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Discovering the Academic and Social Transitions of Re-enrolling Student Veterans at One Institution: A Grounded Theory

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DISCOVERING THE ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL TRANSITIONS OF RE-
ENROLLING STUDENT VETERANS AT ONE INSTITUTION:
A GROUNDED THEORY

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ABSTRACT

Student veterans have been overlooked as a unique student population at institutions of higher learning. Moreover, student affairs practitioners, faculty, staff, and peer students are largely unaware of the unique needs of student veterans. The purpose of this study was to build a base of research on the academic and social experiences of re-enrolling student veterans with the goals of better understanding the student veteran experience and discovering new avenues of support for this population.

The researcher conducted a qualitative study utilizing grounded theory methodology to answer the primary research question: how do student veterans manage college re-enrollment after deployment, training, or self-induced military absence? More specifically, the researcher investigated two secondary research questions:

- How do student veterans manage academic transition after re-enrolling in college?

- How do student veterans manage social transition after re-enrolling in college?

Schlossberg's (1984) theory of adult transitions was used as a theoretical framework to develop 10 interview questions. Fifteen student veterans served as the sample population (n=15); they were interviewed using semi-structured interview protocol. Additionally, two administrative staff members who worked closely with the student veteran population were interviewed. The researcher examined additional sources of data such as student veterans association Websites, institutional Websites pertaining to student veteran re-enrollment, the Montgomery G.I. Bill for Active Duty and Selective Reserve personnel, and documents from the Student Veterans of America to triangulate data.

Data were analyzed using microanalysis, open coding, axial coding, and selective coding procedures articulated by Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1998). The researcher maintained field notes and created memos which augmented the analysis of data and allowed the researcher to identify and articulate emerging concepts, categories, and themes. The researcher created a visual diagram consisting of five interrelated themes that explained how student veterans manage college re-enrollment: (a) military influence, (b) invisibility, (c) support, (d) campus culture, and (e) navigating re-enrollment.

The researcher found student veterans were more mature and academically focused because of their military experiences. Student veterans were less likely to seek academic support and more inclined to pursue social support in the form of associating with fellow veterans with whom they felt more comfortable. Support was not a key factor in student veterans' navigation of re-enrollment and student veterans tended to downplay or hide their veteran status from campus community members. Financial considerations and social implications were the most pronounced challenges student veterans faced after returning to college.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all student veterans at colleges and universities across the United States. More specifically, I'd like to dedicate this dissertation to our student veterans here at Clemson. I stand in awe of the sacrifices you have made and continue to make in service to our country.

I further dedicate this dissertation to my Brother, who to this day serves in the military and protects our freedoms. Tom: I am continually amazed by your perseverance and strength of character, and I thank you for all you have done for our country and our family. I love you, Brother.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my Granddaddy, Cecil Goodwin Livingston. Granddaddy: Dad used to tell me the story of how you dreamed of attending Clemson and how you wished you had sat on the steps of Tillman Hall until someone had let you in. That story has kept me going throughout this process and I am honored to fulfill your dream. Know that Dad and I have sat on those steps together. Thank you for watching over me.

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I would also like to acknowledge my family. Dad: thank you for inspiring me as a lifelong learner and a perpetual student of history, politics, and education. Mom: thank you for counseling me when I've needed it. The personal sacrifices you make for the sake of our family are truly inspiring; you are the rock. Melissa: thank you for loving me throughout this process and for giving me something to look forward to on June 13, 2009. You deserve a purple heart for putting up with me. Lastly, to Shannon and Kwoks: thanks to both of you for being my home away from home. Shannon: we made it.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Chapter One provides an introduction to the research study. The chapter includes background information which provides context for the reader, and states the problem, purpose, and significance of the study. The theoretical framework of the study is introduced, and an overview of the research site is provided. Finally, a list of definitions is included to provide the reader with definitions of key terms and concepts found within the study.

The Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, more commonly referred to as the G.I. Bill, opened the doors of higher education for millions of returning soldiers following World War II. Some politicians and academicians were skeptical of the Bill, and worried the influx of student veterans would adversely affect higher education and the economy in general, or that the Bill would simply have little impact at all (Cohen, 1998; Humes, 2006). Few people realized the G.I. Bill would forever alter higher education in the United States (Cohen, 1998; Humes, 2006; Olson, 1973).

The G.I. Bill constituted a landmark piece of legislation transforming U.S. society and education (Humes, 2006). The Bill allowed the proliferating middle class to see higher education, and thus the *American Dream*, as an attainable goal. Cohen (1998) noted the G.I. Bill ushered in an era of mass higher education in the United States. Reed (2001) stated the Bill represented universal access to higher education, and Rudolph (1990) noted the Bill was a dramatic illustration of the generalization of higher education in the United States.

After World War II, 2,232,000 veterans used the Bill to attend college during the 1940s and 1950s (Olson, 1973). Since its inception during World War II, over 18,000,000 veterans have taken advantage of G.I. Bill educational benefits (Marklein, 2007b). Today's student veterans continue using the G.I. Bill to help pay for college costs. The number of service members estimated to utilize the G.I. Bill in 2007 was 440,000 individuals at over 6,800 institutions (Marklein, 2007a).

Many higher education institutions view veterans as an attractive student population with ample financial resources (Lederman, 2008). Furthermore, military recruiters use education benefits to increase personnel retention (Carnevale, 2006). The effect of combined institutional and military recruitment of veterans is a mutually beneficial relationship between the military and higher education. This relationship is likely to continue as U.S. involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq continues.

While the numbers are less than those reported after World War II and Vietnam, student veterans today remain a sizeable population. Marklein (2007b) noted 82% of two-year public, four-year public, and four-year private higher education institutions enrolled students who left school due to military service before completing their education in the 2006 academic year. As Caple (1991) suggested at the time of the Gulf War in 1991, student affairs practitioners must realize that their student populations, augmented by re-enrolling student veterans, are increasingly diverse. Seventeen years later, this statement resonates. It is incumbent upon all higher education stakeholders to recognize the diverse needs of this population, and begin to think about how best to support student veterans.

Statement of the Problem

The higher education community and, in particular, students affairs professionals recognize diverse student subcultures on college campuses, however, student veterans have largely been unnoticed by the literature. The lack of attention is intriguing, especially given the nature of U.S. overseas involvement at the present time. Current U.S. deployments are comprised of large numbers of National Guard, reserve, and non-active duty personnel of which have not been seen since the Korean War (Carter & Glastris, 2005). Reserve and Guard personnel who sign bonuses to pay for college are sometimes deployed or attend training during their college careers. Deployments and training stints interrupt students' education, and create difficulties for student veterans when they re-enroll.

In general, there are few studies which directly address the needs of today's college student veterans. More specifically, there exists no research that explores the academic and social experiences of re-enrolling student veterans. The lack of literature, coupled with increasing enrollments of student veterans, provides the rationale for this study. This study seeks to inform student affairs administrators and other higher education constituent groups about the experiences of re-enrolling student veterans. A better understanding of the unique experience of student veterans allows student affairs administrators and higher education professionals to better understand and support this student population.

Several assumptions regarding student veterans' re-enrollment guided the development of this research study. First, it was assumed any break in attendance or absence from college would create a transition for student veterans to navigate upon re-enrollment. Second, it was assumed individuals had unique experiences as they navigated college re-enrollment. Finally, it was assumed student veterans would face academic and social challenges after they re-enrolled in college.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to build a base of knowledge on the academic and social experiences of re-enrolling student veterans. The secondary purpose of this study is to provide a better understanding of the student veteran experience and to discover new avenues of support for student veterans. Qualitative research was conducted to build the base of understanding regarding this population. This study will add to a growing field of emerging scholarship related to student veterans in higher education. Ultimately, this research will assist student affairs practitioners and higher education professionals in their instruction, support, and care for student veterans.

A primary research question and two secondary research questions were developed to discover the experiences of re-enrolling student veterans. The primary research question was:

- How do student veterans manage college re-enrollment after deployment, training, or self-induced military absence?

The secondary research questions were:

- How do student veterans manage academic transition after re-enrolling in college?

- How do student veterans manage social transition after re-enrolling in college?

<div align="center">Theoretical Basis</div>

Nancy K. Schlossberg's theory of adult transitions (1984) is the theoretical basis for this study. Leibowitz and Schlossberg (1982) noted transitions are vulnerable and uncertain periods of time for people. Transitions are defined as events or nonevents that result in change (Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989; Schlossberg, 1990). More specifically, transitions alter a person's roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions (Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989; Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002).

Schlossberg's (1984) original theory highlighted four types of transitions: (a) anticipated, (b) unanticipated, (c) chronic 'hassels', and (d) nonevent. Anticipated transitions are those which individuals can prepare for, while unanticipated transitions are those out of the normal and typically involve crises. Chronic 'hassels' are detrimental to an individual's self-esteem and can prevent the individual from taking the necessary steps to make a change (Schlossberg, 1984). Finally, transitions may take the form of a nonevent, or an anticipated transition that never occurred.

The context of transitions is also important to consider. The context of a transition refers to the individual's relationship to the transition. The context takes into account the setting of the transition, and whether the transition was personal, interpersonal, or

communal. Oftentimes, elements of transition fit all three categories – personal, interpersonal, and communal. The degree to which a transition alters an individual's daily life, not the event itself, is most important to the individual (Schlossberg, 1984). Schlossberg further explained that the altered state of a person's life impacts the availability of coping resources needed to successfully navigate transition. Transitions are processes, and the effects of transitions are evident over a period of time.

Individuals are left to cope with the impact of transitions. Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) and Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) denoted four broad categories of coping resources: (a) *situation*, (b) *self*, (c) *supports*, and (d) *strategies*. These categories are commonly known as the *4 S's*. The availability of resources in the four categories often predicts how individuals will cope with transitions (Sargent & Schlossber, 1988; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). *Situation* resources are found in an individual's survey of the entire context of the transition. The experience, attitude, and awareness a person possesses comprise *self* resources. *Supports* include financial and emotional support sources and networks. Finally, individuals must employ a number of methods of coping with the transition, which constitutes the *strategies* component.

Overview of the Research Site

The research site selected for this study was a large (over 17,000), four-year public land-grant institution in the southeastern United States. The research site was selected for two primary reasons: (a) the researcher's ability to access the necessary population for this study, and (b) the institution's military heritage. The institution was

founded in the late nineteenth century as a land-grant institution. Accordingly, military education, along with agricultural and mechanical curriculum, was a staple of the institution. The institution was an all-male military school for over 65 years, but was reorganized as a coeducational university beginning in 1955 (Military Heritage, 2007). Today, the institution's rich military heritage survives in the form of Army and Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps programs, a Pershing Rifles company, and numerous symbols and traditions.

Limitations

The limitations of this study include, but are not limited to, the following: (a) data are not generalizeable because of the qualitative nature of this study, (b) the site institution's strong military heritage indicates a unique and potentially biased population exists that may be uncommon elsewhere, (c) the researcher works at the site institution, which could create confusion for participants regarding the researcher's role, (d) the researcher is not a veteran which may create difficulty in the researcher's understanding of and relationship to participants, (e) the researcher has inherent bias stemming from his relationship with veterans and his experience working in higher education settings, (f) the researcher may run out of time when conducting this research and not reach data saturation, (g) the researcher may make methodological mistakes as the researcher is a novice qualitative researcher, (h) the reliance on participants' self-reported data as the primary source of data in this study, and (i) the utilization of purposive sampling in this study.

Definition of Terms

- *Activation* – "Order to active duty (other than for training) in the federal service" (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2008, p. 3).

- *Active Duty* – "Full-time duty in the active military service of the United States. This includes members of the Reserve Components serving on active duty or full-time training duty, but does not include full-time National Guard duty" (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2008, p. 4).

- *Conscription* – "compulsory enrollment of persons especially for military service" (Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary, 2008).

- *Deployment* – "The relocation of forces and materiel {sic} to desired operational areas. Deployment encompasses all activities from origin or home station through destination, specifically including intra-continental United States, intertheater, and intratheater movement legs, staging, and holding areas" (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2008, p. 156).

- *G.I. Bill* – Also known as the Serviceman's Readjustment Act, the G.I. Bill was passed in 1944 under Franklin Delano Roosevelt's administration. The G.I. Bill provides veterans with educational benefits such as tuition assistance (Olson, 1973).

- *Grounded theory* – A qualitative research methodology developed initially by Glasser and Strauss (1967) which utilizes constant-comparative procedures and theoretical sampling. This study used a revised version of grounded theory by

Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1998) which employs highly detailed and organized coding procedures.

- *Interruption of attendance* – The researcher defined this term as a student's matriculation being interrupted, resulting in the student stopping out or dropping out of the institution. For the purposes of this study, individuals who have an interruption of attendance have stopped out due to a military deployment.

- *Mobilization* – "The process by which the Armed Forces or part of them are brought to a state of readiness for war or other national emergency. This includes activating all or part of the Reserve Components as well as assembling and organizing personnel, supplies, and materiel" (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2008, p. 354).

- *Morrill Act of 1862* – Act signed into law on July 2, 1862 which allowed states to build colleges dedicated to agricultural, mechanical, and military education on government-donated land (Abrams, 1989).

- *National Guard* – See Reserve.

- *Re-enrollment* – For the purposes of this study, the researcher defines re-enrollment in terms of a student veteran who began their college career, had their attendance interrupted by a military deployment, training, or self-induced military absence, and came back to college as a registered full-time student following the deployment, training, or absence. Also referred to as Re-entry.

- *Re-entry* – See Re-enrollment.

- *Reserve* – "Members of the Military Services who are not in active service but who are subject to call to active duty. Reserve Components of the Armed Forces

of the United States are: a. the Army National Guard of the United States; b. the Army Reserve; c. the Naval Reserve; d. the Marine Corps Reserve; e. the Air National Guard of the United States; f. the Air Force Reserve; and g. the Coast Guard Reserve" (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2008, pp. 464-465).

- *Reservist* – See Reserve.

- Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) – An elective course of study taken alongside the general college curriculum which prepares college graduates to enter military service as an officer (United States Army, 2008).

- *Transition* – An event or nonevent that results in change. The *4 S's* are four broad categories of coping resources (*situation*, *self*, *supports*, *strategies*) that explain how individuals manage transition (Schlossberg, 1984, 1990; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989).

- Self-induced military absence – For the purposes of this study, the researcher defines a self-induced military absence as a willing decision to drop out of college to enter the armed forces.

- Student veteran – For the purposes of this study, a student veteran is an enrolled college student who served or serves in the United States armed forces. Students involved in ROTC programs are not considered 'student veterans' unless they have previously served in the armed forces.

- Training – For the purposes of this study, the researcher defines training in terms of any military training that caused the student to withdraw.

Chapter Summary

Chapter One introduced this study to the reader. Background information regarding student veterans' usage of the G.I. Bill was provided. Higher education's lack of attention of student veterans was presented as the problem which promulgated the need for this study. The purpose of this study, to build a base of knowledge regarding student veterans' academic and social transition experiences, was noted. The need to assess student veterans as a unique student subculture and address the needs of student veterans offered significance to this study. Schlossberg's (1984) theory of adult transitions was introduced as the theoretical framework for this study. Finally, an overview of the research site, limitations of the study, and definitions of important terms found in this study were discussed.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

<u>Introduction</u>

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks marked a new era in United States history. The United States deployed troops around the world in the ensuing War on Terror (Bush, 2007). As of April, 2009, U.S. troops remain deployed. Some troops have been sent home and, after arriving home, both combat and noncombat veterans have returned to college and university campuses across the nation.

It remains to be seen whether or not higher education is ready to support re-enrolling veterans. Moreover, institutions may not know how to support student veteran populations. As, DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell (2008) stated, "The amount of scholarly literature studying student veterans is slim and dated" (p. 75). This statement is particularly accurate when student veteran scholarship is viewed through the lens of higher education and student affairs research.

Due to the scarcity of scholarly work pertaining to student veterans, the following review of literature is historical in nature. Much attention is paid to the formulation of the relationship between higher education and the military throughout the history of the United States. Topics throughout the literature review include: the concept of the citizen-soldier, the usage of National Guard and reserve forces, the practice of conscription, and the usage of the G.I. Bill.

The first section consists of an overview of the history of the student veteran and the higher education-military relationship. The second section examines deployment, re-

enrollment, and benefits offered to veterans through the G.I. Bill. The final section provides the theoretical framework for the study, followed by a chapter summary.

<u>History of the Student Veteran and the Higher Education-Military Relationship</u>

The history of the student veteran is an incomplete story. It is a history borne from the relationship between the military and higher education established at the beginning of the U.S. Civil War and further solidified by creation of the G.I. Bill in 1944. The experiences of veterans in higher education post-World War II have further shaped and impacted the college experience of today's student veterans. The concept of the citizen-solider, distinct to the United States, has defined the student veteran experience in the United States of America.

<u>Formation of the Military-Higher Education Relationship and a Challenge to the Citizen-Soldier, 1776 – 1944</u>

There exists little history of the student veteran experience prior to World War II and the advent of the G.I. Bill. U.S. higher education had not yet witnessed the transformation brought on by World War II, and thus fewer individuals accessed institutions of higher learning. Nine colleges existed at the beginning of the American Revolution, and the history of higher education between the American Revolutionary War and the U.S. Civil War was characterized by the tenuous proliferation of institutions (Brickman, 1972; Cohen, 1998; Rudolph, 1990; Trow, 1988). The founding and subsequent failing of institutions and the limited number of persons able to access higher education during this period surely contribute to the absence of history of the early student veteran experience.

The history of the student veteran begins with the formation of a relationship between higher education and the U.S. military at the start of the U.S. Civil War. The initial relationship between higher education and the U.S. military began with "an afterthought stipulation" (Abrams, 1989, p. 16) of the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862. The Morrill Land Grant Act mandated institutions financed under the act provide military training as part of the curriculum (Abrams, 1989). The stipulation regarding military training was added to accommodate Northern military desires to establish a ready officer pool without having to expand the military service academy system (Abrams, 1989). Some land-grant institutions, primarily those in the South, adopted military governance structures and established corps of cadets similar to those of the Virginia Military Institute and The Citadel (Andrew, 2001). Andrew (2001) further noted Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) such as Hampton, Florida A&M, South Carolina State, and Savannah State, which were established after the second Morrill Act of 1890, adopted similar military structures.

Furthering the relationship between higher education and the military was the National Defense Act of 1916, which was later amended in 1933. The National Defense Act of 1916, the National Defense Act of 1920, and the subsequent 1933 amendment established the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) and the modern National Guard, respectively (Abrams, 1989; Hacker, 1993; Newland, 1989). The ROTC program federalized collegiate military training by establishing co-curricular military education programs which absorbed those already in place at land-grant institutions (Neiberg, 2000). At the time, some in the military wished to expand the military service academy

'style' to institutions of higher learning; this view was not popular (Abrams, 1989). ROTC was the viable political option that emerged and allowed for military education, if not drill instruction and training, in public higher education (Abrams, 1989; Neiberg, 2000).

In review of the relationship between higher education and the military, it is important to highlight the concept of the citizen-soldier. The idea of the citizen-soldier has permeated United States culture and, as Newland (1989) noted, citizen-soldiers have historically been relied upon for national defense. Abrams (1989) noted "…America's strong commitment to the citizen-soldier" in the Morrill Act of 1862, designed to practically utilize colleges to provide students with soldiering experience without raising a standing professional army (p. 16). The idea of the citizen-soldier endured conscription throughout World War I and World War II and survived in the form of the National Guard and reserve units.

Following the U.S. Civil War, military conscription, particularly in World War I and World War II, would have a lasting impact on United States higher education. Prior to the Spanish-American War in 1898, the concept of the citizen-soldier prompted National Guard enlistees to assume future wars would be fought as they had been in the past, with all-volunteer armies (Cooper, 1978). However, this assumption was inaccurate. As the United States became increasingly involved in global commerce and, as a result, global affairs in the 1880s, national defense expenditures increased and a foreign policy characterized by foreign intervention was established (Baack & Ray, 1985). The resulting effect on the military was two-fold: the groundwork had been laid for both increased

federal control of the National Guard and the use of conscription to form war-time armies.

Conscription was a reluctantly utilized tool for filling the ranks of the United States armed forces during times of war (Flynn, 1998; Levi, 1996). Conscription was not a continuous practice, rather one which was discontinued following the cessation of hostilities. Howenstine (1945) noted United States citizens' desire to quickly demobilize fighting men after World War I, a fact which surely reaffirmed the impermanence of conscription practices. Conscription, while unpopular, ultimately enlisted over 12,000,000 fighting men in both World War I and World War II: 2,666,867 and 10,110,114 persons were conscripted in World Wars I and II, respectively (Bound & Turner, 2002; Selective Service System, 2003)

While the history pertaining specifically to the student veteran experience is lacking from 1776-1944, several important points should be noted which would shape the student veteran experience for future citizen-soldiers. First was the implementation of the Morrill Land-grant Act of 1862 which introduced military curriculum to public higher education institutions. Second was the menagerie of legislation including the National Defense Act of 1916 which led to the establishment of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps and the National Guard. The third point is the concept of the citizen-soldier, unique to the United States, which persevered despite conscription in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. Finally, the practice of conscription itself funneled millions of college-aged persons into the armed forces. Taken together, these points define the period from 1776-1994 as an era of relationship formation between the military and higher

education where the concept of the citizen-soldier was tested against the backdrop of monumental globally historic events.

<u>The Dawn of the Student Veteran: The G. I. Bill and its Legacy, 1944-1965</u>

In the United States, higher education was impacted by the millions of veterans who returned home at the end of World War II: never before had there been such a massive influx of demobilized combat personnel returning from combat. These soldiers, now 'citizens' again, looked to return to normalcy and carve a place for themselves in post-war United States society. Many returning veterans sought higher education.

The G.I. Bill and the Changing Landscape of Higher Education

The Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, otherwise known as the G.I. Bill of Rights, opened the doors of higher education to millions of veterans in the aftermath of World War II. At the time of its passage, few realized the immense effect the bill would have on U.S. society and higher education (Cohen, 1998; Humes, 2006; Olson, 1973). Many worried the Bill would have adverse affects on society and the economy, not to mention higher education (Cohen, 1998; Humes, 2006). The end result, however, was quite the opposite.

The G.I. Bill allowed millions of veterans to go to college and, as Humes (2006) argued, impacted virtually every aspect of society. The Bill transformed the "American Dream" into a concept truly attainable by the proliferating middle class. Cohen (1998) stated the Bill "…ushered in the Mass Higher Education Era" (p. 182). Reed (2001) called the Bill "the most dramatic approximation" to universal access in higher education (p. 53). Referring to the G.I. Bill, Rudolph (1990) asked: "Where else was the

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generalization of educational opportunity so dramatically portrayed…?" (p. 486). The numbers are staggering: 2,232,000 World War II veterans used the Bill to go to college throughout the 1940s and 1950s (Olson, 1973).

