducted via telephone calls, scheduled for prearranged times, based on the availability of the subject. The process for arranging the interview begin with a soft contact through an email to determine the best time and date for the interview to occur.

Prior to the interview, the researcher emailed the Informed Consent form to the participant to provide information regarding the subjects as research participants. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher reviewed the information with the participant to ensure all information provided was clear and that the subject was aware of his or her rights as

an interview subject. The subjects were also provided a copy of the questions prior to the interview to provide the interviewee an opportunity to prepare for the interview.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW-BASED MODEL

The stages included in this pre-model are based on the information gathered from the literature, with a focus on those essential elements that can provide momentum to a student veteran's successful educational pursuits (Figure 2).



*Figure 2: Literature-Based Student Veteran Success Model*

### **Stage 1: Outreach**

It is at this stage community colleges would begin to reach out to military personnel (ideally while they are still within the military) to attract them to their institutions. Through the use of specialized marketing materials and tactics (such as having college recruiters conduct on-base open houses and information sessions), institutions will begin to develop a partnership with the potential students.

### **Stage 2: Admissions**

In the second stage of the model, student veterans have left the military and are beginning their educational tracks. In this stage, it is essential for institutions to aid student veterans through the transitional period between their military and civilian lives. This period can be traumatic as veterans move from the structured environment of the military to the less structured of higher education. Community colleges can aid in easing this transition by providing supportive services at the front door of the institution during the admission process. Services such as specially designed student veteran orientations, during which procedures and terminology similar to those used within the military are employed, and having student veteran services personnel (advisors and counselors, for example) on hand to introduce to the new students, can aid in making the transition to higher education less traumatic for student veterans.

### **Stage 3: Alignment with Student Veteran Personnel**

As student veterans begin their educational pursuits, it is imperative they connect, as early as possible with those departments and individuals who can support the students in being successful. These service personnel may not be readily apparent to student veterans, so specific

outreach focused on newly attending student veterans to make them aware of the services and personnel available to them. A working partnership with student veteran service personnel that is open and accepting can have significant positive impact on a student veteran's educational progress. A designated safe area, such as an on-campus Veteran's Center, that is welcoming, accommodating and supportive, as the alienation that veterans can feel on college campuses due to reasons such as age differential and life experiences can prove to be a barrier to educational success.

#### **Stage 4: Financial Aid Counseling**

Many student veterans use the financial resources provide by the GI bill to fund their education at community colleges. In order to take advantage of the financial resources available to them, student veterans need to be informed of the processes required for correct and complete completion of the requisite paperwork. There also needs to be an emphasis on completing all forms in a timely fashion as to not cause a delay in receiving financial aid, and thus impacting the ability to take classes. Community colleges need to provide access to specialized financial aid-related personnel, advising sessions and workshops to provide dedicated assistance for student veterans.

#### **Stage 5: Academic Advising**

Specially trained advisors who are knowledgeable in the specific needs of student veterans are an essential resource. Self-advising can be an issue for all students and for student veterans who may be unfamiliar with the structured nature of higher education, and potential reluctance to engage on-campus student services, issues may arise in terms of class and program selection. Problems with course selections can set a student's degree attainment

schedule back significantly. For student veterans, this can affect their education greatly, as governmental financial aid funding programs, such as the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill, have strict timelines that students must meet.

#### **Stage 6: Alignment with Student Disability Office.**

As a consequence of their military service, often military personnel return to the civilian world with physical or mental disabilities that could severally impact success, both within the classroom and out. These disabilities may manifest at any point during the students' educational pursuits and may hinder forward momentum towards degree/certificate completion. In as such, student veterans who may possess disabilities of any kind, whether as a result of their service, or not, need to connect and make use of their accessibility office. These departments have the specialized services and personnel who can provide assistance to student veteran's educational experience by aiding in reducing any barriers or impediments to the student veteran's success.

#### **Stage 7: Career Advising**

Applying the education and training that is received during the pursuit of a degree or certificate at a community college to a student's industry of interest is typically of paramount concern for students. This can be especially true for student veterans as they seek to translate their military experience to the civilian workplace.

Just like other aspects of student veterans' lives, there can be barriers to successful employment due to their experiences within the military and post service. It is vital for community colleges to provide specialized career services for student veterans that focus on those specialized skills the student possess due to his/her experiences in the service.

### **Stage 8: Certificate/Degree Completion**

As the student veteran approaches completion of his/her certificate or degree program, it is imperative the student remains in close contact with his or her advising team on campus. Student veterans, as well as all student populations, need to ensure there are not any issues with the student's graduation track that could delay graduation, transfer to another institution or entrance into the workforce. By creating a strong academic association with his or her advising team, a student veteran can reduce many issues that may have a negative impact on completion of their degrees. This is especially true for student veterans who might have special requirements regarding their progress towards graduation, including both on and off campuses influences that may impede success.

### **Stage 9: Post Completion**

As a student veteran moves from the student to alumni status after completion of his or her degree, an institution should develop initiatives to maintain a relationship with the student. The post-graduation identity of the student is important to establish, especially for their graduating institution as alumni can be incredibly strong advocates for their institutions in recruitment efforts. Student veteran departments need to make efforts to maintain strong connections with their alumni veterans, not only to keep updated on their progress post-graduation, but also to engage them as potential ambassadors for their institutions and programs.

### **SUMMARY**

This chapter provided an in-depth overview of the data collection process that was used to gather information in support of this research. This chapter also outlined the student veteran

success model developed from the literature review as well as providing an explanation of those key momentum points that student veterans need to engage with to be successful.

## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the results of information collected from student veteran personnel via in-depth interviews. This information that was collected through the interviews focused on specific student veteran initiatives that four community colleges engage in to capitalize on momentum points and remove loss points that student veterans may face while pursuing their education. The chapter incorporated the results in the data collection process including a focus on the dominant themes that emerged during interview sessions. This chapter includes a restating of the study's purpose and an overview of the responses gathered during the data collection stage of the research. Special emphasis was placed on extracting the dominate themes that emerged during the interview sessions.

The purpose of this study was to develop a student veteran flow model that identifies the specific and unique programs and services community college should provide to student veterans at various stages of their community college experience. This model follows the stages that a student travels through, beginning with pre-admissions contacts through completion of a degree or certificate and alumni activities. The development of this model consisted of two stages. First, an initial flow model was created based on best practices collected through a review of the research on student veteran success strategies. Secondly, the initial model will be restructured based on the information regarding best practices acquired through the interview sessions.

The following section provides an overview of the results that were provided by the subjects during interview sessions. To gather the results for this dissertation, interviews were conducted with four community colleges from different areas of the country in an attempt to gain a broader perspective on student veteran services. These colleges were deemed as being the top in the nation in providing specific services to their student veterans, as determined by *The Military Times*. A total of nine individuals were interviewed, representing a variety of levels within the community college organization.

#### THEMATIC ANALYSIS

To properly review and categorize the data that was gathered through the interview stage of this research, a thematic analysis of the results was conducted. Widely used in qualitative research, thematic analysis is designed to aid researchers in identifying and reporting patterns found within collected data (Braun and Clark, 2006). Thematic analysis focuses on themes found in the research, and these themes can be vital pieces of information identified in the collected data (Braun and Clark, 2006). Themes represent a pattern that appears within the collected data (Braun and Clark, 2006).

Through thematic analysis, researchers are able to organize and describe data in rich detail, as well as gaining a level of interpretation of the data (Braun and Clark, 2006). Though thematic analysis is widely used by researchers in examining qualitative data, there is no precise way of using the analytical tool (Braun and Clark, 2006). Therefore, how thematic analysis is applied to research is dependent upon how the researcher wishes to use it and the type of data being examined (Braun and Clark, 2006).