The Veterans' Administration was the agency charged with administering the G.I. Bill. Following World War II, the Veterans' Administration served an overall population of approximately 19,000,000 veterans comprised of several hundred veterans from the Spanish-American War, 4,000,000 veterans from World War I, and 15,000,000 veterans from World War II (Krammerer, 1948). When the G.I. Bill was enacted, surveys predicted that only seven percent, or between 500,000-1,000,000, veterans would take advantage of the educational benefits offered by the legislation (Humes, 2006; Olsen, 1973). The eventual number of veterans who took advantage of educational and training benefits totaled almost half of the 15,000,000 World War II veteran population (Cohen, 1998; Roach, 1997). Veterans accounted for 70% of the total male higher education enrollment in the years following World War II (Bound & Turner, 2002).

The perception of the value of a college education changed after World War II (Clark, 1998). College attendance was popularized, and veterans viewed educational attainment as a means of social advancement (Clark, 1998). However, higher education access was not intended for every returning serviceman. Black World War II veterans were specifically discriminated against at the onset of the G.I. Bill's formulation. Authors of the legislation purposefully included a clause which granted benefits only to servicemen who had been honorably discharged at a time when the military often issued 'other-than-honorable' discharges to Black soldiers (Humes, 2006). Onskt (1998) further

noted that poor administration of the G.I. Bill coupled with discrimination prevented Black veterans in the South from utilizing educational benefits. While discrimination existed, there were instances where underrepresented populations utilized the G.I. Bill. Takaki (2000) noted specific cases of minority populations who utilized the G.I. Bill to go to college; examples included women and minorities from several ethnic backgrounds. The fact remains, though, that the vast majority of World War II student veterans were White males.

The Influx of World War II Era Student Veterans

The absence of a large portion of the college-aged population during the war years changed the landscape of higher education. Consequently, administrators considered how they could best serve their student populations and still contribute to the overall war effort. In reference to the request by some to curtail student services during World War II, Cuninggim (1944) noted student personnel services should not be eliminated but instead geared towards the war effort with foresight as to the future needs of students. Cuninggim's assertion would prove to be very insightful, as millions of veterans enrolled in campuses across the nation after the War. Still, colleges were not ready to deal with the influx of veterans on their campuses in the years following World War II (Humes, 2006; Olson, 1973).

Although institutions were ultimately ill-prepared for the wave of veteran students following World War II, efforts were made to examine the needs of student veterans. Aaronson (1949) surveyed student veterans at the University of Minnesota, asking them if they were able to readjust to studying and university life, if they received proper

counseling and enough attention, and if they were able to enroll in the classes they desired. Kraines (1945) intuitively noted, "The veteran who goes to college will present many problems quite different from those of the usual college student" (p. 290).

A general discussion of the special needs of veterans is evident in the literature during the years following World War II. Additional efforts were made to move beyond general discussion and highlight specific needs of veterans. Hadley (1945), for example, produced qualitative data explaining student veterans' academic adjustment problems. Kinzer (1946) expanded the work of Hadley, and further explained veterans' academic adjustment issues due to ineffective study habits, lack of concentration, and the fear of failure, to name a few. Toven (1945) examined career counseling for student veterans, and Menninger (1945) discussed the mental health of returning veterans.

As students, returning veterans quickly proved themselves worthy in the classroom. Despite fears by some in academia, student veterans attacked their studies with vigor and were continually and consistently counted among the best students on college campuses across the nation (Bound & Turner, 2002; Clark, 1998; Olson, 1973; Stanley, 1969). To underscore this fact, Humes (2006) noted "…fourteen future Nobel Prize winners, three Supreme Court justices, three presidents, a dozen senators, two dozen Pulitzer Prize winners, 238,000 teachers, 91,000 scientists, 67,000 doctors, 450,000 engineers, 240,000 accountants, 17,000 journalists…" among many others were student veterans who utilized the G.I. Bill to attend college (p. 6). Indeed, many postwar advances in science and technology are attributed to World War II student veterans. Bound and Turner (2002) noted "…the combined effect of military service and the G.I.

Bill was to increase postsecondary educational attainment among World War II veterans above that of their nonveteran peers, with particularly large effects on college completion" (p. 786).

Advent of the Cold War

The former soldiers of World War II were now 'citizens' again, but peace would not last long. The aftermath of World War II ushered in the Cold War era (which lasted until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989). The United States soon was involved in the Korean War. Roughly 5,700,000 persons fought in the Korean War, some of whom were World War II veterans (Bound & Turner, 2002). Of those who served, 1,529,539 were conscripted (Selective Service System, 2003).

Little is known specifically about returning Korean War student veterans. Both the Reserve Officers' Training Corps and the National Guard had prominent roles in the conflict. Sewell and Stuit (1954) noted the "vast majority" of active army platoon leaders came from the Reserve Officers' Training Corps, and the government charged higher education with the dual responsibility of preparing students and soldiers (p. 425). Fautua (1997) recalled the influence of National Security Council Paper 68, or NSC 68, in terms of the creation of a large standing army heavily augmented by National Guard units, which would persist through the Korean War and last throughout the Cold War.

During the Cold War, the relationship between higher education and the military strengthened. Abrams (1989) noted the development of Federally Funded Research and Development Center (FFRDC) laboratories on campuses across the nation. The relationship also strengthened in other ways. The nature of conscription changed after

World War II, and more draftees were able to utilize educational deferments to avoid military service (Bound & Turner, 2002). The increase of deferments was clearly evident in 1954, when 157,200 college enrollees utilized deferments. Students on deferment composed nearly one in seven of the total college population, and roughly 200,000 others were deferred through ROTC (Bound & Turner, 2002; Selective Service System, 1955). Nearly 44% of Korean War veterans utilized the educational benefits of the G.I. Bill (Montgomery, 1994; White, 2004). The increased utilization of veterans educational benefits set the stage for the most expansive era in U.S. higher education history.

The period following World War II was the most prolific period in terms of shaping the student veteran experience. The G.I. Bill offered higher education access to millions of persons who otherwise might not have had access to higher learning. College education was attainable to virtually anyone, except persons from underrepresented populations. Former GIs excelled in the classroom and proved themselves worthy of the educational benefits granted to them. The dawn of the Cold War sparked noteworthy changes. The strategy of United States armed forces changed to include more National Guard personnel, and a new form of conscription offered individuals educational and ROTC deferments. The relationship between higher education and the military strengthened as institutions of higher learning housed military research centers. With the exception of the Korean War, the era was marked by peace. Peace would be short-lived; a new era destined to impact the student veteran and the military-higher education relationship loomed on the horizon.

The Modern Student Veteran: 1965-2001

The Cold War escalated throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s. The United States gradually became militarily involved in Southeast Asia and Vietnam. On the home front, enrollment rates among college-aged men rose from 1965-1975 as men entered college in attempts to avoid the draft (Card & Lemieux, 2001). Educational deferments similar to those offered during the Korean War made college and universities temporary safe havens for persons hoping to avoid deployment (Bound & Turner, 2002; Card & Lemieux, 2001).

Vietnam was an unpopular war, and colleges and universities offered fertile ground for antiwar activism (Cohen, 1998). ROTC programs came under fire on many campuses (Cohen, 1998; Holmes, 1973). Citing ROTC programs as an example, Holmes (1973) questioned whether or not it was right for universities to have association with and sponsor military programs. Societal tension strained the higher education-military relationship. Higher education and military service had come into competition for citizen-soldiers during the Vietnam era (Cohen, Warner, & Segal, 1995; Teachman, 2005).

Although this was a stressful time for the higher education-military relationship, progress was made in a key area: for the first time, student veterans were truly recognized as a unique student population (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008). Because of the unpopularity of the Vietnam War, administrators were naturally concerned with controlling their campuses upon veterans' return. Heineman (1993) asserted that control of, rather than services for, student veterans was the main focus of campus officials. Stephens and Stenger (1972), however, proclaimed an opportunity for the higher

education community to rise to the challenge by serving Vietnam veterans as a student population.

Military conscription ended in 1973 (Selective Service System, 2003). The end of conscription brought about a fundamental change in the G.I. Bill and the nature of military recruiting. Specifically, the G.I. Bill shifted from a 'reward' for service to an incentive to serve. The United States military became an all-volunteer force, and the G.I. Bill became a recruitment tool (White, 2004).

The end of conscription set the stage for the post-Cold War United States armed forces. Following Vietnam, United States servicemen and servicewomen were deployed numerous times. Notable deployments included Panama in 1989, the First Gulf War and Somalia in the early 1990s, Kosovo in the mid-1990s, and Iraq and Afghanistan (in 2003 and 2002, respectively) following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. There are currently between 1,300,000-1,500,000 active duty, guard, and reserve personnel in the military today (Department of Defense, n.d.a).

The story of the modern student veteran was forged through war and defined by the evolving conception of the citizen-soldier. Seven elements combined to create the profile of the modern student veteran. The first was the concept of the citizen-soldier borne from Revolutionary War-era fears of large standing armies and centralized governmental control. While the concept has evolved, it established the precedent of an all-volunteer army which allowed members to operate simultaneously within military and civilian circles. The second element was a series of legislation beginning with the Morrill Act of 1862 and culminating in the National Defense Act of 1933. This legislation

created the initial relationship between higher education and the military and established the Reserve Officers' Training Corps and the modern day National Guard. Conscription, specifically during World Wars I and II and Vietnam, was the third element. Albeit against popular opinion, conscription supplied the military with millions of personnel who might have otherwise abstained from service.

The 1944 G.I. Bill offered access to higher education to millions of conscripted and voluntarily-enlisted veterans after World War II. The fourth key element of the modern student veteran profile, the Bill ushered in an era of mass access to higher education, led to the proliferation of size of the institution of higher education, and it further solidified the relationship between the military and higher education. The fifth element was the Cold War. Epitomized by NSC 68, Cold War policies and practices catalyzed the buildup of United States armed forces, increased the importance of National Guard units in the overall defense scheme, mandated the maintenance of a large peace-time professional army, and expanded research partnerships between the Department of Defense and institutions of higher learning. The sixth element was the Vietnam era realization which for the first time noted student veterans as a unique subset of the student population. The seventh element, also occurring during the Vietnam era, was the end of conscription in 1973 and the formation of the all-volunteer army.

The modern student veteran has roots in the historical relationship between the military and higher education. Today's citizen-soldier is truly a product of history, as each of the aforementioned elements impacted modern student veterans. Of particular importance are the G.I. Bill, the elevated need to supplement active units with reserve

and Guard personnel, and the end of conscription and subsequent formation of the

modern all-volunteer armed forces. These items in particular established a system that

allows persons to enlist as active duty personnel and attend college after military service,

or enlist in the reserve or National Guard and attend college simultaneously. See Table 1

for the researcher's synthesis of the modern student veteran profile.

Table 1. The Modern Student Veteran Profile: Seven Elements in its Formulation

The Modern Student Veteran Profile	
Element	Description
1. Citizen-soldier	• Established precedent for simultaneous military and civilian service
2. Legislation	• Legislation from the Morrill Act of 1862 to the National Defense Act of 1933 established and strengthened the military-higher education relationship
3. Conscription	• Conscription in WWII and Vietnam in particular funneled millions of persons into the armed forces and, later, into higher education
4. The G.I. Bill	• In 1944, the Bill offered higher education access to millions who were funneled into the armed forces; led to increased institutional enrollments and further cemented the higher education-military relationship
5. The Cold War	• Caused a build-up of the armed forces and saw the rise in importance of ROTC and reserve forces
6. First recognition of the student veteran	• At the climax of the Vietnam War, the first time the higher education community recognized 'student veterans' as a unique student subculture
7. All-volunteer army	• Conscription ended in 1973 and an all-volunteer force was adopted; the military began offering signing bonuses and promoted 'money for college'; created a mutually beneficial system for higher education and the military

The War on Terror and Today's Student Veteran: 2001-Present

The War on Terror is the first prolonged large-scale military engagement since Vietnam. The Department of Defense (n.d.a) noted the total number of troops deployed worldwide was over 240,000 as of December 31, 2007. The number of deployed troops remained virtually unchanged into the following year, as over 238,000 troops remained deployed worldwide as of June 30, 2008 (Department of Defense, n.d.a). Gilmore (2008) noted 184,000 Reservists and 270,000 National Guard personnel have been activated for service in the War on Terror. In Iraq alone, National Guard personnel and reservists comprised 43% of the 137,000 troops deployed in theater as of October, 2004 (Thompson & Zabriskie, 2004). The Department of Defense placed the percentage of Guard and Reservists at 24% of total U.S. deployments as of January 31, 2007 (Office of Speaker Nancy Pelosi, 2007).

In 2007, 196,600 and 25,700 troops were deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan, respectively (Department of Defense, n.d.a). According to Sunshine (2007), there are two plans to reduce the number of troops deployed on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan. These plans, however, reach their minimum deployment rates of 30,000 troops and 75,000 troops by 2010 and 2013, respectively (Sunshine, 2007). Thus, the number of deployed ground troops will remain high for several years to come.

Support for Today's Student Veteran

The discussion of veterans' higher education after World War II stands in stark contrast to the lack of literature found on student veterans today. Jackson and Sheehan (2005) discussed strategies for supporting returning college veterans. Many of the

strategies, however, involved outside sources of help such as 'Vet Centers' or simply

suggested the need to engage veterans in open dialogue. Moreover, the authors mentioned

that college counseling centers would need to undergo training prior to providing services

for returning veterans (Jackson & Sheehan, 2005). The suggested strategies, while useful,

illuminated the lack of services and preparedness at the institutional level.

There are further indications colleges and universities are unprepared to wholly

assist student veterans. DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell (2007) noted the general lack

of support for college veterans both at the governmental and institutional levels. Student

health centers, unprepared to support the mental health of student veterans, may also be

ill-equipped to handle student veterans' unique medical needs (Spaulding & Eddy, 1997).

The initiative of 25 student-formed veterans' organizations to create the Student

Veterans of America organization is a potential indicator that student veterans feel they

need something more from their respective institutions (Guiles, 2008a, 2008b; Pekow,

2008; Student Veterans of America Press Release, 2008). The organization features a

Website replete with documents that are designed to help veterans manage the transition

back to college (Student Veterans of America, 2008b, 2008c) as well as resources for

campus administrators (Student Veterans of America, 2008a).

Since Vietnam, there have been leaders and scholars in higher education who

have recognized the issues of student veterans that would be a concern to higher

education professionals. Stephens and Stenger (1973) described a challenge and unique

opportunity for administrators to support this population. During the Gulf War, Caple

(1991) suggested that student affairs administrators recognize student veterans as adding

to the diversity of student populations. More recently, scholars and administrators have recognized the unique transitions student veterans undergo when returning to college (DiRamio et al., 2007; DiRamio et al., 2008; Jackson & Sheehan, 2005; Livingston, 2008; Murt, 2006).

To support student veterans, it is imperative that stakeholders in the higher education community make an effort to understand student veterans. Student veterans are persons who undergo many transitions. Specifically, understanding the transitions of deployment and re-enrollment are important in supporting this population. The following section examines the transitions of deployment and re-enrollment. Also covered in this section are the benefits of the G. I. Bill.

Re-enrollment and Veterans' Benefits

Student veterans who re-enroll after a deployment, training, or a self-induced military absence have had their education interrupted. In essence, they have been forced to stop out. In the case of stopping out, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) cited numerous studies which noted stopping out increased time-to-degree and reduced the probability of degree completion. Kempner and Kinnick (1990) discussed the general assumption that successive matriculation through college is the most beneficial pattern for students. Re-enrolling student veterans, having already been subjected to one interruption, are further hindered by the sometimes inadequate funding levels of the G.I. Bill (Farrell, 2005; Khadaroo, 2008). Furthermore, some veterans are denied academic credits in spite of their military training expertise (Schworm, 2008). Another hindrance is the chance student veterans may be redeployed for multiple tours of duty (Wasley, 2007). The

combination of factors suggests veterans have increased difficulty persisting after their initial re-enrollment.

Both the military and colleges and universities address student veterans' mobilization and deployment. From the military standpoint, much of the literature is informational in nature. A good example of military literature regarding student mobilization and deployment is the *Mobilization Information and Resources Guide* released by the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (n.d.). The document provides Internet links to the Veterans' Administration and G.I. Bill. Included in the *Mobilization Information and Resources Guide* is a statement issued by the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC), notifying students that most institutions work with students to ensure that deployment and re-enrollment are as efficient as possible (Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges, n.d.).

Higher education also addressed student deployment. David Ward (2003), President of the American Council on Education in 2003, wrote that institutions of higher learning should do their part to be flexible and ensure that "…no service member suffered a loss of funds or educational opportunity because he or she was called to serve our country." Ward (2001) also noted that higher education and the federal government partnered to respond to increased deployments, as the Department of Education and the American Council on Education issued statements directing institutions to fully refund students' tuitions in support of the troops. Some state agencies, such as the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education (2001), also issued statements in support of tuition refunds for students who were deployed.

Institutions also developed procedures to govern students' mobilization and deployments. A brief review of five land-grant institutions' Websites revealed that these procedures fall on a spectrum from highly detailed to very brief. Some procedures dictated that students simply report a change in enrollment due to activation to the veterans' affairs office on campus (Student Financial Services, 2008). Others are much more detailed and provide specific instructions on where to go, who to contact, what paperwork to bring, and how the process will proceed (Academic Advising, n.d.; Sonny Montgomery Center for America's Veterans, n.d.a; Veterans Services, n.d.).

In considering re-enrollment and deployment, it is important to consider the G.I. Bill. Under the original G.I. Bill of 1944, veterans who served more than 90 days were eligible for benefits. Additionally, veterans who served three or more years were entitled to full veterans' benefits, which included up to $500 in tuition per academic year and cash allowances of $65 and $90 per month for single and married veterans, respectively (American Journal of Nursing, 1944; Bound & Turner, 2002). Veterans were allowed to attend any school of their choice, provided the school's home state listed the institution as an 'approved' institution (Eckelberry, 1945).

More recently, the G.I Bill has been criticized for failing to adequately fund veterans' education (Farrell, 2005; Khadaroo, 2008). Schwartz (1986) noted G.I. Bill funding was not as generous after Vietnam as it was after the Korean War. Quinland (2008) stated the rising cost of higher education has outpaced the benefits of the G.I. Bill, especially among reservists and Guard personnel. Marklein (2007) noted the G.I. Bill is complicated because there is essentially a separate Bill for active duty, reservists

including National Guard, and reservists who served at least 90 days in combat after September 11, 2001.

Wright (2008) noted the G.I. Bill only covers 60%-70% of the cost to attend college. Specific monthly payout rates to veterans total $894 on the low end, with a maximum amount of $1,101 (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2008). Wright (2008) highlighted political complications associated with the approval of new G.I. Bill legislation, despite endorsement from congressional leaders and higher education constituents. Even more disturbing are reports by Field (2007) and Wasley (2007) which noted both National Guard personnel and reservists had been shortchanged on their educational benefits. There are positive signs, however, as Field (2008) stated efforts to expand the G.I. Bill have gained momentum recently.

Many institutions view veterans as an attractive student population with ample financial resources (Lederman, 2008). Furthermore, military recruiters use education benefits to increase personnel retention (Carnevale, 2006; White, 2004). The effect of combined institutional and military recruitment of veterans is a mutually beneficial relationship between the military and higher education. This relationship is likely to remain as U.S. involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq continues.

<u>Theoretical Framework</u>

Schlossberg's (1984) theory of adult transitions is the theoretical basis for this study. Leibowitz and Schlossberg (1982) noted transitions are vulnerable and uncertain periods of time for people. While transitions can be precarious, there is power in the transition process. Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) stated transitions, not age, motivate

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adult behavior. Adults have a need to fit in, create meaning, and master new tasks, all of which leads to a need to change which in turn leads to transition.

Transitions are defined as events or nonevents that result in change (Schlossberg, 1984, 1990; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). More specifically, transitions alter a person's roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002; Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). Schlossberg's (1984) original theory highlighted four types of transitions: (a) anticipated, (b) unanticipated, (c) chronic 'hassels', and (d) nonevent. Anticipated transitions are those which individuals can prepare for, and would include the following examples: going to college, enlisting in the military, and getting married. Unanticipated transitions are those out of the normal, and typically involve crises. Being expelled from an institution, being deployed as a Reservist, and divorce are examples of unanticipated transitions. Chronic 'hassels' "…can erode self-confidence and lead to an inability to initiate necessary changes" (Schlossberg, 1984, p. 46). Concerns with health and weight, ongoing employment issues, and tenuous spousal relationships are examples of 'hassels'. Finally, transitions may take the form of a nonevent, or an anticipated transition that never occurred.

The context of transitions is also important to consider. Schlossberg (1984) noted, "The relationship of the individual to the event or nonevent resulting in change is central to our understanding of transitions" (p. 47). The context of a transition refers to the individual's relationship to the transition. The context takes into account the setting of the transition, and whether the transition was personal, interpersonal, or communal.

Oftentimes, elements of transition fit in all three categories – personal, interpersonal, and communal.

Schlossberg (1984) argued the degree to which a transition alters an individual's daily life, not the event itself, is most important to the individual. Schlossberg further noted the altered state of a person's life affects the amount of coping resources an individual needs to deal with the transition. As the transition alters one's relationships, routines, and roles, so too does the impact of the transition. This underlines the fact that transitions are processes, and the effects of transitions are evident over a period of time. A transition is not a quick, simple process.

Individuals are left to cope with the impact of transitions. Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) and Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) denoted four broad categories of coping resources: (a) *situation*, (b) *self*, (c) *supports*, and (d) *strategies*. These categories are commonly known as the *4 S's*. The availability of resources in the four categories often predicts how individuals cope with transitions (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). *Situation* resources are found in an individual's survey of the entire context of the transition. The experience, attitude, and awareness a person possesses comprise *self* resources. *Supports* include financial and emotional support sources and networks. Finally, individuals must employ a number of methods of coping with the transition, which constitutes the *strategies* component.

Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (1997) further explained the transition processes related to each segment of the model: (a) *moving in* constitutes an individual

becoming increasingly familiar with norms and expectations, (b) *moving through* involves an individual relinquishing past roles, (c) *moving out* is a tenuous period where the individual may struggle to emotionally conceptualize the transition, and (d) *moving in* is the process of entering a new life phase. DiRamio et al. (2008) recently used Schlossberg's model of adult transitions in a study on student combat veterans. The researchers developed a grounded theory utilizing the model of *moving in*, *moving through*, *moving out*, and *moving in* as developed by Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989), which derived from Schlossberg's original theory. In the *moving in* phase, DiRamio et al. (2008) noted the motivations student veterans discussed for joining the armed forces and student veterans' military activation and mobilization in the *moving in* phase. The *moving through* phase consisted of student veterans' actual combat deployment. *Moving out* was characterized by student veterans' transitioning from deployment, coming home, and preparing to return to college. Finally, student veterans underwent the college transition in the *moving in* phase, as they gained familiarity with their institution by connecting with peers, faculty members, and services offered by the institution.

From their research, DiRamio et al. (2008) further developed a holistic model for assisting student veterans. The basis of this model was the need to track student veterans as they re-enrolled. The tracking and identification of veterans allows student services to be coordinated and catered to the student veteran population. The key components of the DiRamio et al. (2008) model included: (a) financial aid support, (b) counseling, (c) student organization involvement, (d) disability support, (e) academic advising, (f)

faculty support, and (g) institutional research. Ideally, these services should operate in cooperation and conjunction with one another to wholly assist student veterans.