For the purposes of this research, a thematic analysis was used to determine specific themes in regard to student veterans and strategies for their success discovered during the interview sessions. The analysis began by examining the transcriptions of the interviews, with a focus on highlighting those concepts that occurred most often during the conversations. For example, a frequent point of discussion that was brought up during the interviews sessions was the idea of an increased need on campuses for “faculty professional development” in regard to student veteran needs. As this was a common topic of concern discussed in all the interview sessions, “Faculty Professional Development” was designated as a theme. Once the common themes were identified, they were then clustered into similar groups, and discussed in further detail under each interview question.

#### CLUSTERED RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following section provides a detailed description of the various themes that were gathered and analyzed as a result of the interview process.

#### **To your knowledge, what are the most important issues affecting student veterans at your institution?**

Responses to this question were wide ranging, although the majority of respondents believed that serving student veterans on their campuses is of paramount concern to faculty, staff and administration of their respective institutions. “Top down support” of student veterans and the issues that they face is essential for proper support of this specific student population. It was reported by those interviewed that was the case on their campuses, where administrative leadership was extremely supportive of promoting the success and well-being of student veterans at their respective institutions.

Interview subjects stated that the student veterans face barriers that are similar to those faced by other student populations, but the additional issues brought on by a student's military service compounded the difficulties that they are facing, both on campus and off. The specialized issues that student veterans face come from and impact all aspects of their lives – personal, social, emotional, physical, financial, and the like. In as such, the college needs to respond accordingly with appropriate services to meet those needs (DiRamio and Jarvis, 2011).

One of the major student veteran service issues that all interviewees mentioned during the sessions was that there was a strong lack of awareness as to the specialized needs that veterans require while they are pursuing their education. Education of all campus constituents as to the specific needs of student veterans, and how the institution can respond to these needs to aid the student veterans, was of deep concern for those who were interviewed. This lack of knowledge touches all points of the campus, and a push for campus wide training is necessary need (Lang, Harriett, & Cadet, 2013).

Alienation was a topic that was discussed frequently. The social gulf that exists between the student veterans and the rest of the student population, and often the college's faculty and staff, can lead to a sense of isolation on the part of the student veteran leading to a lack of connectivity to their institution. Age and life experiences were two common issues that lead to this sense of isolation from the student body, as well as a reticence to share their identity as a veteran, lest be labeled, and perhaps weaken their connection to the campus community. "They don't feel that they can be themselves" was the feeling expressed by those interviewed.

A need for "work-life" balanced was discussed by several of the interviewees. With so many different issues impinging on their lives (family, economic, or employment issues) that

other student populations may not face, the barriers that student veterans encounter add a level of stress and life coordination that can have a negative effect on their progression towards educational attainment.

The issues of disabilities, both mental and physical, and their impacts on a student veteran were of extreme concern of those who were interviewed. As these disabilities can affect the student veteran's success in the classroom, it is important for faculty and staff to be aware of the impact that disabilities the student veterans may possess can have on their successful progress. Faculty, especially, need to be willing to make special accommodations for their student veterans to help promote their success. Seating arrangements, for example, may seem simple or trivial to some, but it might be incredibly important for the student veterans to sit in the same space or with their back away from the door to provide a sense of consistency and an environment of calm. Faculty and staff need to liaison with their on-campus disability department and personnel to get a better understanding as to how to accommodate their student veterans in order to remove any barriers to success their disabilities may create (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008).

If the student is receiving any type of benefits to pursue their education, there might be regulations and time limits that are part of the process that can impact the progress of certificate/degree completion for the student veteran. This was of primary concern for many of the individuals who were interviewed. The interviewees cited the influence of government bureaucracy, the often-confusing application process of applying for military-based educational funds and unforgiving timelines that do not align with institutional deadlines, all combining to add to difficulties for student veterans have even in paying for their education. If there is an

interruption in funding from the government at any point, students may have to drop classes or withdraw from college, thus interrupting their educational tract.

There is also a lack of knowledge on the part of the student veterans in terms of services provided by the community college that can assist them while pursuing their education. Often, student veterans are coming from a very structured environment of their military services, where “decisions were made for them.” Moving from this ordered and controlled environment to a culture where there is a stronger emphasis placed on the individual can be a difficult transition for student veterans. This “culture shock” can further add to isolating the student veteran and be detrimental in moving forward with their education. “Self-advising” can be an issue with any college student, but especially with student veterans as they may be unfamiliar with the systems of higher education and how to work within them. Connecting with those specialist on campus who can assist the student veterans with their academic advising needs, for example, can greatly increase the chances for the student’s success.

Communication was also an issue that was discussed, not only communication between student service personnel and the student veterans themselves, but also between departments and even campuses. There can also be difficulties in terms of communicating with external organizations and agencies that support veterans and their dependents. The lack of strong lines of communication between different academic areas and constituents, both on and off campus, can often hamper attempts to assist student veterans, as no one is “on the same page.” The confusion that is sometimes a result of this can severely affect, in a negative way, the educational tract that the student veteran is following.

**What specific services do you provide to your student veteran populations to *make them successful*?**

The interviewees, especially those working on the front line, stated that the student veteran services personnel strive to be the “first point of contact” (POC) for the student veterans who are attending their institutions. Being the “POC” for their student veteran population allows those in-service positions to properly ascertain and gauge the needs of their students, and thus act accordingly (Lang, Harriett, and Cadet, 2013). By the student veteran service personnel or those within the veteran’s center acting as the POC, the transition from soldier to student can be eased.

As would be expected, all institutions that were researched had specific services established for student veterans on their campuses. A common response to this question was that, on all campuses researched, student veterans had full access to the same types of services that are provided to all segments of the student and, in some cases, alumni populations. The development and implementation of specialized programs services, as well as hiring of new and training of current staff, was of paramount importance to those community college personnel who were interviewed. It was believed that it was essential to provide these services, because of the large number of student veterans who attend their campuses, some because of their proximity to military installations.

Professional development opportunities for faculty and staff who interact with student veterans was one thing that was proposed by those interviewed, as training opportunities that focus on assisting student veterans are not typically offered on most community colleges. There needs to be an emphasis on providing specialized workshops, run by on campus as well as off campus experts in the field of student veteran services, and these opportunities, in the opinions

of those that were interviewed, need to be mandatory. Making these professional development workshops mandatory is the only way to ensure that the information is thoroughly distributed across campus, thus removing any blind spots that faculty and staff may possess when dealing with student veterans.

An effective method for student veteran success that all the institutions studied provided was some form mentorship program (Griffin & Gilbert, 2012). These programs typically create a relationship between a student veteran that has been enrolled in courses and pursuing a degree, and one that has just begun their educational tract. These types of “Peer2Peer” programs have been found to be highly effective as the mentor can “show the ropes” to the newer student, thus avoiding any pitfalls that the more senior student may have encountered while also capitalizing on those more productive strategies that might help the new student navigate the higher education environment. These relationships can also move beyond the confines of the campus and assist student veterans with issues that they might be facing in their non-campus life. Especially for those student veterans who have recently left the services and might be unfamiliar with the procedures and process of the civilian world, these types of mentoring contacts can prove invaluable in aiding their comrades in circumventing any barriers that student veterans might encounter.

A new tactic for aiding student veterans that some of those interviewed identified is offering classes specifically designed for, and in most cases, available only to student veterans (Griffin & Gilbert, 2012). These types of classes cover different disciplines, but as they are only open to student veterans, it aids in creating an environment where the student veterans can feel open in discussing topics amongst their peers who have had shared experiences. These

types of classes can foster a “esprit de corps” among the students which can help lead to creating a stronger bond, both to other student veterans and the institution itself.