<center>Chapter Summary</center>

Chapter Two traced the history of the student veteran and the higher education-military relationship through four periods of history: a) 1776-1944, b) 1944-1965, c) 1965-2001, and d) 2001-present. The importance of key legislation such as the Morrill Act of 1862 and G.I. Bill of 1944 were noted.

Seven historical elements emerged to forge the story of the modern student veteran: (a) the concept of the citizen-soldier dating from the Revolutionary War, (b) the series of legislation beginning with the Morrill Act of 1862 and ending with the National Defense Act of 1933, (c) military conscription, specifically during World Wars I and II and Vietnam, (d) the emergence of the G.I. Bill in 1944, (e) Cold War policies and practices resulting in military buildup, (f) the first conception of student veterans as a unique subculture during Vietnam, and (g) the end of military conscription in 1973.

The impact of the War on Terror on student veterans was explained, and the lack of higher education scholarship regarding today's student veterans was noted. Deployment, re-enrollment, and veterans' benefits were discussed to provide context to student veterans' unique situation. Schlossberg's (1984) theory of adult transitions was thoroughly explained to provide the theoretical framework for this study. Finally, the study developed by DiRamio et al. (2008) was provided as a practical example of Schlossberg's theory of adult transition and holistic student service for student veterans.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

<u>Introduction</u>

This study discovered the academic and social experiences of student veterans following the transition of re-enrollment in college at a large (over 17,000 students), four-year public land-grant institution in the southeastern United States. The purpose of this study was to build a base of knowledge on the academic and social experiences of re-enrolling student veterans. The secondary purpose of this study was to garner a better understanding of the student veteran experience and discover new avenues of support for student veterans. This chapter explains and justifies the research design, including the research questions, recruitment of participants, data collection and analysis components, and limitations of the study.

<u>Research Design</u>

A qualitative research design was selected for this study. The decision to utilize a qualitative study derived from the lack of literature and knowledge pertaining to the research topic. Creswell (2003) noted several characteristics of qualitative studies; two in particular provide rationale for the use of a qualitative research design in this study. Qualitative research is emergent rather than preconfigured, allowing the researcher to discover data. Additionally, qualitative research is often conducted on-site, allowing the researcher to share in participants' experiences and develop a greater level of detail.

The decision to use a grounded theory approach also originated from the lack of literature and knowledge of the research topic. The primary purpose of grounded theory

methodology is the development of theory which explains the phenomenon under investigation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998). The need to generate a theory is justified by the general lack of understanding and information about an issue or phenomenon. A grounded theory should add to the base of knowledge about a topic, be relatable to other studies, and ultimately generate a useful theory with practical applications.

Further conviction to utilize grounded theory evolved from the need to 'discover' the research topic. Strauss and Corbin (1990) noted discovery "…is the central purpose of using the grounded theory method" (p. 38). It is assumed that student veterans' experiences are truly unique and that non-veterans have never experienced a phenomenon similar to re-enrollment following deployment, training, or self-selected military leave. For this reason, it is necessary to *discover* student veterans' experiences before any attempt is made to *understand* their experiences.

Lichtman (2006) offered scientific rigor as an attractive characteristic of grounded theory. Grounded theory processes, particularly those articulated by Strauss and Corbin, provide highly organized procedures for conducting research (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998). The detail of organization and procedure is important, as qualitative research is sometimes scrutinized for lacking scientific rigor (Cresswell, 2003, Lichtman, 2006). Strauss and Corbin's formal regimented design offers increased scientific validity to this study.

Other important characteristics of grounded theory justify the research methodology of this study. Two critical components of grounded theory research are *constant-comparative data collection* and *theoretical sampling* (Cresswell, 2003; Glasser

& Strauss, 1967; Lichtman, 2006). *Constant-comparative data collection* allows the researcher to continually reframe research data and contributes to the scientific rigor of the methodology. *Theoretical sampling* strengthens the depth of the study, as it allows the researcher to intentionally explore theoretically relevant incidents that offer rich information and provide increased context to the study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998).

Strauss and Corbin (1990) proclaimed Pragmatism and Symbolic Interactionism are the theoretical underpinnings of grounded theory. From these underpinnings come two concepts important to the understanding of grounded theory. The first addresses the susceptibility of phenomena to change due to environmental factors. Phenomena are not static, thus 'change', through process, must be factored into the method. The second concept is a person's ability to exert control over their own destiny. Accordingly, as Corbin and Strauss (1990) wrote, "…grounded theory seeks not only to uncover relevant conditions, but also to determine how the actors respond to changing conditions and to the consequences of their actions" (p. 5).

Strauss and Corbin (1990) defined the grounded theory approach as "…a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop and inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon" (p. 24). The important concept to garner from this statement is that grounded theory 'evolves'. The researcher does not begin with a theory, but instead allows data to emerge (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998). Thus, the study, while following a set of procedures, does not restrict emerging themes. Grounded theory should be thought of as a flowing investigation as opposed to a rigidly structured study.

Qualitative research, particularly grounded theory methodology, is appropriate in the investigation of student veterans. There is a general lack of literature and understanding regarding student veterans. The use of qualitative methodology allows the researcher to add to the body of knowledge and, in this case, create an initial foundation for future studies. More specifically, grounded theory allows the researcher to accomplish two tasks in this study. The first is the discovery of the process of student veteran re-enrollment, and the second is the generation of theory which explains and offers some practical prescriptive benefits to higher education constituent groups.

<u>Site Selection</u>

The research site selected for this study was a large (over 17,000 students), four-year public land-grant institution in the southeastern United States. The research site was selected for two primary reasons. The initial reason the site was selected was the researcher's ability to access the necessary population for this study. The second reason was the institution's military heritage. The institution was founded in the late nineteenth century as a land-grant institution. Accordingly, military education, along with agricultural and mechanical curriculum, was a staple of the institution. The institution was an all-male military school for over 65 years, but was reorganized as a coeducational university beginning in the 1950s (Military Heritage, 2007).

In 2009, the institution's rich military heritage survives in the form of Army and Air Force ROTC, a Pershing Rifles company, and numerous symbols and traditions. A military heritage plaza sits on the front lawn of the institution which houses medals awarded to alumni. A statue dedicated to the men of the class of 1944 stands in front of

one of the main university buildings. A scroll of honor has been planned and will sit in front of the football stadium. There is an annual military appreciation day football game, and students place stars in remembrance of fallen veteran students in the windows of their residence halls. Ceremonies such as funerals, vigils, and remembrances often incorporate military components, such as the playing of *Taps* and a 21-gun salute.

Request for approval to conduct this study was submitted to the research site's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The research site's Institutional Review Board approved this study (see Appendix A – Research Site's IRB Approval).

<u>Research Questions</u>

A primary research question and two secondary research questions were developed to discover the experiences of re-enrolling student veterans. The primary research question is:

- How do student veterans manage college re-enrollment after deployment?

The secondary research questions are:

- How do student veterans manage academic transition after re-enrolling in college?

- How do student veterans manage social transition after re-enrolling in college?

Schlossberg's (1984) theory of adult transitions served as a theoretical basis during the development of the research and interview questions, and it is explained further in this chapter.

Participant Information and Selection

The population of interest consisted of all re-enrolling student veterans at the research site institution. The exact number of this population was unknown, but the institution's Veterans Administration certifying official estimated roughly 300 students receive benefits per academic year (J. Elliot, personal communication, October 30, 2008). The Veterans Administration certifying official noted spouses and dependents of veterans can receive benefits, so the number of student veterans was likely fewer than 300. A staff member in Academic Services, who serves as the institution's point person for student veterans who withdraw and re-enroll, estimated the number of student veterans at 250 persons (M. A. Rampey, personal communication, July 7, 2008). A member and executive officer of the student veterans association approximated that 200 student veterans were on campus (M. Angel, personal communication, January 30, 2009).

From this population, a sample of 15 re-enrolling student veterans was selected. Participants were selected using purposive sampling. In the discussion of grounded theory, Payne (2007) stated, "Samples are generally selected purposively because it is believed that they can contribute to the topic under investigation" (p. 74). Purposive sampling provided access to participants who offered the richest data because of their experiences. In particular, two variations of purposive sampling, convenience sampling and snowball sampling, were used in combination to recruit participants. Convenience sampling was used because the research project was bound by time. Thus, access and time constraints were minimized through this technique. Snowball sampling was used to bolster the sampling technique. Snowball sampling allowed the researcher to discover

from initial participants further subjects who would benefit the study (Ary, Jacobs,

Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006).

Participants fit the following criteria: (a) participants must have begun their

college career, (b) had their matriculation interrupted at some point by deployment,

training, or self-induced military absence, and (c) re-enrolled in college after returning

from their deployment, training, or self-induced military absence. Participants were either

current students or alumni and had experienced the re-enrollment process within five

years of their initial interview date. Participants' deployments were both combat and non-

combat in nature.

In addition to the sample population of student veterans, the researcher

interviewed two staff members at the research site. The staff members were selected

because they work closely with student veterans during the re-enrollment process. One

administrator served as the administrative assistant in the dean of undergraduate studies.

The other administrator served as the Veterans Affairs certifying official.

The 15 primary participants and the two administrative staff members brought the

total number of participants to 17 individuals. As Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, and Sorenson

(2006) stated, a grounded theory may include 20-25 participants. Ary et al.'s statement

does not mandate the use of 20-25 participants. The researcher found no mention of a

recommended number of participants in grounded theory methodology developed by

Stauss and Corbin (1990; 1998). Furthermore, Charmaz (2006) asserted qualitative

researchers engaged in grounded theory studies should "…see through the armament of

methodological techniques and the reliance on mechanical procedures" (p. 15). In other

words, qualitative research and, more specifically, grounded theory lends itself to "…flexible guidelines rather than rigid procedures" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 15). Thus, the researcher felt justified with his selection of 15 primary participants. Further justification was found during data analysis when participants began to articulate a theme of invisibility (discussed in detail in Chapter Four). The desire of participants to remain invisible, the difficulty in accurately gauging the overall population of student veterans at the research site, and the literature reviewed by the researcher validate the inclusion of only 15 participants in this study.

<div align="center">Data Collection Process</div>

Participants signed consent forms prior to participating in interviews. Four avenues of recruitment were used to enlist participants: (a) an email from the researcher was sent the Veterans Administration certifying official's private listserv, (b) an email from the researcher was sent to potential participants through the administrative assistant in the Academic Services department at the research site, (c) an email from the researcher was sent to the student veteran association student organization's listserv at the research site, and (d) participants were asked to recommend other potential participants. The Veterans Administration certifying official was selected because she coordinates the G.I. Bill benefits at the institution. The administrative assistant to the dean of undergraduate studies was selected because all re-enrolling student veterans were processed through her office.

Each participant filled out a participant profile sheet and was assigned a number (see Appendix C – Participant Information Form). Thenceforth, the participant was only

identifiable by their participant number. The assignment of a participant number provided

further anonymity. The researcher kept participant information forms under lock and key

to ensure confidentiality.

Interviews with student veterans served as the primary means of data collection.

Fifteen participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol.

Interviews were conducted in person on a one-on-one basis, were audio recorded, and

were designed to be approximately one hour in length. Barbour (2008) noted, "The

'semi-structured' aspect is crucial as it refers to the capacity of interviews to elicit data on

perspectives of salience to respondents rather than the researcher dictating the direction

of the encounter…" (p. 119). Creswell (2003) further offered interviews should utilize

open-ended questions in a generally unstructured manner. Smith and Eatough (2007)

specifically explained semi-structured interviews as being guided, rather than dictated, by

a question order, allowing the researcher to explore responses in an authentic manner.

The researcher created a list of interview questions which was used during the

semi-structured interview process (see Appendix B –Interview Questions). Interview

questions were formulated using Schlossberg's (1984) theory of adult transitions as a

theoretical basis and were derived to explore gaps in the existing literature (see Table 2).

The availability of resources in the four categories, called the *4 S's*, often predicts how

individuals cope with transitions (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988; Schlossberg, Lynch, &

Chickering, 1989). *Situation* resources are found in an individual's survey of the entire

context of the transition. The experience, attitude, and awareness a person possesses

comprise *self* resources. *Supports* include financial and emotional support sources and

networks. Finally, individuals must employ a number of methods of coping with the

transition, which constitutes the *strategies* component. The general theme of transition

and the specific references to the *4 S's* are apparent in the interview questions.

Table 2. Mapping of Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

Primary Research Question	Secondary Research Questions	Schlossberg's (1984) theory of adult transitions	Data Collection (Potential Interview Questions)
How do student veterans manage college re-enrollment after deployment?	How do student veterans manage academic transition after re-enrolling in college? How do student veterans manage social transition after re-enrolling in college?	*Transition*: an event or nonevent that result in change *The 4 S's*: the four broad categories (*situation*, *self*, *supports*, and *strategies*) of coping resources; availability of resources in the four categories predict how individuals will cope with transitions	How would you characterize the re-enrollment process? (academic and social transition; *situation* coping resource) What challenges did you face after you re-enrolled in college? (academic and social transition; *situation* and *self* coping resources) How would you describe your academic transition after re-enrollment? (academic transition; *situation* coping resource) What avenues of academic support did you utilize upon re-enrollment? (academic transition; *support* and *strategies* coping resources) How would you describe your social transition after re-enrollment? (social transition; *situation* coping resource) What avenues of social support did you utilize upon re-enrollment? (social transition; *support* and *strategies* coping resources) How would you characterize fellow students' attitudes towards you as a student veteran? (social transition; *situation* and *self* coping resources) How would you characterize your attitude toward fellow students? (social transition; *situation* and *self* coping resources) How would you characterize student affairs administrators' attitudes towards you as a student veteran? (social and academic transition; *situation* and *self* coping resources) How would you characterize faculty members' attitudes towards you as a student veteran? (social and academic transition; *situation* and *self* coping resources)

Saturation of data is an important concept in grounded theory, and multiple interview rounds ensure data are saturated (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998). The researcher purposively re-interviewed three participants who offered the most insight from the initial round of interviews in order to further explore the emergent theory. This allowed the researcher to focus on certain elements of emerging theory and to generate deeper, richer data in an effort to reach saturation.

Additional data sources were selected using *theoretical sampling* following the analysis and coding of data. *Theoretical sampling* is designed to further develop emergent theory by using events, incidents, and other forms of data as practical examples showcasing the emergent theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998). Strauss and Corbin (1990) explained *theoretical sampling* as "…sampling incidents and not persons per se" (p. 177). Hawker and Kerr (2007) noted the potential to theoretically sample other participants following open, axial, and selective coding in order to test the relevance of emerging theory. The researcher in this study interpreted *theoretical sampling* to mean a variety of data sources, including people, could be sampled, provided that data sources offered a holistic and interactive context by which emergent theory was evaluated.

In this study, the following data sources were selected through theoretical sampling: (a) interviews with two support staff at the research site who have a direct role in student veterans' re-enrollment and have extensive knowledge of the student veteran population, (b) observations from the researcher's attendance of a student veterans association meeting, (c) three documents from the Student Veterans Association of America's online resource library designed to inform both student veterans and higher

education institutions, (d) web pages of student veterans associations at three land-grant institutions similar to the research site and the research site itself, (e) web pages and documents regarding student veteran re-enrollment at five land-grant institutions similar to the research site and those from the research site itself, and (f) materials from the Veterans Administration concerning the G. I. Bill. As Creswell (2003) explained, the utilization of varying data sources, referred to as data triangulation, allows the researcher to develop further context and justification for emergent themes.

<div align="center">Data Analysis</div>

Interviews were transcribed by the researcher as they were completed. The researcher transcribed data in order to fully develop an understanding of the data (Lichtman, 2006; Payne, 2007), and because it is a practice suggested for novice researchers (Payne, 2007). Thorough transcription processes also helped compensate for limitations resulting from *theoretical sensitivity*. *Theoretical sensitivity* refers to the researcher's knowledge of the subject under investigation and thus the researcher's ability to glean subtleties from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998). Through the transcription process, the researcher became more familiar with the data, and thus increased his *theoretical sensitivity*.

The researcher maintained field notes for each interview. Following an interview, the field notes were typed and collated in a master document. This document was used to highlight pronounced statements and ideas found in each interview. The field notes were a collection of data and served as an origin of emergent themes that developed throughout the data analysis process.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) reported analysis in grounded theory is not a rigidly structured or static process. Instead, data analysis is intentionally allowed to be creative and free-flowing. Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1998) mention four types of specific data analysis: (a) microanalysis, (b) open coding, (c) axial coding, and (d) selective coding.

Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding are the three main data analysis components in grounded theory. The processes together represent the breaking down of data into simple concepts, reassembling data into related categories, and integrating data to create theory. First, open coding allows the researcher to break data down into the most simple form, that of concepts. As concepts are noted by the researcher, they are placed in categories, defined as 'more abstract explanatory terms' (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Axial coding follows open coding, although the two steps are not necessarily sequential. This is because subcategories begin to emerge during open coding, which, in effect, allows axial coding to take place simultaneously. Axial coding is, however, a distinct process apart from open coding. Axial coding is designed to reassemble data that were fractured during the open coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Axial coding differs from open coding in that the relationship between categories, not the makeup of categories, is the most important consideration to note (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998).

The selective coding process allows the researcher to integrate data and refine categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The researcher is tasked with extracting and naming a central theme to which all categories can be related through the use of explanatory relationship statements (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998). Naming the central theme and

denoting relationships between the central theme and other categories is called integration; the process of integration builds theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998). Once the theory is created, diagrams are often used to summarize the final product. The theory is validated through comparison to raw data and participants' recognition of and reaction to the final product (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998).

Microanalysis is simply a combination of open and axial coding, and it is most appropriate at the beginning of a study to build initial categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998). The researcher must perform careful detailed inspection of the data. Three elements comprise microanalysis: (a) analysis of the data collected from subjects and other data sources, (b) the interpretations of data by the researcher, and (c) self-conscious awareness on behalf of the researcher to analyze the interplay between observation and interpretation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998). Careful and detailed inspection of data does not imply that the researcher read every bit of every data piece. Instead, the researcher should scan the data to look for new intriguing data or data that have not been fully developed (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998).

Memoing is an important part of grounded theory analysis, and it is used in open, axial, and selective coding. Strauss and Corbin (1998) called memos "…a storehouse of ideas" (p. 153). Memos are utilized to help the researcher understand the researcher's own analytic process. In other words, memos are illustrations of metacognition: the researcher is asked to think about thinking. The process of memoing allows the researcher to clarify thought and observe personal bias through in-depth analysis. Ultimately, memoing serves to help the researcher chronicle the ongoing

conceptualization of the study. The researcher used memoing throughout this study. Memoing was used after the field notes for each interview were typed and after each interview was transcribed. The research continued to interweave memoing throughout the study in the coding procedures.

Coding data in qualitative research is a highly involved task. To assist with the coding and data analysis processes, the researcher employed Nvivo8™ qualitative research software (QSR International, n.d.). Nvivo8™ software has many powerful functions. Lichtman (2006) explained that Nvivo8™ software allows users to import files into a project, more easily and consistently code and organize information, search for data within the project, and build models. The use of Nvivo8™ limited the researcher's propensity to make mistakes and lose information, and increased the overall quality of the data and study.

<div align="center">Role of the Researcher</div>

The role of the researcher in qualitative research is of particular importance. The researcher is much 'closer' to the research process and in effect becomes part of the process. Describing the researcher's role in qualitative studies, Creswell (2003) explained "…the role of the researcher as the primary data collection instrument necessitates the identification of personal values, assumptions, and biases at the outset of the study" (p. 200). Maxwell (1996) warned the researcher could endanger research design components in qualitative research because of the researchers' close relationship to the study.

Qualitative research is inherently biased (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Creswell, 2003; Lichtman, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998). While the influence of bias may be

present in any type of research design, bias may particularly impact qualitative research because of the unique role of the researcher in the study. Therefore, it is necessary for the researcher to acknowledge any bias before undertaking a study.

The researcher in this study has worked as a student affairs practitioner for four years. Specifically, the researcher has worked in student judicial affairs and residence life, and the researcher has experience in orientation and new student programs, Greek life, leadership programs, assessment and institutional research, and enrollment management. The researcher is obviously committed to the student affairs profession, subscribes to the philosophy of holistic education, and believes that student affairs services can be employed to assist any population.

The researcher's brother is a veteran. The researcher's brother continues to serve in the military as a captain in the North Carolina National Guard. The researcher's brother saw combat in Panama in 1989 and in Iraq in 2003-2004, and is (technically) a re-enrolling student veteran, having left college in 1987 to join the military before re-enrolling in 1992.

The researcher has two friends who saw combat in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2004 and 2005, respectively. Both men re-enrolled as the researcher completed his master's degree in college student personnel. One transferred to a different institution while the other finished at the researcher's institution. Both men talked extensively about the difficulty they had with the re-enrollment process and with the many academic and social adjustments that accompanied their adjustment to civilian and college life. Conversations with these two men were the impetus for this study.

The researcher has always had an affinity towards the military and admired those who have served their country. To limit bias associated with the researcher's experiences, the researcher worked closely with the research methodology specialist on his dissertation committee. This committee member reviewed the data collection and data analysis processes to ensure accurate representation of data and results. Specifically, the committee member engaged in data validation processes such as reviewing transcripts and critiquing data coding in order to compare his findings with those of the researcher (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998).

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited by the unique characteristics of qualitative research, primarily in that findings are not generalizeable. The essence of this study was depth, not breadth, of understanding. The study was conducted at one institution, and the strong military heritage of the target institution may not be representative of similar populations at other colleges and universities. The sample was not representative of gender and ethnicity, as all but one participant self-identified as "Male" and all participants self-identified as "White/Caucasian". The reliance on self-reported data meant the researcher must consider participants' motivations and biases and the overall subjective nature of self-reported data. Due to the researcher's professional position, he may have been perceived as both an administrator and researcher, which potentially created a dual role that could have influenced participants' data. Finally, the sensitive nature of conversations involving combat deployment and other delicate subject matter may have been difficult for participants to discuss and challenging for the researcher to articulate.

The researcher's experience as a higher education practitioner and family member and friend of veterans was a form of bias in the research. Military personnel share a bond which civilians cannot understand. The researcher, a civilian, did not have military experience and thus his *theoretical sensitivity*, or awareness of the subtleties of data, was underdeveloped. A final consideration was the researcher's novice experience with qualitative research. Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1998) made notations to warn beginning researchers of areas where research may be compromised by novice mistakes. The researcher took action to ensure he had a thorough understanding of the research process and grounded theory procedure.

Chapter Summary

The third chapter explained and justified the qualitative approach and grounded theory research design, and explained the selection of the research site. The primary research question and research subquestions were provided. The researcher described the population and recruitment of the sample population, as well as the data collection and data analysis components of the study. The role of the researcher was denoted and the researcher's biases were clearly stated. Finally, the researcher articulated and discussed the limitations of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Introduction

Data were analyzed using microanalysis, open coding, axial coding, and selective

coding procedures developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1998). The researcher used

memoing, theoretical sampling, data triangulation, member checking, and peer review

techniques to increase validity of the study and create a rich description of data. This

chapter provides an in-depth examination of data analysis and presents the emergent

grounded theory in narrative form. The resulting theory answers the primary research

question: How do student veterans manage college re-enrollment after deployment,

training, or self-induced military absence?