**Does your student veteran service personnel face any challenges when assisting student veterans on your campus?**

The most common challenge that was reported during the interview was the lack of knowledge regarding student veterans and the issues that they face, both on and off campus. As no fault of their own, many faculty and staff on do not have a strong understanding of the issues that many student veterans face on their campus. Nor do they realize that, like any special student populations at community colleges, to aid their student veterans in their personal and academic successes, specialized procedures and personnel need to be in place in order to help the student veterans. For the most part, the interviewees believed that the general faculty and staff on their campuses were supportive of their student veterans and open to doing what they can to support them, but, unfortunately, this support is not always universal. Interviewees said that there has been occasional “push back” from different parts of their institutions when it comes to an increased focus on student veterans and their needs, as it may lead to budgets being re-allocated to cover veteran initiatives or additional time spent outside of the classroom directly working with student veterans. Because of some reticence on the part of on-campus constituents to support student veteran and initiatives to further their success, it is important that “top-down support” from institutional leadership is in-place (Lang, Harriett, & Cadet, 2013).

Those interviewed stated even something like the type of language used when working or conversing with student veterans needs to be examined, and that an emphasis needs to be placed on enhancing faculty and staff’s “soft skills,” in order to properly communicate with

student veterans. Sensitivity in dealing with student veterans is key. Student veterans may not give faculty or staff “a second chance” if they do not connect with student service personnel. Proper communication with student veteran on the part of student services personnel needs to be strongly promoted on the part of the institution. Suggestions from front-line personnel during the interviews focused on the usage of military based terms, or terms similar to those used in the military when assisting student veterans, especially those new to higher education. The usage of language like what the veterans have been exposed to during their time in the service might ease the transition to the educational environment, while reducing any “culture shock” that may present.

The interviewees also believed that this lack of information is also on the part of student veterans regarding the specialized services that are often offered on their community college campuses, and not knowing how or where to connect with those who are on campus to assist them. As student veterans do not want to be viewed “differently,” they have a tendency not to reach out for assistance. This reticence for asking for assistance can also relate again to the idea of not wanting to be labeled as veteran and the consequences of being singled out that can occur. The idea of being seen as a “crazy vet” [a term that came up quite often during the interviews] is a very real concern for student veterans (and veterans in general). Because of this, student veterans, as a population, have a lack of trust of the campus community and that lessens their motivation to take advantage of services available. “Suffering in silence” was how this was described by those interviewed – as their training stresses an individualistic “can do” attitude. This mentality does not leave once they enter in to the civilian world and can still affect their behavior (Griffin & Gilbert, 2012).

In terms of those student veteran personnel who directly work with student veterans, the term that came up frequently was “overwhelmed.” An increase in the number of student veterans attending their institution, but without an accompanying increase in personnel, budget or facilities has led to difficulty on some campus in being able to appropriately assist their student veterans. Because of this, the student veteran support personnel can feel as if “they are being pulled in many different directions,” and may not be able to fully meet the needs of the students they are working with. The sentiment that was discussed by those interviewed was that those who support student veterans also need to be supported by their institutions.

Interviewees from College C stated that there seemed to be a lack of research on student veterans and increasing their success while pursuing their education, both at community colleges and four-year universities. This lack of research and knowledge base regarding how to support student veterans at community colleges has often left those who serve student veterans “in the dark” in terms of the current views and strategies of how to best serve this specialized populations. The creation of a large pool of research that professionals can draw from to gain new perspectives on unique approaches for assisting student veterans is essential as the number of student veteran enrollments increases on community college campuses.

**Does your institution actively engage in recruitment of active military personnel to *attend your institution*?**

The range of responses for this question went from “Not at all” to “On a regular basis.” The majority of respondents stated that their institutions does not engage in specific recruitment of student veterans. Respondents stated that their institutions do not have any

specific recruitment plans or strategies to target student veterans. For most of the institutions interviewed, the recruitment methods for connecting with student veterans go hand in hand with recruiting other student populations to attend their institutions. The reasons behind this lack of recruiting were typically based around lack of funding and personnel to adequately cover the geographic areas that their institutions work within.

There are exceptions though. For example, College A relies on referrals from community organizations, such as local VA hospitals and veteran related organizations, and use referrals from these organizations as recruitment contacts. College C holds recruitment events on local military and military-related installations on a fairly routine basis. This institution also has specific counselors assigned to local military installations to meet with potential students as well as conduct special events and workshops as an additional recruitment method.

**Does your institution have a specific area, office, or lounge dedicated for student veterans, such as a Veteran's Center?**

A major initiative for those institutions studied was to establish and support a specific area on campus that was devoted specifically for student veterans. Because the special needs of the student veteran population in terms of wanting to feel connected without the issues that come with being "labeled," institutions made the creation of centers for veterans a priority. These types of centers were viewed, on the part of those interviewed, as being "essential" in terms of properly assisting their student veterans (Lang, Harriett, & Cadet, 2013).

As those institutions who were studied were leaders in terms of providing premier services for student veterans in the nation, it was assumed that they would have veterans' centers already established. The creation of a veteran's center was extremely important for those institutions studied. Interviewees pointed out that development of a "safe space" where

student veterans can meet to discuss the issues that might be facing, study in peace, and meet with student veteran support personnel was the main impetus to develop centers on their campus.

Design and layout of the veteran centers varies with the institution. Even though their respective leaderships supported the idea of development and support of a veteran center, institutional budgets and physical space of campus facilities often have a significant impact on the design of the center. Colleges researched reported that, in some cases, off campus donations were gathered to aid in the creation of a proper place to be respectful and accommodating to student veterans. The colleges interviewed did not want the centers to be “in a broom closet,” but instead designed specifically with the needs of the student veterans in mind. Simple things that might be taken for granted by other student populations are incredibly important to student veterans – comfortable furniture, large working spaces, up-to-date technologies. Veteran centers also walk a fine line between being close or adjacent to other general student services area (advising/counseling, financial aid, etc.) and providing an isolated, private where the student veterans can feel safe (Lang, Harriett, & Cadet, 2013).

**Does your institution have any specially trained staff or faculty to provide unique or specific support services to student veterans?**

All of the institutions that were interviewed stated that they did have specialized service personnel to provide assistance to their student veterans. Specially trained and designated individuals who service student veterans are an essential piece in developing a first point of contact structure for student veteran services (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). The view from those interviewed was that by establishing a straight line of communication for student veterans to connect with was an efficient strategy to promote and enhance student veteran usage of

campus student services. By creating a support network where student veterans are aware of “the right person to speak to at the right time,” institutions can increase the chances of proper usage of student services on the part of student veterans.

The number of these faculty and staff members who work with student veterans varies with the institution, depending upon the size of their student veteran populations and enrollment. The roles that these personnel take on can vary with college as well. Typically, these specialized services are housed in the veteran’s center or other area designated for veterans, but not always, as some service personnel can be embedded in other student services areas.

The types of specialized personnel varied from institution to institution and provide services that cover a wide spectrum of needs that the student veterans might be struggling with. With this being said, all institutions researched had specialized veteran services advisors that were trained to assist student veterans with issues related to their academic pursuits.

Institutions also have staff, titled Certifying Officials, specifically to assist with the completion and processing of paperwork from such governmental agencies as the VA. Colleges also have student veteran Academic Advisors to assist with program/major planning and course selection as well as veteran Counselors who can assist with any transitional and personal issues that the student veterans might be facing on campus.

The researched colleges also reported having disability specialists on staff to assist student veterans who have self-reported having a mental or physical disability that requires specialized accommodations in the classrooms and on campus to aid in navigating those barriers that might be caused by their disability.

Institutions reported they also get support for their veteran's support offices and personnel in the form of work study employees to help assist those college personnel in serving their veteran populations.