Participant Demographics

Fifteen student veterans comprised the sample population of this study.

Participants fit the following criteria: (a) participants must have begun their college

career, (b) had their matriculation interrupted at some point by deployment, training, or

self-induced military absence, and (c) re-enrolled in college after returning from their

deployment, training, or self-induced military absence.

Fourteen participants self-identified as male and one participant self-identified as

female. All participants self-identified as white/Caucasian. Participants ranged in age

from 22 years to 32 years old. Specifically, one participant was 22 years old, three

participants were 23 years old, two participants were 24 years old, four participants were

25 years old, one participant was 26 years old, two participants were 27 years old, one

participant was 29 years old, and one participant was 32 years old. The mean age of participants was 25 years old.

Twelve participants were undergraduate students and three participants were graduate students. Fourteen participants were current students and one participant was an alumnus who graduated in 2007. Two participants re-enrolled in 2003, one participant re-enrolled in 2004, two participants re-enrolled in 2005, three participants re-enrolled in 2006, six participants re-enrolled in 2007, and one participant re-enrolled in 2008. The mean year of re-enrollment was 2006.

Participants represented four branches of the United States armed forces. Specifically, six participants represented the Army, five participants represented the Marine Corps, three participants represented the Air Force, and one participant represented the Coast Guard. At the time of deployment, seven participants were Reserve personnel, four participants were National Guard personnel, and four participants were active duty personnel. Eight participants denoted they were deployed to combat, five participants denoted they were deployed to a non-combat environment, one participant denoted he withdrew from school to complete military training, and one participant denoted he withdrew from school to serve full-time in the military.

Participants' length of deployment, training, or self-induced military absence varied from as little as three months to as long as 48 months. One participant was away for three months, one participant was away for four months, one participant was away for six months, two participants were away for seven months, one participant was away for eight months, one participant was away for eleven months, four participants were away

for twelve months, two participants were away for fifteen months, one participant was away for eighteen months, and one participant was away for 48 months. The mean time away from college was thirteen months.

Six participants affiliated with the research site's student veteran association. Three participants affiliated with the research site's Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program. One participant affiliated with both the site's student veterans association and ROTC program. Ten participants had been enrolled at the research site prior to re-enrollment and five participants had attended another institution prior to re-enrolling at the research site. See Table 3 beginning on the following page for a comprehensive breakdown of participant demographic information.

In addition to the sample population of student veterans, the researcher interviewed two staff members at the research site. The staff members were selected because they work closely with student veterans during the re-enrollment process. One administrator serves as the administrative assistant in the dean of undergraduate studies. The other administrator serves as the Veterans Affairs certifying official.

Table 3. Participant Demographic Information

Participant Number	Gender / Age	Year re-enrolled	Armed service branch	Type of absence	Affiliated with student veterans association? (Y/N)
	Ethnicity / **Student status**	**Length of deployment, training, or self-induced military absence**	**Military status**	**Previously enrolled at research site? (Y/N)**	**Affiliated with ROTC? (Y/N)**
1	Male / 23	2006	Army	Combat deployment	Yes
	White/Caucasian / Undergraduate	15 months	Reserve	Yes	No
2	Male / 25	2006	Army	Combat deployment	Yes
	White/Caucasian / Undergraduate	15 months	Reserve	Yes	No
3	Male / 24	2008	Army	Combat deployment	Yes
	White/Caucasian / Undergraduate	12 months	Reserve	Yes	No
4	Female / 25	2007	Marine Corps	Combat deployment	No
	White/Caucasian / Undergraduate	12 months	Active Duty	Yes	No
5	Male / 26	2005	Coast Guard	Full-time military service	Yes
	White/Caucasian / Undergraduate	48 months	Active Duty	No	No
6	Male / 25	2004	Army	Non-combat deployment	Yes
	White/Caucasian / Undergraduate (alumnus)	11 months	National Guard	No	No

7	Male 32	2005	Army	Combat deployment	No
	White/Caucasian Graduate	18 months	National Guard	Yes	No
8	Male 23	2007	Marine Corps	Combat deployment	No
	White/Caucasian Undergraduate	12 months	Active duty	Yes	No
9	Male 23	2007	Air Force	Training	No
	White/Caucasian Undergraduate	6 months	National Guard	Yes	No
10	Male 24	2007	Army	Combat deployment	Yes
	White/Caucasian Undergraduate	12 months	Reserve	Yes	Yes
11	Male 29	2003	Marine Corps	Non-combat deployment	No
	White/Caucasian Graduate	3 months	Reserve	No	No
12	Male 27	2007	Marine Corps	Combat deployment	No
	White/Caucasian Undergraduate	8 months	Active duty	Yes	No
13	Male 22	2007	Air Force	Non-combat deployment	No
	White/Caucasian Undergraduate	7 months	National Guard	Yes	Yes
14	Male 27	2003	Marine Corps	Non-combat deployment	No
	White/Caucasian Graduate	7 months	Reserve	No	No
15	Male 25	2006	Air Force	Non-combat deployment	No
	White/Caucasian Undergraduate	4 months	Reserve	No	Yes

Interview Information

The researcher interviewed fifteen student veterans and two staff members at the research site using a semi-structured interview protocol. Interviews were designed to last approximately one hour. Interviews ranged in duration from approximately 18 minutes to approximately 66 minutes. The mean duration of interviews was 34 minutes. The researcher asked the following questions during initial interviews:

- How would you characterize the re-enrollment process?

- What challenges did you face after you re-enrolled in college?

- How would you describe your academic transition after re-enrollment?

- What avenues of academic support did you utilize upon re-enrollment?

- How would you describe your social transition after re-enrollment?

- What avenues of social support did you utilize upon re-enrollment?

- How would you characterize fellow students' attitudes towards you as a student veteran?

- How would you characterize your attitude toward fellow students?

- How would you characterize student affairs administrators' attitudes towards you as a student veteran?

- How would you characterize faculty members' attitudes towards you as a student veteran?

Interviews were conducted individually in several locations, including the researcher's office, off-site restaurants, participants' offices, and the research site's library. All interviews were audio recorded using a digital voice recorder. Interviews

were transcribed by the researcher as they were completed. The researcher used the qualitative research software program, Nvivo8™ (QSR International, n.d.), to store and manage interview data.

<center>Field Notes</center>

The researcher created and maintained field notes for each interview. Field notes were typed after each interview and consisted of observations the researcher noted during each interview. Observations included participants' responses to questions as well as participants' emotional reactions throughout the course of the interviews. The researcher continually refined field notes throughout the study in order to link emerging concepts, categories, and themes. The researcher's field notes contributed to creation of an audit trail designed to explain the origins of emergent data. The researcher stored and managed field notes in the Nvivo8™ (QSR International, n.d.) software program.

<center>Memoing</center>

The researcher utilized memoing as an evolving journal of ideas and emerging concepts, categories, and themes. Memoing allowed the researcher to reflect upon and make connections between emerging data and to better understand the researcher's own thought processes. Memos were organized by category in a master document and stored in the Nvivo8™ (QSR International, n.d.) software program. Memos contributed to the audit trail in this study.

<center>Data Analysis</center>

Strauss and Corbin (1998) noted analysis is not a rigidly structured or static process. Instead, data analysis in grounded theory is intentionally allowed to be creative

<center>62</center>

and free-flowing. Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1998) mentioned four types of specific data analysis: (a) microanalysis, (b) open coding, (c) axial coding, and (d) selective coding. The processes together represent the fracturing of data to create topics of interest, the comparison of similarities amongst topics to create concepts, the reassembling of data into related categories, and the integration of data to create theory. The interplay of microanalysis, open coding, axial coding, and selective coding represent the constant-comparative data analysis technique characteristic of grounded theory methodology.

Microanalysis

Microanalysis is most appropriate at the beginning of a study to build initial concepts and, later, categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998). Three elements comprise microanalysis: (a) analysis of the data collected from subjects and other data sources, (b) the interpretations of data by the researcher, and (c) self-conscious awareness on behalf of the researcher to analyze the interplay between observation and interpretation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998).

The researcher conducted microanalysis during open and axial coding in order to inspect data and look for new intriguing data or data that were not fully developed. The researcher coded data line-by-line or paragraph-by-paragraph using Nvivo8™ (QSR International, n.d.). During this initial phase of coding, 426 *free nodes* were created. The *free nodes*, which represented stand-alone topics, were continually refined and, when similarities were apparent, grouped to create concepts. Microanalysis allowed the researcher to constantly interrogate and reframe raw data, and to begin to see the interplay between concepts. See Table 4 for an example of the microanalysis process.

Table 4. Example of the Microanalysis Process

Excerpt from Participant 2's interview: "Yea, um, I do think, uh, a little bit of that military discipline did carry over, um, to my first semester back because that was, uh, the best semester I've, uh, had at college grade-wise. I, uh, was very focused and, uh, after a year in Afghanistan, coming back and doing these two or three page papers and homework assignments, it's really not that much of a problem – it's like a mission, basically."	
Initial coding from this excerpt: • "Carryover of military discipline" (free node) • "Improved academic performance" (free node) • "Increased academic focus" (free node) • "Academics easier after deployment" (free node)* • "Academic work is a mission" (free node)	
Final coding from this excerpt: • "Carryover of military discipline" (free node) • "Improved GPA" (free node) • "Increased academic focus" (free node) • "Academic work is a mission" (free node)	**Rationale through microanalysis:** • "Carryover of military discipline" became a concept as it was articulated in subsequent data sources • "Improved GPA" replaced "Improved academic performance", as subsequent participants used the term "GPA" as opposed to "grade-wise". Participant 2's use of the term "grade-wise" implies an increase in GPA, and since subsequent data sources specifically noted "GPA", this node replaced the "Improved academic performance" node • "Increased academic focus" became a concept as it was articulated in subsequent data sources • "Academic work is a mission" was a unique node not articulated in subsequent data sources. That said, this node eventually became a category as subsequent data sources illustrated a link between assignments and military influence • *"Academics is easier after deployment" was abandoned as a concept after the researcher critically analyzed the initial interpretation of the data and disagreed with the implications of this node
* = denotes a concept which was abandoned during microanalysis	

The researcher coded data line-by-line and paragraph-by-paragraph to fracture raw data into topics of interest. As subsequent data were coded, similar topics were grouped together to form initial concepts. See Table 5 on the following page for selected examples of initial concepts. Subsequent data yielded the creation of new concepts and, through constant comparison, concepts were analyzed for shared meaning and characteristics. Concepts that shared meaning and characteristics were combined to create categories.

Table 5. Examples of Initial Concepts

Challenge of getting back in the swing of things	"School – it was a little tricky coming back being out of it for three semesters, trying to get back in the swing of things, going to class and everything, getting used to, you know, all that class stuff, trying to remember everything I learned beforehand which was kinda tricky, but, uh, I caught on to most of it."
	"Uh, and, just kinda getting back into the swing of things, the classroom environment, and getting back and listening, note-taking, and everything, so. Um, but I wasn't gone for too long I would say to the point where it was unbearably difficult, but, it – I could tell a difference going back. Just kinda getting back into the routine."
	"I was used to going through in the military training or it was, um, if it was I honestly just didn't understand the material when I came back during the classes I took. But, uh, that first semester (laugh) was very, very difficult, uh, to try and get back in the swing of things."
Readjustment from military to college life	"No, no, no. Just the mental transition. Well let's put it like this: In the Army, you're told when eat dinner, etc., you're told when to do everything. But here on campus, you have to set aside your own time to study – that might be difficult for some…"
	"…just having all those things to deal with again when you're used to only having your job, go home to the barracks, and go to sleep, your job again, in that rotation all the time. You got used to a fit schedule and now you have all this stuff thrown at you at one time."
	"…but it was a big transition all of a sudden going from being in the Army and pretty much knowing what to do because it you were told to do most of the time to having figure out things on my own."
Difficult social transition	"Difficult! Um, like I said, most of the friends I had previously were gone, graduated or soon to graduate. Um, so you know, it was a little difficult. As I'm not the big one to get out and go meet people, go to parties and stuff…"
	"So you know, I didn't feel like I lost that much – I definitely feel a little different coming back socially. I probably struggled more coming back socially than in the classroom."
	"But here, if you wanna do anything, you either have to go to the bar and try to meet new people there or try to make friends with people who are now like four years younger than me in my classes and it's just not the same. I would rather be in one building with a bunch of people and be like, 'Hey man, let's go do this,' instead of trying to figure out, 'What am I gonna do this weekend?'"

The researcher used Nvivo8™ (QSR International, n.d.) to code data during open coding, and to assist in the identification of 49 initial codes represented by *free nodes*. The 49 initial codes were grouped into five categories. See Table 6 on the following page for an illustration of the initial codes and categories.

Table 6. Open Coding: Initial Codes and Categories

Initial Categories	Initial Codes
Invisibility	1. Being a veteran is part of my identity 2. Don't disclose veteran status 3. I just wanted to be another student 4. Institution does not see vets 5. Living off campus
Military Influence	6. Academic work is a mission 7. Carryover of military discipline 8. Difficulty relating to younger students 9. Comparing myself to other students 10. Criticism of students 11. Students irritate me 12. Military makes you mature 13. Service makes you reevaluate priorities 14. Did not utilize support 15. Pride a factor in not seeking help 16. Pride not a factor in seeking help 17. Vet status a point of pride 18. Not happy with ROTC 19. Everyone's military experience is different
Support	20. Campus community support 21. Involvement 22. Utilized academic support 23. Did not utilize academic support 24. Did not utilize social support 25. Military affiliated organizations not social support 26. Desire to help fellow vets 27. Fellow vets as social support 28. Friends and family as support
Navigating Processes	29. Challenges of re-enrollment 30. Re-enrollment wasn't difficult 31. Financially challenging to re-enroll 32. Things have changed 33. Juggling change 34. Changes I've made 35. Challenge getting back in the swing of things 36. Challenge is remembering 37. Challenge is forgetting academic info 38. Readjusting from military to college life 39. Readjusting different for everyone 40. Positive academic transition 41. Difficult social transition

Campus Culture	42. Football
	43. Indifferent perception of campus attitudes
	44. Positive perception of campus attitudes
	45. Negative perception of campus attitudes
	46. Mixed perception of campus attitudes
	47. Students are curious about vets' status
	48. Appreciating the appreciation
	49. Would like to see appreciation of vets

<u>Axial Coding</u>

Axial coding is designed to reassemble data that were fractured during the open coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During axial coding, the researcher evaluated codes and categories that emerged during open coding. Specifically, the researcher recoded and regrouped data into categories and subcategories. Recoding and regrouping allowed the researcher to analyze the relationships between categories in terms of similarity, context, and, more important, affect. Table 7 provides an illustration of reorganized data that emerged during axial coding.

Table 7. Axial Coding: Recoding and Regrouping

Category	Subcategory	Code
Invisibility	Selective Identity	1. Being a veteran is part of my identity
		2. Don't disclose veteran status
		3. I just want wanted to be another
	Connection to Campus	student
		4. Level of involvement
		5. Living off-campus
Military Influence		6. Carryover of military discipline
	Academic Emphasis	7. Academic work is a mission
		8. Positive academic transition
		9. Veterans have more academic focus
		10. Did not utilize academic support
	Maturity	11. Difficulty relating to younger students
		12. Military matures you
		13. Service makes you reevaluate priorities

	Difficulty Relating to Peers	14. Changes I've made
		15. Comparing myself to other students
		16. Criticism of students
		17. Difficult social transition
		18. Not happy with ROTC
		19. Student irritate me
	Pride	20. Vet status a point of pride
		21. Pride a factor in not seeking help
		22. Pride not a factor in seeking help
Support		23. Campus community support
		24. Did not utilize academic support
		25. Did not utilize social support
		26. Utilized academic support
		27. Friends and family support
		28. Military affiliated organizations not social support
	Importance of Fellow Vets	29. Desire to help fellow veterans
		30. Fellow vets as social support
Navigating Re-enrollment		31. Challenges of re-enrollment
		32. Re-enrollment wasn't difficult
	Unique Experience	33. Everyone's military experience is different
	Structure and Routine	34. Readjusting different for everyone
		35. Challenge of getting back into the swing of things
	Change	36. Readjusting from military to college life
	Remembering and Forgetting	37. Things have changed
		38. Juggling change
	Financial Considerations	39. Challenge of forgetting academic info
		40. Challenge is remembering
		41. Financially challenging to re-enroll
Campus Culture	Football	42. Football
		43. Indifferent
	Perceptions of campus attitudes	44. Mixed
		45. Negative
		46. Positive
		47. Would like to see appreciation of vets
		48. Appreciate the appreciation

Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1998) noted theory is validated through comparison to raw data and to participant's recognition and reaction to theory development. The researcher began to see theory emerging during axial coding and purposively selected three participants to re-interview to garner raw data to further develop and explain the emergent theory and to validate the researcher's ongoing conceptualization of data.

Participants were selected because their initial interviews were thorough and their articulation of phenomena was highly descriptive. Additionally, the researcher took care to select participants who represented different constituent groups. Participants represented the student veterans association and Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) and varying branches of the United States armed forces. Specifically, two participants were, either formerly or presently, affiliated with ROTC, one participant participated in the student veterans association, two participants served in the Air Force, one participant served in the Army, and the final participant served in the Marine Corps. For specific demographic information on participants who were re-interviewed, please see Table 8 on the following page.

Table 8. Follow-up Interviews: Participant Demographic Information

Participant Number	Gender Age	Year re-enrolled	Armed service branch	Type of absence	Affiliated with student veterans association? (Y/N)
	Ethnicity Student status	Length of deployment, training, or self-induced military absence	Military status	Previously enrolled at research site? (Y/N)	Affiliated with ROTC? (Y/N)
2	Male 25	2006	Army	Combat deployment	Yes
	White/Caucasian Undergraduate	15 months	Reserve	Yes	No
10	Male 24	2007	Army	Combat deployment	Yes
	White/Caucasian Undergraduate	12 months	Reserve	Yes	Yes
15	Male 25	2006	Air Force	Non-combat deployment	No
	White/Caucasian Undergraduate	4 months	Reserve	No	Yes

The researcher asked the following questions during follow-up interviews:

- When campus community members look at you, how would you articulate what they see?

- How would campus community members identify you as a student veteran when you re-enrolled?

- How would you describe the student veteran population as a whole at the institution?

- How would you characterize the effect 'military influence' had when you re-enrolled?

- What effect did 'military pride' have during your re-enrollment?

- What has been the greatest hindrance in your transition during re-enrollment?

- What has been the greatest aid in your transition during re-enrollment?

- What elements of campus culture were most important during your re-enrollment?

- How would you describe your attitude towards appreciation for veterans?

- What could the campus community do to incorporate student veterans in the campus culture?

Follow-up interview questions were developed to intentionally explore relationships between and interactions amongst categories. See Table 9 on the following page which provides rationale for the formulation of follow-up interview questions.

Table 9. Rationale for Development of Follow-up Interview Questions

Question	Affected Categories	Underlying Question and Rationale
When campus community members look at you, how would you articulate what they see?	• Invisibility • Campus Culture	*Do student veterans feel they are visible and acknowledged?* Designed to discover interactions that may exist between self-disclosure, the desire to be 'just a student' and acknowledgement/appreciation
How would campus community members identify you as a student veteran when you re-enrolled?	• Invisibility • Support • Navigating Re-enrollment	*Can campus community members identify student veterans without knowing of their status?* Designed to discover interactions between disclosure, various avenues of support, and the re-enrollment process
How would you describe the student veteran population as a whole at the institution?	• Invisibility • Support • Military Influence	*Are student veterans able to conceptualize their subculture as a whole?* Designed to examine if student veterans 'see' each other and examine elements of pride that may impact support
How would you characterize the effect 'military influence' had when you re-enrolled?	• Military Influence • Support • Navigating Re-enrollment	*How does the military continue to impact your college experience?* Designed to discover the interconnection between maturity, locus of support, and the change of structure in the impact of the overall re-enrollment process
What effect did 'military pride' have during your re-enrollment?	• Military Influence • Support • Navigating Re-enrollment	*Has the military changed the way you think and act?* Designed to examine if maturity and pride impact seeking of support and the overall navigation of the re-enrollment process
What has been the greatest hindrance to your transition during re-enrollment?	• Navigating Re-enrollment • Support	*What individual challenges impacted your transition?* Designed to examine the individual's unique experience and how this impacted support sought
What has been the greatest aid to your transition during re-enrollment?	• Navigating Re-enrollment • Support	*What helped you the most during re-enrollment?* Designed explore what avenues of support were most helpful during individuals' unique re-enrollment experience
What elements of campus culture were most important during your re-enrollment?	• Campus Culture • Support	*What factors unique to the research site impacted your re-enrollment?* Designed to uncover interaction between elements of campus culture support
How would you describe your attitude towards appreciation for veterans?	• Campus Culture • Invisibility	*How do you view appreciation and is it apart of the campus culture?* Designed to see if veterans feel acknowledged and, if not, if this is because veterans shirk from individual recognition
What could the campus community do to incorporate student veterans into the campus culture?	• Campus Culture • Support • Navigating Re-enrollment • Military Influence	*What can the campus do to better connect student veterans?* Designed to gauge if student veterans feel the campus can 'plug them in', especially academically, and how this might impact support and overall navigation of re-enrollment

Selective Coding

The researcher used selective coding to integrate data and refine categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The researcher is tasked with extracting and naming a central theme to which all categories can be related through the use of explanatory relationship statements (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998). Integration is the process of building theory and consists of the articulation of a central theme which explains relationships among categories and the overarching central theme (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998). The researcher created a diagram to summarize the theory and final product which will be discussed and illustrated under A Model for Student Veteran Re-enrollment (beginning on page 80).

Data Saturation

Saturation is ultimately a subjective determination on behalf of the researcher; however, the researcher worked closely with the research methodology specialist on his dissertation committee to verify saturation. Multiple interview rounds ensure data are saturated (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998), thus the researcher purposively re-interviewed three participants in order to clarify existing data, explore emergent theory, and confirm saturation. Data saturation began to occur after 13 interviews in this study, and two subsequent interviews coupled with four participants who were re-interviewed further solidified saturation.

Data Triangulation

The researcher sought out and included additional sources of data in order to test emergent theory and offer context and increased description to the study (Creswell,

2003). Several sources were used in data triangulation: (a) interviews with two support staff at the research site who have a direct role in student veterans' re-enrollment and have extensive knowledge of the student veteran population, (b) observations from the researcher's attendance of a student veterans association meeting, (c) three documents from the Student Veterans Association of America's online resource library designed to inform both student veterans and higher education institutions, (d) Web pages of student veterans associations at three land-grant institutions similar to the research site and the research site itself, (e) Web pages and documents regarding student veteran re-enrollment at five land-grant institutions similar to the research site and the research site itself, and (f) materials from the Veterans Administration concerning the G. I. Bill. See Table 10 on the following page for a complete listing of sources used during data triangulation.

Table 10. Sources of Data Triangulation

Genre	Specific Document or Website
Interviews with administrators at research site	Transcript of interview with administrative assistant for dean of undergraduate studies
	Transcript of interview with VA certifying official
Observations from researcher's attendance of student veteran association meeting	Typed reflection of observations
Documents from Student Veterans of America's online resource library	*Campus Kit for Colleges and Universities*
	Campus Kit for Student Veterans
	From Combat to Campus
Student veterans associations' Websites	Research site's student veterans association
	Florida State University's Collegiate Veterans Association
	Mississippi State University's Student Veterans Association
	Texas A & M University's Veterans Association
Information regarding student veterans' re-enrollment	Research site's veterans benefit Website
	Auburn University's Office of Veterans Affairs Website
	Florida State University's Veterans Office Website
	Mississippi State University's Sonny Montgomery Center for America's Veterans Website
	Texas A&M University's Veterans Website
	Virginia Tech University's Veterans Affairs Benefits Website
Materials from the Veterans Administration	*The Montgomery GI Bill – Active Duty: Summary of Educational Benefits*
	The Montgomery GI Bill – Selected Reserve: Summary of Educational Benefits

Another source of data triangulation is peer review (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998). The researcher utilized the research methodology specialist on his dissertation committee as a peer reviewer throughout this study. Specifically, the researcher and the committee member met regularly during the data analysis process to ensure proper coding of data and to discuss and analyze emergent themes. The committee member offered critique of the researcher's coding and challenged the researcher in articulation of emergent theory. The peer review meetings added additional context to the study and insured the researcher's intimate knowledge of data.

Member Checking

The researcher conducted member checks to ensure the researcher's evaluation of data coincided with that of the participants. There were two phases of member-checking in this study. During the first phase, the researcher emailed participants a copy of their individual transcripts, corresponding field notes, and a copy of initial categories the researcher determined through open coding. Participants were asked to check the accuracy of the transcript and corresponding field notes and were invited to offer critique of the researcher's initial categories (See Appendix D – Member Check: Phase One). During the second phase of member-checking, the researcher emailed participants a copy of the diagram which conceptualized the emergent theory. The researcher attached a brief summary of the diagram and invited participants to critique the theory (See Appendix E – Member Check: Phase Two).

Two participants responded to the first phase of member-checking. Participant 14 was the only participant who supplied corrections. Specifically, he noted the designation of the version of the G.I. Bill that applied to him ("1606") and clarified the abbreviated name of his squadron ("MALS-39") and where the squadron was stationed ("…on the SS Curtis and in Ali Al Saleem, Kuwait"). Three participants responded to the second phase of member-checking. Those participants who responded did not offer any corrections and affirmed the diagram and synopsis were accurate from their individual perspectives. No participants, either through formal responses to member-checking emails or during informal conversations with the researcher, indicated any problems with the researcher's analysis, interpretation, and integration of data.

Audit Trail

As previously noted, the researcher maintained field notes and memos throughout this study. These documents complemented data analysis and created an audit trail of emergent theory. Driessen, van der Vleuten, Schuwirth, Tartwijk, and Vermunt (2005) explained, "Dependability can be reached by establishing an audit trail…" (p. 219). The audit trail increased the validity of this study by (a) providing a history of the researcher's observations and thought processes and (b) augmenting raw data garnered from participants. Accordingly, articulation of emergent theory includes components of the audit trail interspersed throughout the final narrative. See Table 11 on the following page for an example of how the audit trail was utilized during this study.

Table 11. Example of Audit Trail within Analysis and Interpretation of Raw Data

Audit Trail	Interpretation and Articulation of Category
*From **Field Notes***: • "…it was a gradual readjustment process for him to acclimate himself to his peers – said he had to learn not to hold them to his standards." • "Noted that he had some resentment towards his non-military peers – made an interesting comment about the lack of "rank" and structure at college, and how that equated to a decline in respect." *From Interview **Transcripts***: • "When I came back I would say initially my first semester – probably my first year back – probably – I don't wanna say 'disdain', but it was like I was comparing myself to them and maybe I was finding everyone else like not up to my standards. Uh, I guess that's from, you know, being used to, uh, being held to standards, you start to apply standards to other people…" • "…and I think maybe like no rank structure was probably a little bit of adjustment, uh, lot more personalities, because people aren't accountable to rank or anything where you're out in the middle of the ocean, I guess. You have rank that you have to abide by, but you also have to live with the people and you don't try and form any enemies or things like that." ***Memoing***	• From Field Notes and Interviews, the researcher noticed resentment, disdain, adjustment and other indicators that led the researcher to create the subcategory **"Difficulty Relating to Peers"** • The researcher noted the following in his *memoing*: "One veteran talked about his frustration with his peers and said it was tough in college because of the absence of rank, structure, and accountability. In essence, the point I think he made was that rank garners respect. The rank comment stuck with me; it seemed this veteran was frustrated because respect (or maybe courtesy is a better word) was something that he practiced automatically, whereas his "average Joe/Jane" peers could not be counted on to do the same." • The thought that became more apparent after memoing was the relationship between the military, rank (or, more broadly, the 'military way of doing things'), and difficulty relating to peers. This prompted the researcher group the subcategory, "Difficulty Relating to Peers", under the larger category, **"Military Influence"**

A Model for Student Veteran Re-enrollment

The Student Veteran Academic and Social Transition Model (SVASTM) that describes the grounded theory for how student veterans manage the transition of re-enrollment is represented in Figure 1 on the following page. The model includes three important components: cornerstones, auxiliary aid, and environment. The categories of military influence and invisibility comprise the cornerstones. The category of support is included under auxiliary aid in this model. The category of campus culture is included under environment in this model. Also included is the category navigating re-enrollment.

The SVASTM explains that student veterans are more mature, have more focus, and exhibit self-reliance because of military influence. The invisibility category illustrates how student veterans selectively disclose their identity and avoid deferential treatment. Student veterans are more likely to seek social support over academic support and to rely on fellow veterans for support, factors which are explained by the support category. The campus culture category highlights student veterans' perceptions of faculty helpfulness and indifference amongst other campus constituent groups. Finally, student veterans' financial concerns and their adaptation from military to college life are discussed in the navigating re-enrollment category.

Overall, the SVASTM explains that student veterans may experience initial academic hiccups but their social transitions may be more problematic. The following section provides a detailed narrative of the grounded theory which explains how student veterans manage the transition of re-enrollment.

Figure 1. Selective Coding: The Student Veteran Academic and Social Transition Model (SVASTM)

CORNERSTONES

Military Influence
- Academic Emphasis
- Maturity
- Difficulty Relating to Peers
- Pride

Invisibility
- Connection to Campus
- Selective Identity

AUXILIARY AID

Support
- Importance of Fellow Vets

Navigating Re-enrollment
- Unique Experience
- Structure and Routine
- Change
- Remembering and Forgetting
- Financial Considerations

ENVIRONMENT
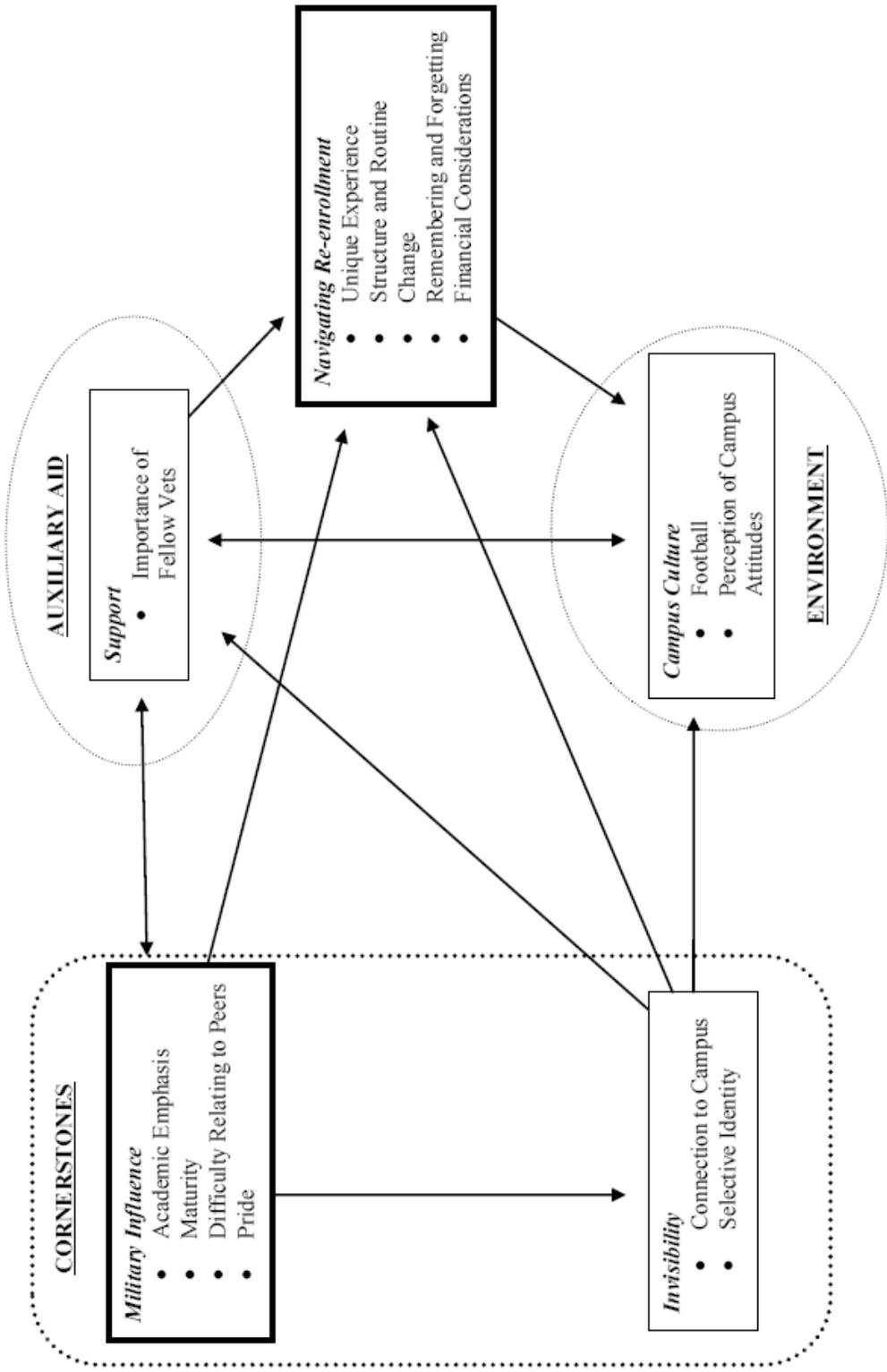
Campus Culture
- Football
- Perception of Campus Attitudes

Two cornerstones that ultimately affect student veterans' management of re-enrollment are military influence and invisibility. Much interaction and interrelation exists between these two categories. While the categories are discussed separately, the relationship between them is noted.

Cornerstones are important because they are the initial foundation affecting student veterans' re-enrollment. The effects of cornerstone interaction impact veterans' likelihood to pursue avenues of support and ultimately rely on fellow veterans for information, assistance, and social interaction. Moreover, concepts included in each cornerstones category affect student veterans' perceptions of campus culture and ultimately the overall navigation of re-enrollment. A more detailed visual diagram of cornerstones is provided in Figure 2 on the following page.

Figure 2. Cornerstone Categories: Interrelation between Military Influence and Invisibility.
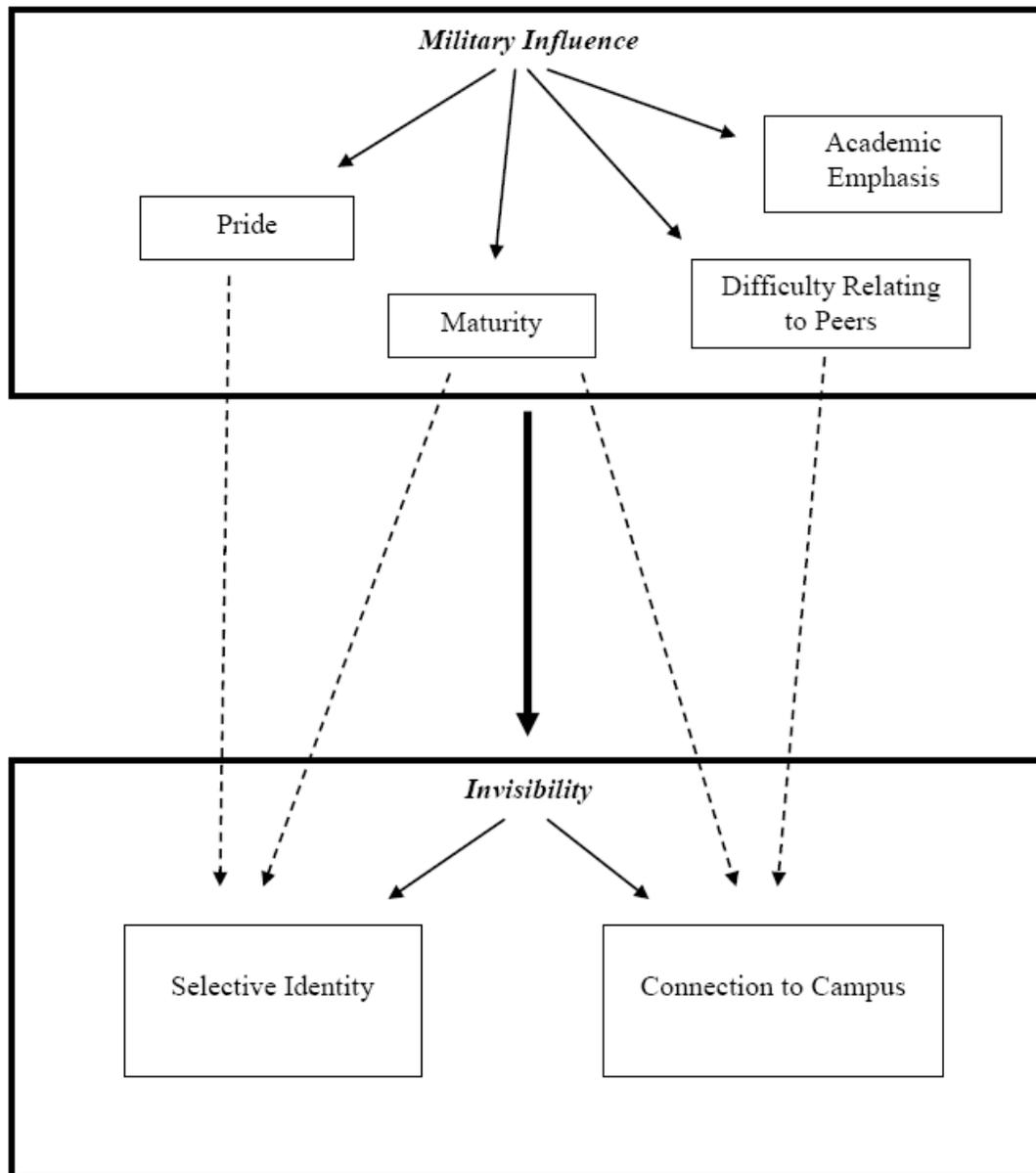
Military Influence

Military influence is a category which denotes the lasting impact that military service, structures, and ideals have on the re-enrollment process. Specifically, four subcategories are acknowledged: (a) academic emphasis, (b) maturity, (c) difficulty relating to peers, and (d) pride. Further concepts are evident within each subcategory and are discussed further in this narrative.

The researcher found student veterans have an increased academic emphasis upon re-enrollment. Participants noted improved grades and academic performance, increased focus, little need for academic support, positive academic transitions, and the propensity to view academic work as a mission. Student veterans further described increased maturity, noting the maturation resulting from military service, difficulty relating to younger students, re-evaluation of priorities, and making changes after military service. Participants explained difficulty relating to peers in terms of criticism of peers, comparisons of themselves to other students, irritation by peers, unhappiness with the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), and difficult social transition. Finally, student veterans discussed pride in terms of the effect pride has on the inclination to seek help. Figure 3 on the following page presents a visual breakdown of concepts within military influence.

Figure 3. Military Influence: Sub-categorical Breakdown.

Military Influence

Pride

Difficulty Relating to Peers
- Criticism of students
- Students irritate me
- Not happy with ROTC

Maturity
- Difficulty relating to younger students

Academic Emphasis
- Positive academic transition
- Increased academic focus
- Academic work as a mission
- Did not utilize academic support
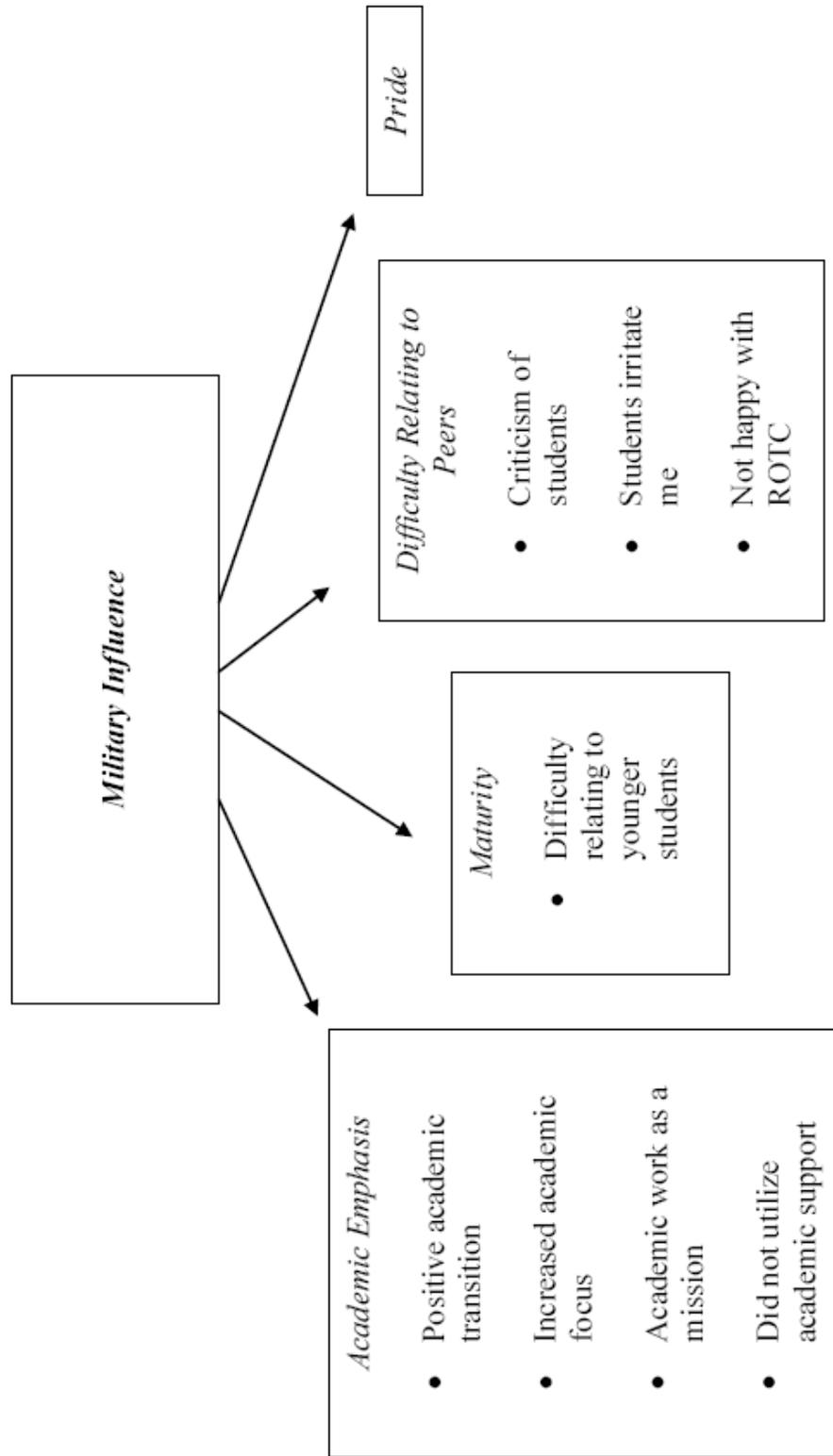
Academic Emphasis

The subcategory of academic emphasis explains how student veterans described an increased focus and improved overall academic performance during re-enrollment. Some participants noted a direct link between their military experience and their emphasis on academics. Participant 10, a 24 year old combat veteran who re-enrolled after a twelve month deployment, offered an excellent overall representation of academic emphasis, noting:

> "And now as I was coming back, you know like I said, I had looked forward to coming back and I was very excited about it. Uh, and then, you know, I came back into something I was more prepared to deal with, uh, maybe it was not the easiest major in the world, especially after I tacked on ROTC and another major, but academically I've improved my GPA every semester. Uh, that first semester back, I had some fairly difficult classes and, uh, I had all A's except for one B. So, I guess I was ready for it even if they were a little bit difficult, you know… physics, organic chemistry, not the easiest stuff, but I nailed them!"

Participant 2, a 25 year old student veteran who re-enrolled after 15 month combat deployment to Afghanistan, expressed, "Um, so I guess you could just call it the military in general improved my, uh, my grades."

Some participants noted a general excitement in coming back to school. Participant 10 said:

> "Uh, while I was excited about coming back, I looked forward to it the entire time I was in the Army, uh, you know I had always loved education. I was really excited about coming back into the learning atmosphere."

Participant 9, a 23 year old student veteran who re-enrolled after a six month training stint, noted, "I just wasn't really focused on academics and after spending two years in the real world doing the ole' military thing, I was very excited about being back in school…"

Coupled with the excitement of coming back to school, participants offered that their military service reinforced the value of education. The value of education was explained in terms of dealing with soldiers without an academic background. As Participant 14, a 27 year old student veteran who re-enrolled after a seven month non-combat deployment, noted:

> "Being in the military is not an academic setting. I think the military strives to try to, like, tell people, uh, they're gonna get a great education and we're gonna support you like a learning environment, but compared to academia it's, I don't know…"

Participant 14 went on to say:

> "…they are just human being who operate at a level, you know – they're pretty good Marines, they do their job, but the things that they do outside of the workplace are reprehensible. I mean, just like having to deal with those people on a continual basis was definitely something I struggled with."

Participant 10 further explained:

> "…more important to see the value of a good education 'cause I had seen the flip side. I had seen those people who didn't have an education and their options were just incredibly limited. I saw what I could do if I had a degree and I was going to do anything to get it. They were not the most intelligent of people, not the most educated either. And so, most of them like I told you, they just didn't have no intention or desire of pursuing higher education and they were in the Army because that was really the only place they could make a decent living, you know, that they had found. A few of them, I talked to and asked them what they did back in the civilian world …… they were gas station attendants, uh, bag boys, uh, you know, one of them had a decent job. He was a superintendant, like a shipping supervisor, of a plant. For the most part, it was very low income jobs. They knew that they were actually not terribly upset of going in the Army, 'cause they were making more money. So it was kinda depressing to see that and that was when I began to see that they are not lying when they say that education is worth a lot these days. You can't get very many places without a decent one."