**Does your institution provide support services to family members or dependents of student veterans?**

On-campus services provided to dependents of student veterans were not typically provided by those institutions that were interviewed. For the most part, the institutions researched stated that the same services provided to student veterans (and traditional and non-traditional students alike) were also provided to the dependents of student veterans.

**Does your institution provide any specific services for female student veterans?**

Although all student veterans have specialized requirements while attending community college, female student veterans have their own specific sets of needs and barriers that they face that set themselves apart from their male counterparts (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008). The institutions researched endeavored to develop specialized services for those female veterans on their campuses. Interviewees also stated that they feel that often times the specific needs of the female veteran are overlooked as their experiences can be vastly different than their male complements in the service. In as such, it was believed by those interviewed that a stronger emphasis to support their female student veterans needs to be initiated on college campuses, specifically by developing female student veteran centric programs, provide specialized services for female student veterans, and hire/train personnel to provide assistance to this population.

This being said, a major issue that interviewees discussed that complicates matters when attempting to assist female student veterans is the lack of personnel to specifically assist female student veterans, and the lack of budget to hire any new specialized personnel. As such, many of the institutions researched relied on personnel within their Women's Center, or like-minded departments, to assist with working with their female student veterans.

Despite this, the researched institutions recognized a need to support student female veterans. Institutions also stated that they provide special events that honor female student veterans and their service to their country. College B, for example, provides support groups for female veterans only, where they would be able to freely and safely discuss the issues that they face, both as a result of their military service as well as in their civilian lives. This form of therapy allows the female student veteran to feel recognized and provides an opportunity to have a voice and an element of control over their own life and educational successes.

***Does your institution have any formal or informal student veteran groups on campus, such as the Student Veterans of America or others?***

Those interviewed stated that all of their campuses had some form of student veteran related group or club, with the main group typically being the Student Veterans of America (SVA) chapter. Having these types of clubs on campus develops a strong sense of belonging for the student veterans, with their experiences in connecting with the student comrades reflective of their time in the service (Summerlot, Green, & Parker, 2009). The student veterans have the opportunity to freely exchange ideas with their fellow comrades while learning about the on and off campus services that can improve their success, within the classrooms and their personal lives. If the institutions did not have an SVA chapter, the student veterans, in conjunction with the student veteran personnel, develop "home grown" student veteran clubs

to fill the void and meet the needs of the student veteran population. Those interviewed also stated that many of their student veterans also connect with groups off campus within their local community that are supportive of veterans post military service.

These groups also provide fertile opportunities for mentor relationships to develop between those student veterans who are nearing the end of their educational pursuits with those students who are beginning their scholarly pursuits. These mentor-protégé relationships have proven invaluable in assisting those novice student veterans unfamiliar with the higher educational systems in “learning the ropes” (Summerlot, Green, & Parker, 2009).

Interviewees stated that some issues that arose with their student veteran groups mainly surrounded the fact that due to the transient nature of community colleges and their students, leadership of these student groups can be fluid and change frequently. This can have an impact on the stability and enrollment of the group. As a response, the institutions interviewed have a “faculty advisor,” who is charged with providing the student veterans group, which adds a level of stability to the organization.

Another category of support are veteran groups that go beyond the borders of the campus. Institutions reported that such organizations like the American Legion, VFW and organizations related to such governmental agencies like the Veterans Administration, are often liaised with via the community college to provide additional support to the student veterans in manners that the colleges cannot provide.

**Does your institution provide specialized military financial aid counseling or assistance for student veterans?**

As the process for applying for supportive educational benefits, such as the Post 9/11 GI Bill, can be a complicated and time intensive process, these systems can act as a barrier for

student veterans forward advancement towards completing their degree (Griffin and Gilbert, 2012). Lack of access to funding sources can dramatically impact the progression of a student veteran's progress towards education attainment and completion.

In response to these obstacles, many of the institutions have specific student service personnel that work with veterans solely on issues related to their educational finances. For example, College A has an Accredited Financial Counselor on staff that meets with student veterans one-on-one to provide assistance in all matters regarding students' educational benefits. This type of hands-on assistance has proven to be incredibly beneficial for the student veterans on their campus in receiving their benefits to pay for their education in a timely manner without interruption. Some institutions stated that they have developed and conducted specialized workshops, available only to student veterans, that assist them with their personal finances by providing training to help the students become more adept at financial literacy.

**Does your institution provide college application or registration assistance or specialized orientations for student veterans?**

As a large majority of veterans who come to community colleges are unfamiliar with the process for applying to and registering for classes, supportive initiatives need to be put in to effect to prevent these processes from becoming a barrier for a student veteran moving forward in his or her educational pursuits.

College personnel interviewed stated that it is necessary to provide personnel whose sole duties center around assisting with the admissions process. Some campuses have even established specific personnel to assist student veterans through the process. Personnel such as "Admissions Coaches" who can meet with the students at "the front door" of the institution to

provide one-on-one assistance are becoming an essential piece of the process for on-boarding new students efficiently.

Institutions interviewed provided specialized orientations for student veterans as a method to ease the transition that student veterans go through as they move from their military service to the civilian/education (Griffin & Gilbert, 2012). In some cases, procedures and terminology similar to military versions were used in these orientations to provide a “boot camp” like feel to provide a familiar setting for the student veteran and lessen the chance for “culture shock,” which could deter a student veteran from pursuing his or her education pursuits beyond the orientation.

**Does your institution provide any services designed specifically for your student veteran alumni?**

All colleges interviewed stated that they did not provide any specific services for their student veteran alumni, post-graduation. Even though institutions did not provide post-graduation student services-related support to their alumni veterans, it was expressed by those interviewed that it is important to their respective institutions that they recognize their alumni veterans. Specialized programs honoring student veterans were quite plentiful on the campuses of those researched community colleges. College D has a Veteran’s Day Parade where current student veteran and alumni are invited to campus to be recognized by the student, faculty and staff for their service to the country. It was voiced by those interviewed that it was important to have these types of events, not only to honor the student veterans who had attended their colleges, but also to make an attempt at creating a lasting bond between the alumni and the institution.

**Does your institution provide specialized services to assist student veterans with disabilities?**

The disabilities, be they mental or physical, that student veterans often present while pursuing their education on community college campuses, can be a difficult barrier negatively affecting their educational progress (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008). As such, the institutions have put a strong emphasis on providing exceptional supportive services to those student veterans with disabilities.

Working with and assisting students with disabilities is, from the perspective of those interviewed, an extremely important priority on today's community college campuses in promoting student success. As often is the case when assisting students with disabilities, accommodations must be made in the classroom and on campus to remove any barriers to the student success that the disabilities might pose. Because of these accommodations, be it extended exam time or specialized seating arrangements in the classroom, faculty and staff need to be well aware of the needs of disabled students and what they need to do and provide to support them. Professional development training, specifically focused on the needs of the disabled student, need to be prevalent and abundant on campus to ensure that all those who serve disabled students are well aware of proper procedures and strategies in working with this population of students.

A first point of contact is again essential for disabled student veteran, be it a counselor, advisor or social worker (Lang, Harriett, & Cadet, 2013). By having an individual in this type of role, it will help streamline the process of initially getting the student veteran assistance in working with their disability on campus, as well as continuing the process of assistance as the student continues the pursuit of his or her education. Having specially trained personnel on

staff who are cognizant of the needs of student veterans, available accommodations and support options, as well as the legal requirements incumbent on the community college is a non-negotiable issue, according to those interviewed. Social workers, therapists, counselors, even tutors who are well versed and experienced in the training and education of the disabled need to be available and accessible to those who need their services (Lang, Harriett, & Cadet, 2013).