Only a few participants noted the excitement over re-enrolling in a learning environment and the acknowledged the value of education. That said, these comments are

closely related to more specific concepts described by re-enrolling student veterans. Specific concepts noted by the researcher were: (a) positive academic transition, (b) increased academic focus, (c) academic work is a mission, and (d) did not utilize academic support.

Positive academic transition.

Student veterans described their academic transitions in positive terms. The researcher noted several concepts which supported positive academic transition. Participants expressed the academic transition was positive, smooth, and not as difficult as they anticipated. Student veterans noted their academic performance in terms of grades and Grade Point Average (GPA) increased.

When asked about his academic transition, Participant 10 said, "I would describe it as very positive I would say." Participant 9 noted, "I did, uh, exceedingly well after I came back." In a similar observation, Participant 3, a 24 year old combat veteran who served a twelve month deployment, stated:

> "Uh, overall, it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. The, uh, classes in my major – I only had a few left actually – so those, the key ones weren't that bad. The other classes that I took were a little, you know, lower level so they were a little easier."

Participant 11, a 29 year old student veteran who was deployed on a three month non-combat tour, offered, "as far as the process of transitioning back to education, uh, like I said the process was smoother than I could have anticipated."

Participant 2 stated, "Overall I'm a much better student than what I was before, before I was deployed." Participant 3 provided, "So overall, coming back to school, I've actually done a little bit better than I had before I left, and I haven't found it too hard in

most of these classes so far." These statements are explained further by student veterans who denoted positive factors such as improved Grade Point Average (GPA), increased academic focus, and improved time management.

In regard to improved GPA, Participant 2 described his first semester back in college as, "…the best semester I've, uh, had at college grade-wise." Participant 1, a 23 year old student veteran who spent 15 months in Iraq on a combat tour, noted, "Um, well, my GPA stayed about a 3.0 – it's not exactly, it's a little bit below, but when I left it was a lot below – so, yea, I guess it's improved a little bit." When describing his GPA, Participant 10 expressed, "…but academically I've improved my GPA every semester. Uh, that first semester back, I had some fairly difficult classes and, uh, I had all A's except for one B." Participant 9 said, "When I left I had, well I had been in electrical engineering for two years and I had a 2.3 GPA, and since I've been back I have a 3.3, so I brought it up from a 2.2 to a 2.8."

Increased academic focus.

The researcher found improved GPA to be related to student veterans' increased academic focus. Participants stated they had more academic focus, dedication, discipline, and improved time management. Participant 12, 27 years old, who served an eight month combat stint with the Marine Corps, noted:

> "Like when I came back, my goal I set for myself, was like hey, 'I want to graduate with a 3.0.' I'm like, 'Hey, I can do that.' Like, I mean, I've been making like 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5s since I've been back but it's not going to pull my 1.8 up….it's like a 2.5 now."

Participant 6, a 25 year old non-combat veteran who was deployed for 11 months, said of student veterans' increased academic focus:

"Um, and we're more focused – more focused on getting our degree, whereas some of them might be more focused on going out and having a good time. So yea, I was more focused on getting my education done. And it was tempting to go into one of those organizations where they do a lot of social activities, but I just decided that wasn't gonna be my focus."

Participant 9 explained that he was in school to be serious: "I'm sure, the perception I give off is a 'very focused-on-what-I'm-doing', and uh, I don't really have time for screwin' around." He noted he was "…just focused…and dedicated." He further expressed:

"Seems like there's a lot of the other students that they don't know what they want to do after they graduate. They're just kind of going through the motions. And after having been out in the real world and worked a forty hour, fifty hour week job and coming back from that it really fo-, it really focuses you on what you want to do, thinking forward, to what you're going to do after college, what kind of, where you want to live, career thoughts and, you know… You're no longer…in that transition period between high school and the real world. You're finally out there, and you have to start thinking forward about these kind of things."

Participant 10 articulated increased academic focus in terms of motivation when he said, "…doing a little bit of self-reflection, I could tell that I am more mature now, more disciplined. Now I can sit down and study without being distracted easily. I do have the motivation to be here."

Those who worked closely with student veterans articulated similar observations. During her interview, the administrative assistant to the dean of undergraduate studies noted the motivation of student veterans, saying, "…but as far as any of them allowing themselves just to continually drop down – most of them are hard workers, they really are." The Veterans Administration certifying official described student veterans as students who excel:

"If their schooling has been interrupted by a call to active duty or something and they are able to come back, they really want to complete it, they want to be finished. So those students, really most of them excel, you know, they know what they are doing well at, they want to finish and they make good grades, the majority of them, really."

A concept closely related to increased academic focus was improved time management. Participant 12 explained that his outlook on time changed when he re-enrolled after serving in the military. Speaking of his attitude prior to the military, he noted:

"You know it was like, I guess, before I left I never realized there were so many hours in the day. And, uh, I mean, consequently when I left Clemson the first time I was on academic probation. My GPA was about like a 1.8 and just cause I didn't go to class."

Participant 1's comment offers a corollary to Participants 12's statement:

"…time management. You know, being deployed and being in the military in general, you usually have a fairly busy schedule, so coming back to school and working a job – it's kinda helped me out a little bit, I guess you could say, with my time management skills."

Academic work as a mission.

Some participants explained their academic work as an extension of their military mindset. More specifically, student veterans expressed a 'mission' outlook in relation to their coursework. Participant 12's comment provides an example of this military mindset:

"I mean, you get in there and like, wow, I actually go to class and do what I'm supposed to…..this is not hard at all. So, I mean, that's that, I mean you know, I guess that was doing what you're told pretty much. Like I'm supposed to go to this class, you know, I guess that means like going back to the military….you do what you're told. The teacher tells me to do this, whereas before, I was like, whatever."

Participant 2 stated, "...after a year in Afghanistan, coming back and doing these two or three page papers and homework assignments, it's really not that much of a problem – it's like a mission, basically."

Participant 9 recounted an instance where a professor approached him after class to discuss a presentation he gave for his communications class:

"For instance, I had to take a, uh, communications course and, uh, they had us stand up and do PowerPoint presentations. Of course I get up there, and I'm practically standin' at attention sayin' I'm gonna brief you on this, this, and this..."

 The professor noted he did well on his presentation but challenged him on the formality of his presentation style. Participant 9 used the term "briefing" to describe the class activity, which further indicated the 'mission mentality'. The carryover of military influence was apparent to the researcher, and, though stated directly by only three participants, the concept of academic work as a mission was clearly related to the increased focus, motivation, and seriousness expressed by student veterans.

Did not utilize academic support.

Most participants noted they did not utilize formal academic support during their re-enrollment. At first, the researcher questioned this phenomenon and thought this could be a contradiction to academic emphasis. That said, the researcher found that many participants did not need academic support. When asked if he utilized any formalized academic support during his re-enrollment, Participant 14 remarked, "Uh, no... I mean, I'll say that I'm a pretty good student and I never used that stuff before." Participant 3 further explained:

> "Um, I guess I felt like I really didn't need it that much, and some of my classes, you know like these computer engineering classes, they're higher level, and that's

kinda hard to find specific tutors for those, that kind of subjects."

Other student veterans noted the potential to need academic support, but indicated they were able to persist without it. Participant 8's comment illustrates this ability to persevere:

> "Um, the classes I had weren't even that bad, so even if I would have known some….I had my statistics class last semester and I definitely could have used some for that. But, other than that, it wasn't that bad."

Similarly, Participant 10 talked about the desire to push himself academically to see if he could achieve:

> "And you know... a lot of it also, especially for me, is that I always want to see if I can do more. Sometimes...I was telling a friend of mine last night actually...sometimes I don't know when to quit. Uh, you know, if I can do something that, like I don't think I can do...like, 'Whoa...I wonder what I can do next?' You know, I just want to push myself, you know, higher and especially since going after the military and back from the military, my first semester wasn't really hard. I took a little bit of an easier load and I thought I should be able to crank this out. This should be pretty easy for me."

Most student veterans did not utilize formalized academic support resources, such as Supplemental Instruction (SI), tutoring, or the institution's academic success center. Participants did, however, utilize some informal avenues of support. When asked if he utilized academic support during re-enrollment, Participant 9 said, "Umm…can't really think of any off the top of my head other than just, um, being really active in speaking with professors and talking to them…" Participant 4, after looking at the researcher like he had asked a ridiculous question, remarked, "None, other than my academic advisor." Participant 1 further explained:

> "I didn't use any. I mean, I talked to my academic advisor, obviously – um, you know, which type of classes I needed to take, and you know, how he thought I should go about, um, preparing to come back to school and the classes I was

going to take, but other than that, I mean, it wasn't – I don't think I really did a whole lot different."

Maturity

The subcategory of maturity illustrates student veterans' explanations of their increased maturity resulting from military service. Participant 13 was a 22 year old student veteran who took seven months off from college to pursue training in the Air Force. Upon re-enrolling, he explained:

"Um, I came back with a much higher – what I felt was a much higher – maturity level. Um, I've always been – felt – I was, uh, fairly mature even before I left, and – but going through the rigid structure of like, I mean, even just for those seven months that I was gone. Uh, coming back to college, and fraternity life, it was a whole new perspective on how I saw things and where I saw importances in life – it's a completely different way of looking at it."

Participant 12 described how his mindset changed when he re-enrolled after serving in the Marine Corps:

"Before the way I approached things and the way I think about things and then, like, yeah, the stuff I think about is like...yes, most definitely. Because of the military and my experiences within it, it most definitely has… Part of it to is like a maturity thing...like me, I wasn't mature enough to...I wasn't as steady in my life that I had any business being in college, you know. I was strictly there because that's what everybody else did."

Participant 15 noted a similar change, stating, "…'cause with that time I spent in the service I was also maturing, so now I'm looking at it as a 25 year old looking as opposed to someone who's three or four years younger."

Several participants made overt references to the relationship between the military and maturation. Participant 10 provided, "Um, and now I just felt like I was more mature. Ironically, even being in the Army, being subordinate all the time, really prepared me to

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be on my own." Participant 5 stated, "…in the military, you know, you do mature a lot

through that, too."

Student veterans discussed maturity in terms of experiencing different cultures

and garnering a more worldly perspective. Participant 10 said:

> "Especially, I think, the maturity factor that I had had a few years to get out and kinda see the world, see the application of what I may be studying, uh, more important to see the value of a good education…"

Participant 12 offered:

> "Yeah, like there's certain things especially people coming in now that have that cross-cultural awareness. Like I mean, I guess I had already taken a course when I was here the first time and satisfied that but if you're trying to tell me that I'm going to have to take a cross-cultural awareness class, I'm like, really? Yeah, like I've been to Iraq twice and Afghanistan once and I'm like what are you going to tell me? I've been to Africa, like what are you going to tell me regarding cross-culture in a class? Hey, like I know it's different."

Participant 8 observed differences between Western and Middle Eastern culture:

> "Yeah, because the Middle East culture, you could do a 180 from Western is about…..it would point right at them. Unbelievable how different it is. You know they don't value life as much. They don't take it...they don't value life like we do. Just everything is different."

Participant 13 further explained:

> "So, coming back from the military, kinda get a worldly, so to speak, outlook on things…I didn't really fall back into old ways, but it's just – it gave me a whole other perspective on how I viewed life and how I viewed college and the steps I needed to take to get to where I needed to go…"

Three participants noted a change in social outlook when they re-enrolled. The

researcher found this change to be closely aligned with maturity. Participant 13's

comment on his adjusted outlook of his social life illustrates this concept:

> "Um, it's just – before I left, there were a lot of late nights and a lot of not being able to get up and go to class and, you know, kinda having a really carefree

outlook on it. And coming back, it was a lot of early nights and early mornings, just getting up to stay in a routine. Um, and, being able to say 'If I don't go out tonight and have drinks, it's not going to kill me, and if I stay in and study that's gonna better me further down the road', and it really made me think – kinda have more down-the-road perspective instead of 'My friends might not be happy if I don't have a night out' – five years down the road, having this mentality could really help me out, so… it was kinda of maturity, loosely termed, maturity level."

On a similar note, Participant 9 explained:

"Uh, yea I was able to say 'No' a lot more, ha. It used to seem like, I felt obligated to go out with people during the week just 'cause they asked. And when I got back I said, "No, I got other things going on, but we'll get up, you know, Thursday night or you know. Well say I can't tonight, but we'll do it later." And so, I took more control of the situation instead of just going with the flow."

Participant 4 noted a more drastic change in her social outlook. She said:

"I really don't get along with anyone anymore 'cause I have a certain mindset that I didn't have when I was here before. And I'm not as social as I used to be. So, I just kinda keep to myself."

Participant 4's comment led the researcher to further explore an emerging theme, difficulty relating to peers. While memoing, the researcher formulated a distinction between difficulty relating to peers and difficulty relating to younger students. The researcher found difficulty relating to younger students to be a concept linked to student veterans' increased maturity. It is important to note that "younger" in this sense encompasses both age and maturity levels. Though some student veterans are the same age as their peers, they view themselves as "older". The following section specifically examines this concept in relation to maturity.

Difficulty relating to younger students.

Participants tended to be older than their non-veteran peers. The influence of the military and different life experiences led the researcher to deduce that student veterans

had difficulty relating to peers. Four of the 15 participants noted they were married.

Participant 5 described how being married and older impacted his relationship with

fellow students: "I'm married and older so they just didn't know how to interact with me,

I guess. It was kind of silly...they were kinda standoffish." Participant 8 said, "…you

know, I'm married so I don't get involved too much…"

Marriage more closely related to age than influenced by military service.

However, marriage was indicative of a larger concept noted by student veterans: different

priorities. Differing priorities amongst student veterans and non-veteran peers contributed

to difficulty relating to younger students. Participant 11's comments are indicative of this

observation:

> "I've learned that the organization of the military and what different people in various Mos do...I don't know….they are not discussed on the civilian side of things and certainly not by 19 or 20 year old college kids. There's no beer involved in learning about military structure… Yes, I don't think that you could help but notice the different priorities, you know. They just all call me the old man. I think I'm the second oldest guy in my major… I think the probably the biggest factor in any difference there were would probably be the age and maturity difference… Uh, it's just that my priorities are much different than some people."

Participant 9 alluded to a reevaluation of priorities after he re-enrolled:

> "…coming back from that it really fo-, it really focuses you on what you want to do, thinking forward, to what you're going to do after college, what kind of, where you want to live, career thoughts and, you know, how you're gonna make your, how you're gonna make your insurance payments on your car and like you need this medical insurance or this one. I mean, it really re-, it opens up your eyes."

A statement by Participant 10 further hints at differences in priorities amongst student

veterans and younger non-veteran peers:

> "The maturity thing was a huge difference, um, especially since a lot of them I

saw, you know, they didn't pay for their bills really...they didn't make their own way. A lot of them didn't have jobs even. Uh, they had nothing to worry about but going to school. And then they always knew their parents would have their back if they got in trouble. So it was almost like a consequence for the atmosphere for them."

Several participants explicitly linked maturity, differing priorities, varying attitudes, and age in their evaluation of younger students. Participant 3 expressed, "Well, I'd say I guess my attitude's changed, mainly because I've been growing up and I seem older now than most of them and I see younger, immature kids kinda here to party, kinda, not really move on…" Participant 1 stated, "And, I don't know – I do see a lot of 'em – even though they may be my same age, same age as I am, um, they seem a bit immature, to me." A statement made by Participant 6 best illustrates the overall difficulties student veterans experienced when relating to their younger peers:

> "But I would also say the maturity factor my take a part in it, you know, because I would see other students who would slack off or be immature, and with how I became so mature in the military and I just kinda saw other students being inconsiderate and irresponsible. I didn't see a lot of that, but when I did I would start thinking, 'What's wrong with them?' I'm so used to being surrounded by people who take on a lot of responsibility, you know being in the military. There were some people who were irresponsible in the military which was unfortunate, but you know, you had more – you had one or two people like that – but when you're in college, you have more like people – incoming freshmen, sophomores – who are still growing up. And being older, I would say that was something that was kinda a transition difference in terms of attitudes towards other student. Um, but, I really wouldn't – I wouldn't feel like I'm above them or anything, but whenever they would be immature or anything like that it would stand out to me. And it would really affect my impression on a lot of other students."

The previous statement by Participant 6 provides a segue way to the next subcategory, difficulty relating to peers. Whereas maturity was the predominant influence affecting student veterans' relationships with peers, the following subcategory illustrates the relationship in a different light. While the aforementioned concept of difficulty

relating to younger students is closely connected with the subcategory of difficulty relating to peers, the researcher deduced significant variance to offer the following section as an integral subcategory of military influence.

Difficulty Relating to Peers

The subcategory of difficulty relating to peers describes student veterans' perceptions of their non-veteran counterparts. More specifically, many participants offered a critical view of their peers. Through further analysis and reflection, the researcher deduced many of these criticisms stemmed from student veterans' military experience. It is important to note that difficulty relating to peers does not mean student veterans cannot create relationships with students or that they generally dislike students. Rather, difficulty relating to peers explains the challenge of student veterans being able to relate to and understand non-military students.

Participant 3 noted a lower level of dedication in his peers. His comments explain how student veterans' military influence made it difficult to relate to fellow students:

> "Uh, just everything you know: their grades, their dedication. That's one thing that affected me a lot – you know, in the military, you know you gotta be on time and everything – dedicated – this I see people showing up late all the time not caring about anything. That's been a little bit of a change for me, too: not really caring as much as they should about something that's important… I guess, you know, no motivation, no discipline."

Participant 2 noted, "Uh, I guess that's from, you know, being used to, uh, being held to standards, you start to apply standards to other people…" This statement implied student veterans were accustomed to a different set of standards, a more disciplined environment, and a heightened level of dedication. These standards differed starkly from those of non-veteran students. Another comment by Participant 2 further explained the dichotomy:

"When I came back I would say initially my first semester – probably my first year back – probably – I don't wanna say 'disdain', but it was like I was comparing myself to them and maybe I was finding everyone else, like, not up to my standards."

Because of their military experience, student veterans had more investment in their education. Aside from the maturity difference noted in the previous section, student veterans expressed other sentiments that created difficulties between themselves and their peers. The following section highlights these sentiments.

Criticism of students.

Student veterans' military experience clearly influenced their attitudes towards non-veteran peers. Participants alluded to increased investment in their education because they paid for school themselves. Interestingly, student veterans connected a lack of accountability to students who did not pay their own way. As Participant 3 explained:

"…a lot of 'em – a lot of 'em – they aren't paying for school. I guess that's just kinda the thing with me – I've always paid for my own school, and so I see it differently than they do and they don't seem to fear the consequences or anything."

Participant 10 offered additional explanation of this criticism:

"…a lot of them I saw, you know, they didn't pay for their bills really…..they didn't make their own way. A lot of them didn't have jobs even. Uh, they had nothing to worry about but going to school. And then they always knew their parents would have their back if they got in trouble. So it was almost like a consequence-free for the atmosphere for them."

Two participants expressed irritation that they were paying for school while many of their peers were not. Participant 5 expressed:

"Um, I think maybe, and this might be overdramatic, I guess, but more that I feel like they are less….not that I want them to accommodate me for my own circumstances, but I guess that I kinda feel like they are used to just having, you know, parents pay their tuition or do whatever is needed for their student through

the mail, a fairly easy process where, you know, things like that aren't as easy for me…"

When asked how he would characterize his attitude towards his fellow students,

Participant 9 sarcastically replied:

> "Um, if you're referring to the trust fund babies, uh…there's, there's some of those out here. And I don't have any problems with them. I mean, they're good, good people just like the next. Just, they're gettin' spoon-fed and good for them."

> When describing his peers, Participant 15 offered, "I guess some arrogance…

And, uh, I would say some of it could be attributed to being spoiled – never having had to

work for what they have." This statement provides a segue way to further criticisms

noted by student veterans. These criticisms are more closely related to the concept of

work, in that student veterans know what real work is because of their military

experience. An example of this vein of criticism is provided by Participant 2's comment:

> "Some students complain about silly things like one or two page papers, something like that. I noticed a lot of that my first semester back. But maybe I was looking for it – I don' know – maybe I came back to Clemson expecting to find students who didn't know what hard work was."

Participant 11 noted a sense of entitlement among his peers: "I think the entitlement of

some people, like I've noticed a fair share of that...how there are people who believe that

they are entitled to everything regardless of their worth, their merit."

Several participants described their perceptions of peers' carelessness,

irresponsibility, and lack of discipline. Participant 3 stated, "…like I said, the students –

the students around here I see a little more lack of discipline or whatever,

responsibility…" In statements he made about relating to students, Participant 15 noted,

"Yea, I'm just not used to that notion of responsibility…or irresponsibility I guess."

Participant 13's remarks offer further description of this perception:

> "I assume that the majority of students – freshmen and sophomores – that I've had are not veterans. Uh, and I would say that the fact that they, uh, don't follow instructions, uh, don't come to things on time, are just completely oblivious to a lot of things…"

Participant 15 remembered the careless work habits of some of his fellow students. He

noted the following:

> "Um, for instance, some of the students in our department work out at the Center, and uh, our department is pretty good about employing students, and some of the people are just dumb asses when it comes to working. Uh, one of them refused to wear gloves when he was working with a mercury – you're handling mercury. You look at him and you're like 'They just told you to wear gloves; wear your gloves, and it's for your own damn good, too.'"

Participant 15 was an avid motorcyclist. As he described his difficulty relating to his non-military peers' carelessness, he offered an analogy to motorcycling:

> "I ride a motorcycle – been riding one for quite awhile now. And I laugh – I don't laugh – I'm somewhat concerned when those same people who've never had to work for what they get buy a bike and ride it around and it's crashed within a month because they're – I don't know – arrogance or ignorance or what… You know, the new sport bikes are fast. But it's that same attitude towards 'I'm invincible, I can do anything, don't think twice…' I came across one guy – his bike's been down a couple of times – and, um, I won't tell you how I came about him, but he didn't have insurance on his ride. So keep that in the back of your mind… But didn't have insurance on his ride because he'd gotten a ticket doing something like 90 mph down the highway – just like if you started past Subway and cruised down towards the gym… And um, I looked at him and was like 'Dude, what would happen if someone pulled out in front of you?' And his response was 'Oh no, I was watching.' I said, 'Well apparently you missed the cop.' I mean, just that kind of behavior that I probably would have noticed when I was younger – now I look at it and I'm like 'Not cool.' And then the whole insurance thing… And, oh, he had a suspended license."

Student veterans also found it difficult to relate to their fellow students' naivety

and lack of experience. Participant 10 articulated this concept, saying:

"I see it as the best thing I've ever done. It was tough, yes, it interrupted my normal schedule of life, yes, but I would do it again, yes, so I feel that I'm at an advantage over them.......especially the fact that they have been in school their whole lives. They are training to have a place in a world that they haven't experienced yet."

Participant 9 observed a lack of experience amongst his peers:

"I think they have, I think they lack vision, and I think they lack, um, a grasp on reality. Not in any kind of derogatory way. I just don't think that they have that experience or that, foresight to understand certain, certain things."

Student veterans' criticisms of peers had undertones of frustration, irritation, and anger. The researcher took note of this, and found student veterans clearly articulated these sentiments. In the following section, participants describe their emotions of irritation, anger, and frustration regarding their peers.

Students irritate me.

The researcher found student veterans' criticism of peers was often accompanied by emotions of irritation, frustration, and anger. Participant 14 said the following when discussing non-military peers' propensity for being late:

"…so maybe I'm over the top on this one, but I think that's a big thing that I see: that people make a point of not being on time, it seems like to me, and I find that irritating. It shows to me that – it kinda shows a poor form of respect to the party that's waiting on you."

Participant 4 indicated she had a particularly difficult social transition and had a hard time relating to her peers. When the researcher asked her how she characterized her attitude towards her fellow college students, she paused, smiled, and said, "I get angry most of the time. I have picked fights, and I don't know – if they piss me off I let them know it; I'm very blunt." She went on to describe how it was challenging to come back and listen to peers who did not have her experience, peers whom she felt were naïve:

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"For the last four years now I've been – I was a sergeant, which in the Marine Corps I was over like everything below me – so I got used to being the one that ordered people around and not the one who has to come back and listen to anybody else."

Participant 12, also a Marine, made a similar observation as he described his difficulty

relating to students:

"Yeah, it's kind like, you know, like I was talking about the kid that gets on my nerves. He's always got something to say…like I don't even pay him any attention. Like a while back, beforehand, I would have been throwing stuff at him. Occasionally, it bothers me when people are just like…talk all the time. I don't know why but like last night, some kid, like a young guy 20 or 21, he just wouldn't shut up. 'Shut up!' Yeah, like that was a big thing you know when I came back…like I had a temper. Yeah, like I had a very, very bad temper. So you know it's just like a lot of times I wouldn't even know like why I was getting angry. You know I would see something I wouldn't like and I would just be pissed. Like you know, I mean, it was interesting. It's not that I'm unhappy, it's just like last night, I mean... I've learned to control it a lot better than I did when I initially came back, but I mean like, 'Stop talking to me, stop talking in general, just shut up.' So I don't know…stuff like that is kinda weird because I mean, that filter thing, you know some things…I feel like it's either I really don't care about like somebody or what they're saying…it really gets to me, really gets to me."

The administrative assistant to the dean of undergraduate studies witnessed frustration

from student veterans as they listened to their peers complain:

"Some of them get kind of frustrated because, not frustrated – what's the word? Gosh, like if a vet is in my office sitting there talking to me just about nothing, just passing the time, shooting the breeze and one student comes in that has as problem and when they leave after I help them, sometimes I've noticed them looking at them like, 'You think that's a problem?' It's like, 'That ain't no problem – let me tell you about a problem.' Their problems are different. To them a problem is really a problem where a regular student just might have a class that they don't want to go to an eight o'clock class, something as minute as that. Their problems are different. I guess they see the whole world different. And I can see where that makes a big difference."

Other participants did not specifically articulate anger, frustration, or irritation,

but their tone, taken in context with their statements, still conveyed these emotions. For

example, Participant 5 expressed his perception of his peers by talking about a group

project assignment for his class:

> "…maybe the rank structure thing, I guess, would be there is no accountability to other people in your groups and things like that so people would just not show up. You would schedule a meeting to do a project or something like that and they would come drunk and not participate or things like that, you know. Um, and just be disrespectful, I guess, a lot of times."

Two student veterans alluded to irritation stemming from students' assumptions and

insensitivity towards their military experience. As Participant 1 explained, students did

not have any idea what he did while he was overseas. His comments hint that this caused

him mild irritation:

> "…our job over there was mainly to clear minefields, I mean, it wasn't – we weren't out there kicking in doors and shooting at people. But, you know, you tell 'em you cleared a minefield and they automatically assume that you're out there digging it up with a shovel, and we had all kinds of specialized equipment for our safety and to make the process more efficient. But they don't understand that."

Participant 1 further highlighted students' insensitivity towards his combat experience,

saying, "Well it's kinda like, um, I hate to say 'college students' like I'm not one, but

most of the college students you talk to 'em and they're like, 'Oh, did you kill

anybody?'" Participant 2 noted a similar observation: "Um, like some who are like the

ones who ask you if you've killed anyone it's usually like, 'Wow, do you even know

what you just said – do you have any idea?' So there's that."

The researcher noticed another interesting concept that emerged pertaining to

criticism of peers. While some participants were involved in ROTC and noted the

program as a beneficial aid during re-enrollment, others had a critical view of ROTC

students. The following section illustrates participants' perceptions of ROTC as a concept linked to difficulty relating to peers.

Not happy with ROTC.

The Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program was not a significant feature of this study. However, two participants specifically mentioned some challenges they had relating to ROTC cadets. The researcher felt inclined to include this subsection because ROTC is a visible component of the research site's military heritage. However, student veterans may not equate ROTC with the military; this is important to note because the researcher thought most non-military campus community members would connect ROTC with the military. Participant 2 confirmed this assumption, saying, "I get the feeling most of the time I just look like a ROTC cadet to most of these professors. I can't blame 'em if they think I'm just another ROTC kid." Participant 2 commented further on this matter and stated that students might confuse him with ROTC cadets:

> "As far as the rest of the student body goes, I do think they, uh – I don't think they can tell a difference. I mean, uh, not unless they talk to you. I have had a few conversations with ROTC kids and I just usually end up coming away like "Wow, he's gonna be in for a shocker when he gets in." I mean, they're idealistic which is a good thing, but… I don't wanna say I'm jaded or cynical, but maybe I am. Maybe. But realistic I guess. You have your good experiences and you have your bad. Unfortunately, most of these ROTC kids only see the good. They don't realize there's gonna be some bad along with that. But it is interesting talking to some of them."

Participant 2 described his perception of ROTC in the following terms:

> "I don't know about civilians – I know in the military, we do not consider ROTC military, that's pretty much a constant. We – it's not that we dislike them or hate them, it's that they're essentially a club for the military. They've never done – unless they're like juniors or seniors and they've signed the contract – they've never done anything, uh, not really done any official training. They certainly haven't gone through boot camp or basic. Um, they wear the uniform – the same

uniform that we wear – and sometimes you do hear stories about some of these cadets who, um, think their rank means something when in actuality it doesn't… So, I mean, I appreciate what they do – we definitely need people with college degrees in the military, but you can't give – it's not like on the same level. It's kinda like a fan club how we look at it."

The researcher noted sarcasm and cynicism in Participant 2's comments about ROTC. He also noted some criticisms – specifically naivety – of ROTC which paralleled those student veterans expressed about non-military and non-ROTC students. Participant 15's comments further reinforced the researcher's observations:

"My first year here I did Air Force ROTC, um, thinking about becoming an officer. But coming from that to the ROTC – I was unhappy with it, didn't like it, and decided that it wasn't worth it. Um, I actually had one kid say, 'You don't understand – in the real Air Force…' And I looked at him and he said, 'Oh, but you're just a Reservist…' 'Listen here asshole: three months ago I was in the fucking desert.' ROTC sucked."

Participant 15 explained further naivety amongst ROTC cadets:

"Well, ROTC is, you know, 'The book says we should do this and we're gonna do it, we're gonna do it, we're gonna do it…', which in the real Air Force, officers get tired of saluting back. So it's kinda, it's almost a courtesy unless you're directly walking next to them or whatever… But if they're in the middle of doing something over here and they walk by over there you don't come to attention and go… No!"

The researcher asked Participant 15 if he would classify ROTC as a source of support during his re-enrollment. Participant 15 replied, "Oh god, no." More interestingly, he went on to state that his veteran status was not appreciated by ROTC cadets: "Um, and all the people in ROTC knew, but it was almost looked down upon. Whatever. Um, like I said, I really didn't enjoy that."

Again, it is imperative to note that only two participants expressed negativity towards ROTC. The negativity is significant, however, because it is a reminder that (a)

student veterans see themselves distinct from ROTC and (b) campus community members cannot assume that student veterans are ROTC cadets and vice versa. The expressed negativity also implies that ROTC may not be a source of support or familiarity to all student veterans.

The researcher extrapolated a final subcategory, pride, within military influence. The following section explains how military influence reinforced pride, self-reliance, and individual will.

Pride

The subcategory of pride illustrates how military influence equipped student veterans to rely on personal determination and individual will to troubleshoot problems and navigate processes. Participant 10 articulated the pride he felt resulting from his military service. With more subtlety, he also hinted pride was defined by his accomplishments and his perseverance through an experience that non-military persons did not have:

> "Uh, but yeah, I will say I walk around, stand a little bit taller, um, I'm good at balancing my stuff because hey, I'm proud to be here. Uh, I know what I've done for this country already and for the students and for the parents and everything so, yeah I think it definitely sets me….threatening the modesty again….definitely sets me up above everyone else because I know maybe one percent of them will actually do what I've done. It's a kind of special feeling."

As the researcher conducted interviews, he noticed several participants expressed they did not utilize avenues of support because the military had taught them to self-sufficient. The researcher analyzed this observation in his field notes and memos and came to the conclusion that student veterans were expressing they were too proud to seek help from others. During subsequent interviews, the researcher began to tell participants

he had noticed this potential theme and asked for their feedback. Several participants

indicated that this was not the case, that military pride did not prevent them from utilizing

academic or social support. However, several student veterans said they could understand

and agreed with the researcher's observation.

Participant 12 offered the following remarks to the researcher's observation about

military pride:

> "Oh yeah. Um, but my mentality is like I guess to a degree you do have like a, you know like an ego…like, 'Hey, I've done all this like, you know, what have you done?' Because that's the, you know, big thing in the military is like, you know, everybody looks at everybody and it's like well, you know, he's done 'x' amount of training and it's like, 'What have you done?' You know….so it's a big thing and so like a lot of guys carry that out…I mean like, a lot of the things I always looked at in hard times and stuff is like, 'If this guy can do this, why can't I..?' I mean, like it wasn't even…and as far as like the Student Veterans Association and such, I'm not one of those people like to really seek help or anything. I would never have anything to do with that stuff."

Participant 9 had this to say in response the researcher's question about military pride:

> "Uh, I, I would agree with that. There's certainly a lot of self-pride having gone through the whole military experience. It's like, if I can, if I can do this you know, I can stand on my head in a bucket of water, for this semester, kind of thing."

Participant 10 was able to relate to the researcher's observation about military pride. He

noted the following:

> "I can understand that. Um, I've always been a little bit of a…I don't know, maybe I'm a type A, a little, a perfectionist? I can definitely see the pride aspect of, 'Look what I've done so far.' I went through some things myself that I never thought I would do or even could do and I made it through them. And I, so you know, I can definitely see how that would happen. You know, 'I've been through this, I should be able to handle school just fine. I'm not going to get weak now just because I'm back in an environment that's not, you know, a whole lot more forgiving than the one I just came from. I'm gonna keep my own standards high so that I can show that I can still do it.' I can see that!"

Participant 11 noted the researcher's explanation of military pride did not characterize

him personally, but he had noticed pride affecting fellow student veterans. He said:

> "Personally, I ask for help whenever I need it. I'll never let pride get in the way of anything. Uh, but I know of a few other veterans, actually a couple in my department, and I would say that you're spot-on in your observation."

The administrative assistant to the dean of undergraduate studies responded to the

researcher's inquiry about pride by telling a story about one veteran who had trouble after

re-enrolling. She explained a person would not know he was in trouble:

> "…because he's just like that, that he's not gonna go and get help or not going to ask for it. I can't think of a one that would come in and actually – maybe one – but most of them, they don't come in and say, 'Hey listen, I'm not doing well.'"

The Veterans Administration certifying official made a similar observation:

> "But a lot of students don't necessarily just open up about those things to me. You know, it's usually in looking at their degree progress report, maybe there's been a lot of drop/add activity with them, you know dropping courses. Maybe they have withdrawn from the University before, so you can kind of look at the record and see that something is going on but it's really up to them to kinda raise that subject and start that conversation."

> Statements from Participant 13 best illustrate the effect of military pride. The

researcher always asked questions about motivation to seek academic and social support

before discussing his observation of military pride. In response to the question about

academic support, Participant 13 laughed and said:

> "Like I said, I'm a very stubborn person and I like to do things on my own and my own way and I hate asking for help. Um, and that definitely didn't change any with the military service now – it kind of more or less ingrained in you to try and figure it out yourself first and if absolutely you need help, then go ask for it. But, when I first got back, it was kind of tough to ask for it."

The researcher followed up on this comment and asked Participant 13 if he had seen and

could relate to military pride. Participant 13's response to this question clearly identified

the impact military service had on student veterans' development of pride and self-

reliance:

> "I've seen that a lot. Um, they – it, it comes from – they want you to be self-sufficient. Um, in the heat of things, you need to be able to kind of take a deep breath and assess the situation that you're in and everything's that's going on around and you need to be able to take care of yourself, um, take care of yourself first, and then take care of everything else around you next. Um, so coming off that, you really want to take care of yourself and take care of yourself alone; you really don't wanna have to depend on anyone else… Yea, I've absolutely noticed that."

Summary of Military Influence

During her interview with the researcher, the Veterans Administration certifying

official provided an excellent summation of the noticeable impact of military influence:

> "Well, I think usually my veterans are a little older than the average college student. So I think they just kind of see them maybe as a little bit younger, maybe a little bit less experienced. I have never really thought about that very much… But in general I think the veteran student is just a little more interested in actually meeting their educational goals and there seems to be an attitude of just trying to get on with things, get things done, just kinda that military idea of things. Veteran students generally, you know, they've read the directions to things, they get your emails and read them, and they are paying attention to where they are supposed to be and when. The general population student have a letter in their hand that I've sent them that tells them exactly what they need to do, and they haven't even read it, you know. They will see that my name's on it and see my office number on it and then just come on in. A veteran student does not do that. They don't, they know what courses they need to take, they are familiar with their catalogs, and they are paying attention to the things around them. General population students don't do that quite as much… I think it's because they have been in the military and they know how to follow directions, they know – they are more aware of consequences maybe for not getting things done or what have you. But I mean, they are prepared, they are paying attention. I couldn't say that enough and that's why working with veteran students is, you know, it's a good population of students. They are trying to do what they need to do."

> Military influence, the first cornerstone category, is perhaps the most important.

This section explained how student veterans' military service impacted their focus on

academics, their maturity level, created difficulties in relating to non-military peers, and ultimately reinforced self-sufficiency and pride. Student veterans articulated increased academic emphasis and improved GPA. Participants explained their military service had matured them, allowed them to see the world in a different light, and created an age gap with their younger peers. The military experience also made it difficult for student veterans to understand and relate to fellow college students, and participants tended to be critical of non-military peers. Finally, student veterans were taught self-sufficiency in the military which led to increased confidence, self-reliance, and pride.

In the military, student veterans developed focus, confidence, and discipline. They reevaluated priorities and garnered new outlooks. They also grew up. Participants' maturity ultimately contributed to and bolstered their increased academic emphasis and performance. Student veterans were emboldened by the competencies they developed in the military and felt they could entrust themselves to navigate challenging situations with perseverance and individual will. Their outlook on the world had changed, and this impacted the way they interacted with and viewed their fellow students.

Military influence directly affected student veterans' navigation of re-enrollment. Specifically, military influence taught student veterans to operate within rigid structures and protocols. In subsequent sections of this study, participants articulate the challenge of transitioning from military structure to the loose structure of a college campus. The carryover of military influence is apparent in the adjustment from military to college.

Military influence indirectly affected navigation of re-enrollment by directly impacting two subcategories, support and invisibility. Because of the maturity and

increased academic emphasis gained from the military, student veterans often chose not to utilize – or did not need – academic support. Pride and self-sufficiency also impacted veterans' utilization of both academic and social support. In subsequent sections of this study, student veterans' difficulty relating to peers is supplemented by a tendency to socialize with fellow veterans. Thus, difficulty relating to non-military peers impacted the types of support student veterans sought.

The invisibility category was also affected by military influence. Because student veterans were older and more mature, they were less likely to be involved in student organizations or live on campus, which ultimately impacted their visibility on campus. The maturity and, more accurately, humility participants developed in the military influenced whether or not and to whom they disclosed their veteran status. Thus, it was difficult to see student veterans because they often did not want to be seen. The following section illustrates the second cornerstone category, invisibility, using participants' own words.

Invisibility

This category explains student veterans' invisibility at the research site. Invisibility was both inadvertent and intentional. Inadvertent invisibility was attributed to students veterans' connection, or lack thereof, to campus. Participants also acknowledged a level of intentional invisibility by choosing to selectively disclosing their veteran status. The following section illustrates invisibility through two subcategories: (a) connection to campus and (b) selective identity. Figure 4 on the following page presents a visual breakdown of concepts within invisibility.

Figure 4. Invisibility: Sub-categorical Breakdown.
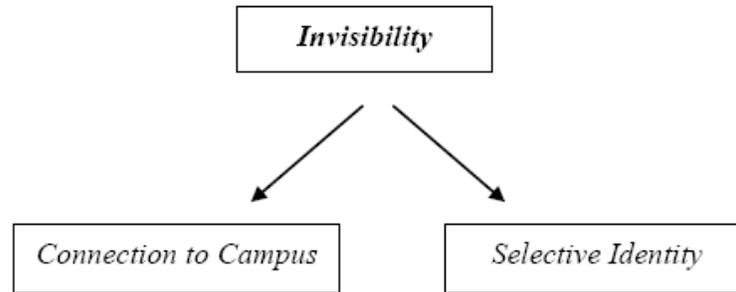
Connection to Campus

      The subcategory of connection to campus explains inadvertent invisibility within

the student veteran population. As noted in the discussion of military influence, student

veterans are often older and more mature. The age and maturity difference created

difficulty relating to peers; they also factored into veterans' desire to live off-campus and

lack of involvement in student organizations. In essence, the researcher found student

veterans to be removed from campus, thus making it challenging for them to be seen.

Literature from Student Veterans of America confirmed the researcher's observation. The

organization's *Military to College Guide* urged student veterans to consider their

connection to campus and, when taken into context with data from this study, hinted

student veterans may face challenges connecting to campus:

> In addition to joining the local student veterans club, you might consider getting
> involved in other on-campus activities. Such involvement may help you to feel
> more connected to other students and the larger campus community (Student
> Veterans of America, 2008c, p. 4).

> In discussing his social transition, Participant 5 noted the following:

> "Uh, Probably, I feel like, just connecting with classmates maybe, uh, you know a
> lot of things are done either in groups or study groups and things like that and just
> being older and being not in the dorms and not involved in the student life, being

not really connected, so you kind of miss out of those kind of student sharing and student studying and things like that… and I wasn't in a fraternity or any other of those kinds of things which is, you know, is a big social aspect for most college students…"

Several participants made statements similar to Participant 5. Participant 8 said, "…so I've never been involved in extra-curricular activities and fraternities and all that stuff because I live five minutes from here and I've always lived on the Pendleton side." Participant 1 stated, "I don't spend a lot of time on campus, and I don't involve myself too much with the university in terms of like extracurricular activities." He further explained, "I mean, I work 30 hours a week and I'm also married, so getting involved with like Central Spirit and that type of stuff – I don't have time for it." When asked how he would characterized the student veteran population as a whole at the research site, Participant 15 said, "We're pretty – I'd almost call us 'loners.'"

Participants 2, 5, 12, 14, and 15 all noted they lived off campus. The administrative assistant to the dean of undergraduate studies said, "Most of them are off campus, though. I don't think I've known but maybe two that stayed on campus with other students." She went on to talk about a conversation she had with a student veteran who was preparing to re-enroll:

> "I asked him where he was going to stay and if he had his housing back, if there was any problems or anything and he said, 'No, I just don't think I'm going to stay on campus.' And I said, you know, 'Well didn't you stay on campus before?,' because I remember taking him out of housing when he left. And he said, 'Yeah, I stayed in (whatever dorm it was),' and he said, 'But I just don't think I want to do it this time.' And I was wondering if it was because of what he had experienced in Iraq or if he just changed his mind, because a lot of students do that. They don't always want to stay on campus. They want to get the campus life and then go out and get their own place somewhere off campus."

Participant 5 noted the difficulty of connecting with peers because he chose not to live on campus: "Uh, well, just – you don't interact with them outside of class, 'cause you don't live with them like in the dorms, you know." Participant 14 described his reluctance to live on campus: "I had been living in a dorm and when I came back it was too late to get in the dorm, like I could've tried but I was kinda like, 'I'm not gonna live in a dorm again,' so I'm like rushing to find an apartment."

Student veterans' decisions to live off campus and to prioritize other things over involvement inadvertently contributed to their invisibility on campus. A more important factor, however, was student veterans' choice to selectively disclose their veteran status. Selective disclosure contributed to student veterans' invisibility more so than their lack of connection to campus. The following section highlights participants' inclination to keep their veteran status to themselves.

Selective Identity

Selective identity refers to two concepts which contributed to student veterans' invisibility. The first concept is student veterans' limited disclosure of their veteran status. The second concept is participants' conceptualization of their identity as veterans. The researcher found that student veterans not only selectively notify campus community members of their veteran status, but that they do not want to be defined by their military service. In other words, participants acknowledged that they wanted to blend in within the campus community.

Participant 14 said the following when the researcher asked him to characterize how his peers viewed him as a student veteran: "I'll say this: I try to conceal it. As I've

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said before, is that unless somebody has direct evidence or knows someone that I know, I

make no mention of my prior service." Participant 12 made a similar comment:

> See, nobody knows. I don't tell anybody, you know, like I mean…I'm not like – I'm not loud and proud…I'm not going to get up there, you know the first day of class and…'Whooo, look at me.' I'm not…I'm just like the average student, I hope so. Besides having a big scar on my back but aside from that you wouldn't know me from anybody else. So like, why should I be treated as such. Hey, I'm getting a degree just like everyone else, you know?

Participant 6 said he did not feel the need to broadcast his veteran status:

> "Um, and I wouldn't really mention it up front to a lot of people, that I was a student veteran, um because, you know I don't really see that as something that I need to present to everybody, you know, and broadcast."

Participant 8 stated he would never identify himself as a Marine during class

introductions:

> "Well, I'm never…only the ones I'm real close with know I'm in the Marines, you know, and they asked at the beginning of class to introduce yourselves and say what you do, I've never said, 'I was in the Marines.'"

When asked how he thought faculty characterized him as a student veteran, Participant 10

said, "Uh, well a lot of them don't even know that I'm a veteran just because it's not

something I just come out with usually." Participant 5 explained he did not want to be

recognized as a veteran: "And I don't want to be recognized as a veteran… I mean I don't

have any intention of being highlighted in the class or anything." Participant 2 discussed

how he only disclosed his veteran status out of necessity:

> "Well, uh, be honest, it's not so – I don't bring it up in every class now – I used to bring it up when it was relevant before, just for my, uh – sometimes I would have drill, a three day drill, and I would have to miss class, so sometimes it got brought up by necessity."