**In your view, what are your institution's strongest services and attributes that are provided to your student veterans?**

Those interviewed stated that they believed that their institutions have excellent resources and procedures in place to provide a climate of support for their student veterans. As all the institutions that were researched are leaders in their fields in terms of student veteran support. The depth, breadth and range of services, resources and procedures, that are available to their student veteran populations were excellent in their effectiveness.

A common theme that presented during the interviews was that the importance of a "one-stop shopping" philosophy when it came to providing services to their student veteran populations. Establishing a first point of contact between the student veterans and the veteran's center, for example, was an element that all those institutions interviewed strove to provide. All services available to student veterans need to be readily accessible and available to students in a streamlined and convenient fashions.

This idea of ease of accessibility should also take into consideration the location of service departments on campus. Student veterans, according to those interviewed, have a tendency to be very specific in terms of where they visit on campus and do not stray too far from their typical routines. This is important to realize in terms of designing and implementing

the physical layout of student services areas where student veteran services offices and departments will be housed. Making the departments easy to reach and connect with will increase the likelihood of student veterans using the veteran services available to them.

Being flexible and open to change in terms of how they accommodate and assist their student veterans attending their institutions was also a strong aspect at the community colleges that were researched. Community colleges need to stay abreast of new procedures and strategies for successful student veteran advancement. In an effort to always be on the cusp of providing new student veteran success programs, research into new student success efforts for student veterans, adoption of new technologies and convention attendance and professional development opportunities for staff that work with student veterans were all factors that those interviewed stated their colleges have placed an emphasis on.

**How could your institution provide more effective assistance in supporting student veterans?**

Even though all those community college personnel who were interviewed are leaders in their field in regard to providing premier campus and educational services to student veterans, there is always room for improvement. With that in mind, this question was designed and asked to elicit responses regarding areas where improvements in how the colleges work with student veterans could be and need to be made.

An increase in general awareness on the part of the campus community as to the struggles that student veterans face while pursuing their degrees is a factor that needs to be improved on all college campuses. There appears, according to those interviewed, an overall, general ignorance regarding student veterans and the struggles they face on campuses in pursuit of their educations. Because of this lack of proper knowledge regarding this population,

bias on the part of student, faculty and staff can sometimes take root, causing student veterans to feel, or become, more isolated from the general campus community. There is a need for training and professional development for campus faculty and staff, on a routine basis, to allow for broader knowledge regarding how to best meet the needs of student veterans on community college campuses.

A stronger emphasis on connecting with student veterans prior to their exit from military service was an area of concern. It was believed by many that were interviewed that there needs to be a “military-to-education” bridge, where connections by campus liaisons are made to those service members who are exiting the branch of the military and who have an interest in using their educational benefits to begin and continue their higher education. College open houses, recruitment fairs, and specific staff positions that are devoted to recruitment on military installations, especially at those community colleges that are close in proximity to military bases, were just a few of the strategies to increase outreach.

According to the respondents, communication was a common area of improvement that was discussed. Not only does communication need to be improved from the institution to the student veteran, but also on campus, between departments as well as between campuses at those institutions that have multiple campuses. Issues where “the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing” due to lack of proper, strong lines of communication can act as a hindrance in helping student veterans. All those involved with assisting student veterans in being successful need to be “on the same page” when it comes to the process and policies that are being implemented on campus regarding student veterans. If there is a communication misalignment in terms of how to best assist student veterans, additional barriers towards

student success may arise. This communication issue also shows that there is an over-reliance, on those campus researched, on email in terms of communicating with student veterans. This type of communication, it was voiced, removes the “human element” that so many student veterans need as they transition to this new environment, and by removing that level of connection by communicating through somewhat anonymous platforms like email, may have a negative impact on students who need a stronger form of human interaction.

Similar to communication, marketing was also a common theme discussed by the personnel interviewed. “Getting the word out” to those student veteran population regarding the services that are available to them can make a marked difference in the success of the student veteran, and help reducing the instances of a student “suffering in silence.” These improvements in marketing practices, both internal as well as external strategies, will aid in attracting new student veterans who may be at some cross-roads as to whether or not to use their benefits to attend college.

Improved proactive methods in identifying, documenting and tracking student veterans need to be implemented as well. According to those interviewed, many student veterans are not identified unless they self-disclose or through their use of governmental benefits, and may have a tendency to get “lost in the system” once they have been identified. Once the student veteran has been identified, proper procedures need to be put in to place to ensure that strong tracking methods are practiced to create and strengthen the relationship between the student veteran and the institution. By combining stronger tactics to identify and connect with student veterans as early as possible in their career tract, and closely monitoring their educational

progress through routine face-to-face or on-line meetings, it was believed on the part of those interviewed that chances for stronger student success and degree completion will increase.

Identification of new and different forms of revenue streams was a common theme for improvement. Even though, at the community colleges researched, there was an emphasis on student veteran and support, this did not always translate into larger operational budgets being devoted to student veteran support. According to those interviewed, institutional and departmental budgets are being reduced, almost annually, and veteran services centers on community college campuses are beginning to look elsewhere for funding opportunities, even looking for funding support from off-campus, community-based organizations and governmental agencies. The limits to what they can do in regard to supporting their student veterans via accommodation services are all determined by the budget that is provided to them by their respective institutions. By researching and investigating new funding methods, veteran services might be able to increase the scope of the services they provide to those veterans in need of assistance.

A stronger focus on mentoring programs being developed on their campuses was also discussed. Student veterans who are new at the college, and new to higher education, often need assistance in acclimatizing to their new environment. Also, the student veteran might be uncomfortable or unwilling to approach faculty or staff for assistance. By establishing a program where those student veterans who are reaching the end of their educational tract at the community college are paired up with new student veterans to “teach them the ropes,” student veterans will be able to learn the best strategies for navigating the community college systems. The issues that often negatively impact creation and maintaining of mentoring

programs, specifically at community colleges, that the personnel interviewed had encountered on their own campuses was due to the often-changing rosters of mentors as students graduate and move on. A similar problem was also discussed regarding creating a stable student veteran student association on campuses. There was also a belief from those interviewed that a rigorous training process for mentors needs to be created and implemented to ensure proper relationships building and information transference amongst those involved in the mentoring programs.

The following ideas were also discussed during interviews, but at a lesser frequency and could be considered outliers: increased interactions with alumni student veterans, stronger connections with female student veterans and determining better strategies for converting military experience to college credits.

**If you had to create a student veteran success model for your institution, what components do you believe to be essential that need to be included?**

The purpose behind this question was to get an insider's view on the part of those interviewed on the importance, if any, of student success models on community college campuses. Overwhelmingly, those student services personnel and leadership that were interviewed believed that it was important for community colleges to develop and provide their institution some form of structured model to assist students, veteran and other student populations, in being successful as they pursue their educations. Having such a model in place can assist student veterans, not only in the correct educational pathways to follow, which is extremely important for those student veterans in transition from military to civilian lives, but also provide a structure for the community colleges and their personnel to adhere to move their student veterans forward in their educational pursuits.

The essential components that those interviewed believed need to be included in a success model for student veterans are the following:

- Open and inviting atmosphere for student veterans;
- Accessible and knowledgeable student services staff;
- General staff and faculty who are supportive of and understanding of the barriers that student veterans might face in pursuit of their education;
- Plentiful professional development opportunities focused on training faculty and staff in issues that student veterans face, in and outside the classroom;
- Emphasis on networking with off-campus organizations to increase resources opportunities for student veterans;
- Development of a proper identification and tracking system for student veterans to monitor their progress as they pursue their education;
- A focus on supplying workforce and employability support services for student veterans;
- Specialized orientations that are designed specifically with the student veterans needs in mind, and that are staffed/managed by specialized student veteran's admission personnel;
- Events that are designed to recognize the community college's student veteran populations;
- A stronger emphasis on maintaining a connection to their alumni veterans.

## SUMMARY

Chapter IV provided a summary of the themes related to student veteran success that were gathered through an extensive interview process with experts in the field of student veteran support at community colleges. These themes were analyzed and found to cover a wide-range of areas that impact student veterans, their success on community college

campuses as they pursue their education and how the institutions can support the students.

The major themes that were identified included:

- Access to qualified and specially trained student veteran services personnel;
- Support and buy-in from all levels of the campus community regarding acknowledgement and treatment of student veteran transitional, social and personal issues they face while pursuing their education;
- Identifying and tracking student veterans as they pursue their education;
- Development of specialized recruitment plans to market to and recruit student veterans to attend community colleges.

Based on these results, in Chapter V, the initial student success model developed through the literature review of student will be modified to reflect the additional information gathered through the interview process.

## CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the conclusions and recommendations determined as a result from the research completed in support of this dissertation. The focus of this research has been to develop an institutional model that could be adopted by community colleges to use to aid in supporting their student veterans as they pursue their education and transition from the military to the civilian environment.

### SUMMARY OF DISSERTATION

Chapter I of this dissertation provided a broad overview of the research that was the focus of this dissertation, namely the development of a student success model designed specifically for student veterans. This chapter presented an introduction into the experiences that student veterans have on community college campuses as they transition from the military environment to the educational environment. The chapter also included the purpose of this study and its significance to the overall body of research regarding student veterans and their academic success at community colleges. An overview of the methodology and an examination of the theoretical framework to be used within the research was also discussed. To increase the veteran and researched specific vocabulary, a list of commonly used terms and their respective definitions were also included in this chapter to provide clarity.

A thorough literature review of the pertinent research was conducted and included in Chapter II. Within this review, a brief history of community colleges, an examination of success

models that can be used at higher education institutions, particularly community colleges, and a variety of theories directly related to how individuals and groups transition from one segment of their life to another was reviewed. Information regarding the plight of veterans and student veterans alike is also explored in this chapter.

Chapter III examined the methodology that was employed throughout the course of this research. Within chapter III, the design of the research, steps to develop a pilot study, and the procedures that were engaged to conduct the research were discussed. The sites and subjects that would be involved in the research, as well as the methodology that was used to for their selection, was also highlighted. Also in this chapter, the pre-model of the student success model was developed based on the literature review.

In Chapter IV, the results that were collected was discussed. A thematic analysis was conducted on the responses that were provided during the interviews and, from that analysis, a detailed summary of the responses for each question were presented. From these responses, a revised student success model will be presented in Chapter V.

## CONCLUSIONS

The number of student veterans that are attending community colleges is increasing, and in as such, there needs to be an appropriate response on the part of community colleges to support these students (Rodriquez & McCambly, 2015). Community colleges are a perfect and fertile place for student veterans to begin and be successful at their educational pursuits, as community colleges provide the type of environment that is open and accommodating that promotes student success (Tinto, 1990).

As veterans leave their military service, there are often barriers that impact this transitional process. These barriers can impact many parts of the veterans' lives: personal, social, financial, and educational. As veterans begin considering their options for the next phase of their lives after their military service, some begin weighing their options of using their veteran educational benefits and attending community college to pursue their education.

This transition from the military to the educational environment is not always a simple or easy track for veterans. The barriers that veterans face both on and off college campuses need to be recognized and the action is needed to respond to support the students. These barriers sometimes a result of their military service, as well as advanced age (in comparison to other traditional students), and financial and family issues, all of which can have a negative impact on a student veteran's educational progress. These barriers, as well as others, that students face both on and off college campuses need to be recognized by community colleges and institutions then need to respond with appropriate measures to support their student veterans.

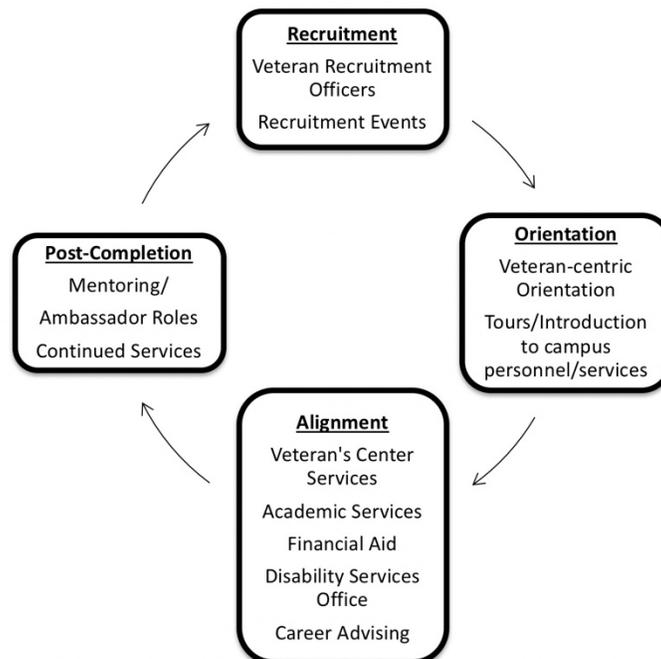
One option available to community colleges to efficiently and effectively assist their student veterans in being successful in their educational pursuits is for institutions to develop and initiate student success models. These models will focus on those aspects of the community college that will provide momentum in moving a student veteran forward in their education as well as identifying and removing those potential barriers that could prevent this forward movement.

To develop a student success model specifically for student veterans, a two-phase process was developed in order to properly ensure that all elements essential to promoting

student veteran success were examined and incorporated into the model's structure. The pre-model was developed based on information gathered through a review of the pertinent literature. A revised post-model for student veteran success was created after interviewing various community college personnel, and the resulting information gathered from an analysis of those interview transcripts were incorporated into the revised version of the model. As a result, the revised edition has some modifications to each stage to better reflect a more streamlined, student veteran-centric model best suited to meet the needs of the student veteran population.

### REVISED STUDENT VETERAN SUCCESS MODEL

The following section of this chapter provides an outline and details of the Revised Student Veteran Success Model. Each stage is provided with a description of those procedures and services that community colleges need to develop and provide at each stage of the model.



*Figure 3: Revised Student Success Model*

## **Stage 1: Recruitment**

Those interviewed recommend that community colleges need to make a concentrated effort to connect with potential student veterans as early as possible. By making contact with veterans even before they have left their military service when they still might be weighing the options of begin pursuing their education post-military, higher education institutions might be able to plant seeds regarding the positive outcomes of pursuing an advanced degree.

To aid in facilitating this process of making early connections with veterans, community colleges may consider developing positions on their staff that are specifically designated to recruit student veterans, either before or after their exit from the service. If institutional constraints do not allow for the creation of new staff positions, veteran recruitment needs to be added as part of the position duties and responsibilities of veteran center staff or the recruitment staff of the college.

Recruitment specialists need to be instrumental in creation and establishment of plans designed specifically to attract student veterans to campus. These plans should also include a detailed marketing plan that will identify military installations and the surrounding areas to better promote the college to potential students. The creation of specialized recruitment events to attract and engage student veterans is also important, in which these recruitment specialists would take the lead. Open houses, recruitment fairs, and on-campus tours, all of which will inform the veterans in regard to the options available to them.

## **Stage 2: Orientation**

As the transitional process for veterans becoming students, might not be easy for this specific population, it is important for community colleges to be aware and address the issues

that new student veterans might face as they enter the higher education environment. Barriers, such as a confusing application processes or unclear procedures in terms of registering and “becoming a student,” that might arise during this stage of a student veterans transitional period might “push” them away from attending college.

In as such, community colleges need to respond accordingly to make efforts to remove any of these potential barriers as soon as possible by creating a streamlined registration process for new student veterans. A major first step in aiding student veterans in being successful at community colleges is establishing an effective transition process through which the student veteran can adapt to their new environs of higher education.

The development of specialized orientations designed specifically for student veterans, where the usage of military-like processes and terms may assist in acclimatizing the student to this new, unfamiliar environment. During this orientation, the student veterans should be introduced to those student services providers that they may require assistance from while they are on campus. Many student veterans state that typically do not go anywhere else on campus besides their classrooms and the veteran’s center, a tour of the campus needs to be incorporated in to the orientation to introduce the new student veterans to other areas of campus that maybe useful to the student veteran.

### **Stage 3: Alignment**

Responses gathered from interviews revealed that, as early as possible in the student veterans career track at community college, student veterans need to be aware of the services and resources available to them, as well as the college personnel who are on campus to support them. Lack of knowledge of these services is often an issue on the part of student

veterans, so an increased effort into raising the level of awareness of the available veteran services needs to be incorporated into the orientation process.

### *Veteran Services*

As recommended by those interviewed, the idea of creating a “one-stop” philosophy in terms of on-campus resources available to student veterans is a model that community colleges should move towards adapting. Making student veteran services easily accessible, in terms of physical location, accommodating hours of operation as well as depth and breadth of services provided are key components in increasing student veteran success.

Development and maintenance of strong lines of communication amongst the various on-campus departments and resources dedicated to assisting student veterans also needs to be a priority for veteran services personnel. Lack of proper communication and coordination amongst the different departments and service offices on campus serving student veterans is often an issue at community colleges. Miscommunication amongst departments or campus staff can often cause and compound mistakes when assisting student veterans on campus so strong communication processes need to be put into place to avoid any confusion.

Veteran services personnel, wherever they might be housed on campus, need to be instrumental in establishing a campus-wide system that can effectively serve the specialized needs of the student veteran population. Although all levels of the college need to be involved and committed to promoting the success of their student veterans, veteran services personnel need to be the leads in development, establishment and growth of those models that help propagate student veteran success across all areas of the campus, as well as beyond the

borders of the institution. These personnel should also be instrumental in establishing a sense of identity and community for the student veterans that are attending their college.

In order to properly track the progress of student veterans as they pursue their education, a strong relationship between the students those college veteran student services personnel and the veteran students. Mandatory meetings between the student veterans and student services need to be established at regular intervals to provide “check-in points” to connect with the students to determine their status in their educational pursuits, as well how they are handling their experiences on-campus. Strong lines of communication also need to be developed to ensure that proper information that is important to the success of the student veterans’ success is promptly and routinely conveyed.

An established veterans center is an essential component of a community college campus that has the success of its student veterans as a focus. This “safe-zone” should be the hub, both physically, emotionally, as well as procedurally, that all other student veteran services are centered. Establishing a main point of contact on campus for student veterans to meet, communicate, and access services and personnel is an indispensable policy that community colleges need to institute. This is especially true for those student veterans who may not be comfortable in venturing away from those areas of the campus where he or she feels the most comfortable. This aligns with the idea of developing a “one-stop center” philosophy for providing student veteran services. Other non-academic services, such as having a food pantry for those student veterans in need, could also be offered via the veteran’s center as well.

In order to create a more accepting and supportive environment on campus, veteran personnel may endeavor to create “safe areas” in various campus areas and departments. Designating certain areas on campus as “veteran supportive” by having some form of sticker, for example, placed in a visible area could add to developing a supportive atmosphere for student veterans.

Aligning with student veteran service personnel means not only connecting with those campus staff and faculty that will assist them academically, but also aligning with the other various college personnel that will also support the student veteran as he or she progresses through their education. Veteran services personnel should create partnerships, and potentially introductions, between the various campus constituents who are available to assist student veterans. As student veterans might be reluctant to seek out assistance from college personnel, it is important for the student veteran personnel to develop a strong alignment between the veteran’s center and the students it serves, with other academic and non-academic departments at the institution. Veteran services personnel also need to be the main point of contact for off-campus services. Partnerships with governmental agencies and non-profit organizations who have missions orientated around serving veteran populations might be unknown to student veterans and their dependents. These partnerships should be developed by the on-campus veteran personnel to provide additional resources to their student veterans, while they are both attending classes and after they graduate.

#### *Academic Services*

The processes and procedures that govern a community college could be completely alien to student veterans who are transitioning out of the military into civilian life. While a

veteran-focused orientation may provide an introduction to the community college and its host of procedures, more personalized and individualized assistance may be required as the student veteran continues his or her educational pursuits.

Community colleges need to provide veteran-dedicated academic counselors and advisors, so they can assist them with the process of determining majors and the selection of classes. These staff members should, if possible, have office hours in the veteran's center for convenience to the student veterans. Similar to other veteran service personnel, student veterans need to meet with their academic counselors/advisors regularly to ensure that they're on track in terms of pursuit of their major. Specialized tutors may also be made available to student veterans, a service that could be in conjunction with the disability services office if there is a need for any specific academic accommodations.

The creation and development of courses or seminars that are for veterans only might assist in aiding acclimation to the campus setting. These classes or seminars could focus on transitioning or academic skills, such as first-year experience classes, or on subjects that student veterans might find interesting or of use in their future education or careers. As these classes and some of the seminars would only be available to student veterans, an environment would be created where the students would feel more comfortable voicing their thoughts and perspectives in a class with other like-minded individuals, as opposed to a more traditional classroom.

#### *Disability Services*

Issues relating to disabilities, either mental or physical, may affect the academic and life success of student veterans while they are pursuing their education at the community college.

Therefore, it is imperative that student veterans engage their campus disability services office as early as possible during their educational pursuits. Personnel who work with disabled students should be introduced at the student veteran orientation.

Student disability personnel should also be properly trained in the specifics of working with and providing for student veterans that present any form of disability. There also needs to be periodic, scheduled meetings between the student and disability services personnel to assist with any transition or personal concerns that the student might be facing as a result of their disabilities.

Specialized procedures and policies need to be established that would allow for accommodations on campus that might negate any barriers to academic success that the disability might place on the student veteran. In terms of providing in-classroom assistance to those student veterans with disabilities, the disability services offices personnel should also provide professional development opportunities for faculty and staff regarding working with student veterans who have disabilities. These workshops should provide in-depth information regarding the different types of disabilities (physical, mental, visible and not visible) that student veterans might present and how they may affect the student, as well as the types of accommodations that faculty need to provide, especially within the classroom.

Accommodations might include arraigned seating for student veterans and extended time for completion of assignments and exams. Changes in curricula to be more supportive of the special nature of student veterans (i.e. removing or downplaying extreme graphic violent or war-related subject matter from the curricula) can aid in supporting the student veterans

within their classes and reduce any material that might have an adverse effect on the student veterans in the audience.

The disability services office should also provide counseling services to those students who have issues with their mental health. Issues such as anxiety, depression, and Post TSD-related issues can have a strong negative impact on the student veteran's education, and so periodic meetings with staff therapist or counselors might alleviate those issues that could potentially act as a barrier.

#### *Financial Aid*

Community colleges need to have a role in assisting student veterans with any financial aid issues that they might face when trying to apply for their military based educational funding, such as the Post 9/11 GI Bill. To ensure there is no interruption of their education due to errors in the application process, community colleges need to provide properly trained financial aid staff who can walk student veterans through the funding application process as to minimize the chances for any potential errors. Specialized workshops also need to be hosted by the college to provide information such as financial aid funding procedures, and important deadlines.

#### *Career Advising*

A significant number of students attend community college to acquire, skills, training and experience that will assist them in pursuing their respective careers. In light of this, community colleges need to make efforts to support the career searching of their students by providing access to trained career advisors who can aid students in making the education-to-industry transition.

This career guidance is especially required for student veterans. As has been mentioned before in this research, student veterans come to community colleges with a whole host of life experiences that other traditional students might not have. Disabilities, be they physical or mental, visible or not; extended periods out of the traditional work force due to their military service; advanced age; additional family or dependent responsibilities; are all life factors that could potentially act as barriers that could negatively impact entering or advancing in their chosen career field.

Meeting with a specially trained career advisor or counselor who has knowledge on how to properly assist student veterans with their career needs can drastically increase the chances of a student veteran finding employment within their career field. Many employers seek out veterans specifically for hiring, in order to take advantage of the specialized skills that they have gained during their military service such as leadership skills and teamwork abilities. In as such, community colleges need to develop and cultivate relationships with those employers that have been classified as “military friendly” or who have established Veteran Hiring programs. With these types of employer relationships in place, career advisors can be more successful in assisting student veterans in applying the skills they gained during their military service to their chosen profession.

#### **Stage 4: Post - Completion**

The relationship between the student veteran and the community college should not end with the completion of a certificate or degree. Continuing the relationship as the student veteran become an alumni veteran can have positive aspects. Alumni veterans can be strong advocates and ambassadors for the community college experience, and can meet with

prospective student veterans, even before they leave the military, to discuss their positive experiences on campus as they pursued their degrees. This activity can add to the college's recruitment efforts with student veterans.

Alumni veterans can also act as excellent mentors to student veterans, a role that can be extremely effective on community college campuses in assisting with student success. Alumni should also be members for campus advisory boards as they can provide unique perspectives regarding their experiences on campus which could be useful in shaping institutional policies as they affect not only student veterans, but all students.

In order to properly continue to support their alumni veterans, services need to be developed by community colleges that are focused on the particular needs of alumni veterans. Personal and social counseling, career advisement and providing information in terms of transferring and continuing education options should be provided to the alumni veterans. Access to these services, and all campus services, should be provided for life, and adaptable to the different stages of life that an alumni veteran is transitioning through.

#### LIMITATIONS

As with any research, certain limitations narrowed the scope of the dissertation. Access to the proper community college personnel during the research phase of this dissertation had an impact. In order to gain a proper, global perspective on the issues that student veterans face on community college campus, it was hoped that interviews would be conducted with campus personnel at multiple levels within the institutional hierarchy, "front-line" individuals such as advisors, as well as those in more administrative positions, vice presidents and above that have a broader intuitional perspective. Connecting with professionals at the higher levels of the

community college administration was a difficult process, and, therefore, only a small amount of these individuals was interviewed, and as a group their perspectives were not proportionally included in the overall group of data.

As the majority of this research focused on service providers and leadership at community colleges, there was a lack of perspective gained from the student veteran themselves. The incorporation of information from the student veteran population may have provided some further insights from different perspectives which may have added to and strengthened the development of the student success model.

Also, a stronger effort needed to be made to differentiate between those student veterans who have been in combat situations and those that have not. There is a strong marked difference between the types of experiences that these two types of veteran groups may have faced during their service, and thus may have differing ramifications after their military services. These different past experiences may require that different resources be provided by the college to their student veterans, so additional research on these differing experiences needs to be conducted.

Scalability in terms of providing services to student veteran is another area of research that needed to be covered. With limited resources and small staff sizes, it can be difficult for community colleges, especially those with smaller student populations, to provide the proper, effective services to their student veterans, as opposed to larger community colleges who have a student veteran population substantial enough to justify the need for a certain amount or level of staff and services. Despite the size of the institution, services still need to be provided to those students who require it. For those institutions without the resources to properly assist

their student veterans, strong partnerships need to be established with service providing organizations, as well as governmental agencies, who have the resources to support and strengthen the on-campus providers.

The inclusion of the perspectives of different campus constituents gathered through the interviews other than just student veteran service providers and administrative leadership may have provided further insight in to how to better assist student veterans. Directly interviewing faculty who might directly or indirectly connect with student veterans as well as the student veterans themselves would have provided another layer of understanding as to the issues student veterans face, both on and off campus.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As many veterans begin attending both two-year and four-year colleges and universities post-military service, there is an increased need for further research into the experiences of student veterans in pursuit of their education and how community colleges can support them during this period of their post-military service lives.

As there is currently a relatively small amount of research focusing on student veterans and their experiences at community college, research needs to be conducted on how well community colleges are responding to the specific needs of this particular student population. Research to determine if community colleges are doing everything that they can in terms of supporting their student veterans, and providing available resources to this population needs to be initiated as well. Also, research should be conducted to see how student veterans, with the large of amount of experiences and expertise that they bring to campus effect the community college institutions.

As research was conducted primarily at institutions that were identified as being premier providers, research needs to be conducted on those community colleges that do not have the strongest veteran services programs to see in what areas improvements are needed and required. By conducting research at community colleges where student veteran services need development might provide a ground level perspective on how to develop a model that not only provides success for its students but provides growth for the institution itself.

Research needs to be conducted on the long-term effects on student veterans of attending community college in pursuit of a certificate or degree. Research has been conducted on degree attainment and a positive impact on salary/wage earnings over the course of one's lifetime, but there also needs to be an examination of the social and personal ramifications of attending a higher education institution on a student veteran's life. Also, research needs to be done on the effects not only on the student veteran's life himself or herself are affected by their educational attainment, but also their dependents and other members of the student veteran's off-campus life and how they have been, either positively or negatively affected.

An examination into why student veterans choose or do not choose to pursue their education is another area for focus. It is important to look at what factors in their lives (personal, social, financial, etc.) are taken into consideration when making the decision to begin and continue their education or to choose other paths in their lives. Community colleges need to be aware of those factors that influence decision making.

There also appears to be an increased need for research focusing on the specific needs of subsets of the student veteran population, for example, female student veterans, minorities and LGBTQ populations in the military. As these subsets of student veterans may have

additional or even more specific needs, community colleges need to be aware of their needs and develop supportive systems and procedures to properly address their needs.

Proper tracking procedures for student veterans is also an area that requires further examination. Community colleges, as well as all higher education institutions, need to have a comprehensive system in place that aids in determining at what point their students are in their respective educational tracts. By providing accurate tracking procedures for not only student veterans, but all students on campus, community colleges could have a better idea of those key benchmark points in a student's education where intervention and support might be necessary. These key student benchmarks could include periodic check-ins with the veteran center regarding academic progress, connecting with financial aid to ensure proper alignment regarding funding or preparation for graduation or completion.

Another area of further research would be an examination of how student success models such as the one developed during this dissertation research can be implemented on community college campuses. Initiating any large-scale institutional change can be a long and sometimes difficult process. Research needs to be conducted to examine what campuses resources and constituents are required to initiate the proper and effective implementation of any new success model to assist student populations.

Also, research on how student success models could such as this one be applied to other special populations on community college in being successful in pursuit of their degrees is needed. First generation students, LGBTQ students, students with disability, and international students are all special population groups that have their own special needs that should be

explored to determine what alterations need to be made to existing success model, to better apply it to different student populations.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the transitional issues that student veterans face on community colleges campuses today can have a significant impact on their success while pursuing their education. As such, community college administrators, faculty and staff need to react responsibly and nimbly to establish efficient methods, process and procedures to assist in being successful as students and promote positive growth in other parts of the student veteran's life. Development and implementation of a structured system that will focus on those elements of the community college that can provide momentum towards educational success as well as striving to eliminate any barriers that might negatively impact that success is important.

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