The Veterans Administration certifying official at the research site noted the following

about student veterans:

"I don't think that other students may know who they are or to appreciate their experience or something and veterans don't always show that. They are not always throwing it out there, I mean there are some that do but I think when students come back they want to do everything they can to just kind of fit in and get back into that mode of being a student and being in school…"

The researcher found student veterans had interesting reasons for not revealing their veteran status. In particular, participants alluded to humility, humbleness, and an aversion to receiving deferential treatment. Participant 12 explained he did not bring up his veteran status because he did not like to boast:

"I mean like – so I've never been one to like boast or be affiliated with that. I've never been – I guess the term when you're in the military – one of those motivators, like one of those loud mouths…like 'Wow, I'm proud – look at me, look what I've done.' That's not my cup of tea."

Participant 10 made a similar comment when he explained his decision to not highlight his veteran status: "Hmm, I suppose the easiest part of this question is why I don't. Lots of time I don't want to seem like I'm bragging or anything." Participant 13 discussed how he did not like to flaunt his veteran status:

"…it's not something that I flaunt or anything – I don't, you know, kinda go around wearing a big Air Force t-shirt to look and see who notices or anything which is, you know, kind of a personal choice. Again, I know people and have seen people that are very – and not to say that I'm not – proud of it and they want people to know about it, but I just choose not to be that open about it."

Participant 8 expressed similar sentiments about not flaunting his veteran status:

"I, uh, yeah, I guess there's a reason. I don't know….it's a ….not that I don't like to talk about it, but I just don't like to flaunt it or whatever. Even though, I mean, I'm not saying it's not worth flaunting, you know, but…"

Participant 2 contrasted his selective disclosure to a classmate who chose to flaunt his veteran status. He made it sound like he almost doubted his classmate's veteran status

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because of his demeanor:

> "I'm not really an alpha personality in general so I'm not out there looking for some attention anyway. Plus I just had this experience a couple of weeks ago where someone in one of my classes kinda brought some attention to themselves in what I would consider a negative way. I don't know if his story is true or not but he claimed to be a scout sniper or something and we are in the forensics anthropology class and we had the medical examiner there from Greenville county giving a presentation and he asked him about bullet trajectories when they pass through people, and he made it sound like he had seen some firsthand experience of that before. Which he might have, but it's just not the way I would go. I wouldn't try to bring that kind of attention to myself. Like I said in our first interview, if people ask me if I've killed anyone, that's a pretty insensitive question. At the same time I wouldn't want it going around. That might be just a personal disagreement with the way he did things, but it just seems like that if you're really – and other people have got this impression, too – if you're really in the service and really did it, you wouldn't necessarily bring it up like that."

The researcher found student veterans displayed humility towards their service.

More specifically, participants explained they did not seek individual attention; rather, any acknowledgment should pertain to veterans as a whole. Participant 5's comments illustrated this point after the researcher asked him why he chose not to advertise his veteran status:

> "Why is that? Um, I think, the reason I'm a veteran is the commitment I made personally to do, to serve, I guess…you don't do it to try and get recognition or to get tax benefits or anything specific, it's just a personal decision that I made and just being one person versus the multitude of veterans that are out there and that have done in so much for the country, I think it should be more addressed as a whole instead of an individual."

Participant 2 explained it was strange for him to be thanked for his service and he felt he was not quite ready for individual recognition:

> "In my opinion it should be more on a group level. It's strange when I am in uniform and someone comes up to say thank you for your service – it's like, 'I've never done anything like this.' I joined the military and they sent me overseas and now I'm this veteran but I didn't really choose to be a veteran, it just kind of happened. On an individual level it's still kind of weird. It's different but as a

group veterans ought to be recognized. It's just something that I personally am not ready for, I guess."

Participant 15 expressed aversion towards individual recognition, saying:

"You know when someone – when I'm in Charleston on a weekend duty in uniform or somehow or another someone comes up and shakes your hand or what not, it always makes me feel awkward. And partially because, you know, I fix airplanes and don't really get shot at or bombed and – not like some of the people in the Marines and Army do. So, I guess I'm an active contributant, but to me it feels like that respect should be attributed to those ones who really, you know, have given up more. Which certainly I appreciate it and what not – if the airplanes didn't fly it would make it a lot more difficult on other people – it's just always weirded me out when other people have come up to me… I mean, there's no one person who makes the wheel go around. If the aircraft mechanic doesn't fix the aircraft, the aircraft can't take off no matter how good a pilot you've got. But, by the same token, if the guy with the fuel truck doesn't show up, same issue. Or, you know, it's – it's no one person."

Participant 10 made a similar statement, suggesting veterans do not disclose their military experience because they are not looking for attention:

"Like I said, for us maybe the Army somehow put some humility salt in our food. But we don't want to brag about what we've done in front of other people. We just do it because it's what we chose to do. And because it's right and I think a lot of people don't want to walk around like a neon sign that says, 'I'm a veteran, thank me.'"

Other participants explained they did not want their veteran status to influence peoples' perception of them or to garner them special treatment. Participant 13 noted the following as he discussed how his veteran status might come up in conversation:

"Again, I know people and have seen people that are very – and not to say that I'm not – proud of it and they want people to know about it, but I just choose not to be that open about it. Um, no real particular reason – I just know that some people feel very strongly for or against it, so I don't want that to influence their first impression of me…"

Participant 10 articulated that he did not want to have an unfair advantage over his peers:

"Um, and I suppose some of it might be that I don't want them to treat me as

special or different from the other students one way or another really. Um, you know, I just want them to see me as someone there to learn. Um, because I think that having an unfair advantage would be just as damaging or possibly more as having an unfair disadvantage."

Participant 12 noted two occasions where he had revealed his veteran status in his dealings with administrators. As he explained, he did this not to receive special treatment, but to offer context for his specific circumstances for those who were trying to assist him:

"So those were the times I actually asked for help and I was trying to ask people to take into consideration that…I mean that's the only two times I ever brought it up with an administrator. I'm not asking people to open like some crazy door, you know what I mean?"

Student veterans noted their military was but one part of their identity. As Participant 14 explained, he often did not speak of his veteran status because it did not define his identity:

"…you know: the past is the past. Maybe if it defined me more; maybe if it was more a part of my life, if I had done 20 years instead of, you know, six, you know. But it defines such a small part of my life, uh, you know, it's just not something I talk about a whole lot."

Participant 10 expressed a similar sentiment, noting he did not want to be defined by his veteran status:

"Uh, it's not like I walk around advertising it, because most of the time I don't want to be defined by being a veteran. You know in my majors, Biochemistry and Genetics, sometimes I want to be defined by how well I do in my classes."

Participant 15 explained that being a veteran was just one of his qualities:

"…sometimes if I'm wearing the right t-shirt you might be able to guess it, but it's not – in other regards, I'm just a student. It's just not something I necessarily like to parade about, brag or, I guess – choose the right word – but…It's something I'm proud of but I have other…qualities."

Participant 1 told a story about disclosing his veteran status to his new faculty

advisor:

> "Yea, it becomes your identity. Like you know, for example, when I became a junior, I had to go see a new advisor. So I meet her and she says, 'So, tell me about yourself', and I tell her I'm a veteran and all this stuff. Automatically, every time I'm in a class with her and, you know, with newer people, she's like 'Oh, this is Joe – he was in Afghanistan', and that type of stuff and you're like, 'Yea, yea, thanks.'"

In essence, Participant 1 had lost control over his identity because others defined it for him. While he was not irritated by others knowing he was a veteran, he did express weariness over being 'outed' by someone else. Participant 1's experience explained why some student veterans choose not to disclose, as they may be afraid of being pigeonholed as a veteran.

The researcher's conceptualization of invisibility, explained by veterans' lack of connection to campus and their reluctance to announce their veteran status, was confirmed by participants who stated they did not know other student veterans or had a difficult time finding fellow student veterans. For example, Participant 7 acknowledged:

> "I don't know any student veterans beside me. Actually I know one…if he's still here at school or not… I only know his last name…his last name's Gary – I can't remember his first name. I saw him around on campus one time – that's it."

Participant 2 was the president of the research site's student veteran association. He expressed concern over the viability of the organization because they were having a difficult time finding and recruiting new members. His comments further explain student veteran invisibility on campus:

> "We've gotta do a better job finding veterans – young veterans… Really ever since I've been here it's just been word of mouth. Um, I don't think we were able to do it this year, I think they sent out an email our first year here, but it's hard to reach people on campus even though we're all connected with the internet and

email and everything – like if it's not from one of their friends and it's an official campus email, it automatically goes in peoples' delete bin, trash bin."

Participant 10 was the vice president of the student veteran association. He discussed how difficult it was to gauge the student veteran population at the research site:

"That's kinda like what we tried to estimate for the purposes of recruitment for our organization. We've tried to get a decent handle and about 200 is the number we have come up with. We have, I mean we don't know exactly the best way to reach them…um, probably it will end up being putting some flyers out. Um, I fixed a flyer a couple of years ago, so I can distribute that. But a lot of it is that we don't know how many there are or how to exactly how to get a hold of them. I mean, you know email is a very easy way to do it but how many emails do you get a day? How many do you just glance at and not give serious thought to? Especially, maybe with veterans, we've got a little more tendency to separate the wheat from the chaff, you know? Um, so we will pick out the ones that immediately attend to us, and delete the rest. Yes, it's one of our concerns as well."

The *Campus Kit for Student Veterans*, a document published by the Student Veterans of America, advises student veterans who desire to start a campus student veteran organization to contact the Veterans Administration certifying official at their campus. As the following excerpt illustrates, the documents suggests fellow veterans are difficult to find:

"Step One: Contact the VA Certifying Officials at your university, this person can tell you how many people are receiving veterans' benefits at your respective institution. This person can also mass email all those people receiving benefits to help you find members" (Student Veterans of America, 2008b, p. 8).

Summary of Invisibility

The researcher attended a student veterans association meeting at the research site on October 3, 2008. After this meeting, the researcher typed a synopsis and reflection of the meeting. He noted:

"Reflecting on the experience, it was somewhat awkward. It was hard for me to understand their world. I felt they respected me as a person but were curious as to why I was studying them. Maybe they felt a little uncomfortable being under the microscope…"

The discomfort of "being under the microscope" was an illustration of invisibility. In many ways, student veterans are a population that shuns attention.

Invisibility, the second cornerstone category, explained how student veterans – whether or not by design – are often invisible members within the campus community. Factors which contributed to invisibility were off-campus residency, limited campus involvement, and selective (and sometimes non-) disclosure of veteran status. Upon further analysis, the researcher found influences from the first cornerstone category, military influence, contributed to student veterans' invisibility.

Because student veterans were often older and more mature, they were more likely to live off campus and have priorities which superseded campus involvement. Elements of pride impacted disclosure, as student veterans were not inclined to announce and use their veteran status to receive preferential treatment. Moreover, participants alluded to a sense of humility the researcher found to be closely related to military influence and maturity which prompted them to, at most, selectively disclose their veteran status.

Student veterans' invisibility impacted the categories of campus culture, navigating re-enrollment, and support. In regard to campus culture, student veterans' invisibility affected perceptions of campus attitude toward student veterans. Participants noted they were often not treated any differently from non-military students, a factor which was influenced by the invisibility of the population. Student veterans' shunning of

individual attention as opposed to group recognition impacted their outlook on acknowledgement as a feature of campus culture. In terms of affecting navigation of re-enrollment, student veterans' invisibility meant re-enrolling was often an individual exercise. In other words, navigating re-enrollment was truly a unique experience for each participant.

Finally, student veterans' invisibility affected the support participants pursued and received during re-enrollment. From an administrative standpoint, it is difficult to support a population which is not visible and, in some cases, does not want to be noticed. As the next section indicates, one of the primary forms of support for student veterans is found amongst military peers. While invisibility obscured student veterans to outsiders, participants were more likely to connect with individuals who shared their military experience. Thus, student veterans were able to be seen by their military colleagues, if not the entire campus community.

<u>Auxiliary Aid</u>

Auxiliary aid includes the category of support. The researcher initially placed support in the center of the visual diagram (Figure 1) but later repositioned this category after further analysis. While memoing, the researcher reflected that support, while important, did not dictate the success of student veteran re-enrollment. Instead, the researcher found support to be a helpful, yet auxiliary, component of the overall re-enrollment process. Thus, the category of support (which was initially classified as a lynchpin) was relocated to more accurately reflect the role support played in student veterans' overall navigation of re-enrollment.

<u>Support</u>

The category of support explains how and where student veterans sought support during re-enrollment. Participants noted both academic and social support sources, as well as general support from family and friends. More specifically, student veterans explained that fellow veterans who are students, faculty, and administrators were a source of support. Figure 5 provides a visual breakdown of the support category.

Figure 5. Support: Sub-categorical Breakdown.
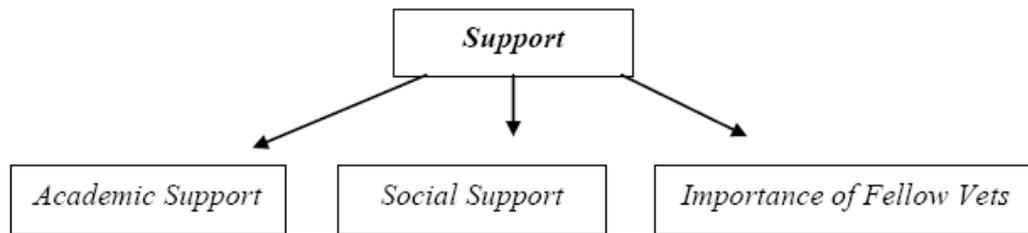
Academic Support

Student veterans' academic emphasis, increased academic focus, and positive academic transition (resulting from military influence) meant academic support, especially formal academic support, was not frequently utilized. However, several participants acknowledged they sought out academic support. Participant 5 noted he utilized Supplemental Instruction (SI) and fellow students as academic support upon re-enrollment:

> "Uh, I did the…trying to remember the name of the program…like they have
> students that previously passed a class with an A and they allow them to like tutor
> whole sections…and I can't remember the name of it but I used that for quite a
> few of my classes for the first two years… Yeah, for like chemistry, statics…I'm
> sorry that I don't remember the name of the program now… Supplemental
> instruction! There you go…SI classes! There you go….so I was a regular
> attender to every SI that was available to me for each specific class."

Participant 3 also indicated fellow students were a source of academic support: "I was able to work closely with some of the other students – that helped me out." Participant 4 noted she used her academic advisor for academic support:

"Other than my advisor. I mean, I really didn't know where to go or if there was a place to go and I don't like going to people I don't know, so I stuck with my advisor, and they kept in contact with me when I was in Iraq and everywhere."

Participant 6 expressed his academic advisor was a source of support during re-enrollment:

"You had to talk to a counselor, and I think that really kinda helped me get back on track with reenrolling, knowing what classes I had to take. Uh, that was another thing – just knowing the classes I had to take again, just kinda get back into the routine and get back on track to meeting my goal of getting that degree. So, I would say that regular academic counselor…"

Social Support

Student veterans utilized social support more than academic support. That said, some participants indicated they did not use social support. Participant 11 said, "I'm not sure if I did utilize anything. As I stated earlier, it was a rather easy reenrollment. I guess I was more of a recluse back then." Participant 4 noted, "I don't think I did. I tried to get to know the people in my major, and it just went downhill from there." Participant 8 explained he did not know of the existence of social support: "Social support…none. I didn't know of any." Participant 2 noted a lack of motivation to utilize social support: "I mean, there's probably stuff at the school, but, um, just not a whole lot of motivation to utilize it, I guess."

The avenues of social support utilized by student veterans were often specific to the individual. For example, Participant 12 explained his job working in a bar was a

source of social support for him:

> "Because one the few guys I did know that was still here…actually he stayed around and got his masters in engineering and he bartended at one of the bars, and so I started working there. And, uh, I naturally would just meet a lot of people. That was real…like I mean, you know, there's no shortage, I mean there's always somebody there… You know, as far as my buddy, I met a lot of people through him, a lot of people through work. That just kinda became my support system."

Several participants acknowledged they were involved in social or service fraternities and that these were a source of support. When discussing his social transition, Participant 3 said, "And, uh, luckily I'm a member of a fraternity – it's an engineering fraternity."

When the researcher asked Participant 9 about avenues of social support, he replied:

> "Um, let's see…Just fraternity…downtown, and, like I said, somewhat related there's a lot of, uh, there's a couple families I know that are fraternity alumni, but they really appreciate those of us that are in the military. So, they'll have us over for dinner and you know. They really look after us, take care of us and make sure we know we're appreciated."

Participant 6 said of his service fraternity, "I also was a member of another service organization, uh, and I used that as well as a, a social avenue…" Participant 13 highlighted his fraternity brothers as a social support: "Um, um, a lot of fraternity brothers were really open…" Participant 15 explained the crew team was an important social support for him: "That was pretty much – that's been – crew's pretty much defined school for me. Everybody has their one organization that they're involved in, and that's been it."

Family and friends were a source of social support for re-enrolling student veterans. Participant 14 highlighted his family as an initial source of social support:

> "My family was great. Like, uh, my parents came and picked me up. They had a little – we landed at Hartsfield and they picked us up – and we had a van, drove us to the air station, and my parents were pretty supportive."

Participant 1 characterized his social support as "…mainly family and close friends I'd grown up with." He further stated, "…just coming back, I mean, I guess a lot of the friends I had from high school, 'cause I'm from here, and so when I came home, you know, getting in touch with them was more important than meeting new people."

Participant 13 explained family and close friends were the social supports to which he turned:

> "And so, there were some tough times where I didn't really know what I need to do was or where I needed to be going and so there were – a lot of my friends – the close friends really stood out. Um, people that kinda kept in touch. Um, girlfriend and family were absolutely (laugh) integral and, you know, staying sane, and you know, boot camp and stuff, and so it's just – those were probably the closest avenues. You know, you really find out who your friends are when you go through something like that and you come back looking for someone, you know, just to catch up with and see where they've gone and they can see where I've gone, and so those were really probably the more prominent avenues of where I turned."

Participant 11 noted his wife and friends were his social support:

> "I mean, you know, my wife and I still have the friends that we hang out with, but frankly most of them were in college also. So, it was, you know, relatively a common thing….we would get together when we could…"

Participants mentioned they used fellow veterans as social support. Student veterans socialized with other veterans from their unit and through the student veterans association at the research site. The researcher noticed participants frequently mentioned the role fellow veterans played in their transition back to college. The following section explains the importance of fellow veterans in the re-enrollment process.

Importance of Fellow Vets

The research site's student veterans association was one important avenue of social support for several participants. As noted on the association's Website, the purpose

of the organization is "…to provide a social structure for students who are returning veterans…" (Clemson University Student Veterans Association, n.d.). The desire for social support was expressed on other student veterans associations' Websites. The Florida State University Collegiate Veterans Association's Website explained, "Our mission is to promote a fun and inviting atmosphere for all branches of prior service…" (FSU Collegiate Veterans Association, n.d.). Mississippi State University's Student Veterans Association stated, "We are dedicated to actively helping veterans to assimilate into campus life" (Mississippi State University Student Veterans Association, n.d.). The homepage for the Texas A&M Veterans Association was inactive, however, the researcher found the organization's profile on the student activities Webpage. The association's purpose statement read, "To help veterans, active, and active duty reservists attending Texas A&M assimilate to the scholastic environment while providing the camaraderie found in the Armed Services" (Texas A&M Veterans Association, n.d.).

Participant 10 spoke often of his experience in the student veterans association. His description of the support offered by the group offered an excellent illustration of the important supporting role fellow veterans played:

> "Yeah but we know how hard it is for people coming back…it's pretty disorienting so it's really important to find these people and let them have people around them who are like them, you know. They may not know us, but we're like them. They are in the same situation and we're fellow veterans…we're not the kid who just came from High School who doesn't know a thing about anything. I'll tell you now, we try to be kind of a support group. That's why people ask us a lot… 'What do ya'll do?' 'Do ya'll do community service?' 'No, we do soldier service,' you know…we try to be there for people like us to help them come back into school because we've figured it out by now, hopefully."

Three participants explained a desire to help fellow veterans. This was one

motivation which led them to participate in this study. Participant 12 said he found out

about the study while working with the Veterans Affairs certifying official on campus.

He stated:

> "I was talking to her because I was trying to figure out like….like trying to get all the documentation that I needed to get a deferment that basically said, 'Hey I'm in school and doing good, like leave me alone.' So I was talking to her and she mentioned this so that's why I wanted to touch base with you. So that's why I said, you know, this might help. It might help someone else with my experiences. Uh, well you know I wouldn't be opposed to you know, hey there's some guy coming in here to enroll. Do you want to…give him my email address and let him email me or give him my phone number and tell him to call me if he's got like…Yeah, it would be somebody to help you out with like…that's been through the grind, you know?"

Participant 3 said: "I guess I just really wanted to help out with the study. If I can help

other veterans, I'd like to help 'em out – especially if they're going to transition back and

this information would be useful to them." After finishing the interview with Participant

6, the researcher asked why he had wanted to participate in this study. Participant 6

explained he wanted to help fellow veterans. His desire to help other veterans was

evident in his comments during the interview:

> "And you know, deployment, and – it'd be good to ask like, have you helped out some of your other student veterans with the transition process because we helped out each other a lot… Directly or indirectly…you know, something like being friends with a student veteran or being there when you need somebody to talk to."

Participants indicated they talked to fellow veterans about their experiences

during their transition. The researcher actually witnessed this when he attended a student

veterans association meeting on October 3, 2008:

> "I told them about my brother being in Iraq and the conversation immediately turned more informal. John, Jeff, and Jeff had served together in Afghanistan and started talking about some of their humorous experiences from the deployment.

The stories centered almost completely on humor, which I found to be familiar as I have listened to my brother talk in a similar manner about his experiences."

Participant 7 said of fellow veterans with whom he deployed:

"Yea, and I keep in contact with those guys that you were around for a year and a half, or at least I was – kept close contact with them over the following six to eight months or whatever. Yea, well everybody goes through the same thing at the same time so you're all kinda lumped together and that's pretty much it – you just do a lot of talking afterward."

Participant 8 mentioned a friend who was a fellow veteran with whom he talked: "He, uh, works a lot now. I don't get to see him too much. He was in the National Guard and he had somewhat of a different mission than what we did but I still talk to him about Iraq in general." Participant 2 explained he liked being able to talk with fellow veterans: "…and we kinda helped, uh, ease the transition being together 'cause we could talk about our experiences and, uh, uh, share, we shared those experiences…" Participant 2 further stated of the student veterans association: "…it was more like a social, uh, social club, um just to take it easy and talk, maybe talk about your experiences if you want or just, just in general hang out, talk, basically."

Participants noted it was easier to associate with and socialize with fellow veterans. Participant 2's remarks regarding tailgating at football games provided an example of associating with fellow veterans:

"…we'd, uh, go tailgate for all the games. It's pretty much me, Pudge, and Jeff – we're interacting with all these other people at the same time, but there's a whole lot of 'if you see one of them, you'll probably see the rest of us' during that time… Sometimes we'd hang out during the football games. We didn't have the block seating like we do now in the football games, but, um, we'd, um, tailgate together, just in general hang out I guess."

Participant 1 said he wished he would have known sooner about the opportunity to

associate with fellow veterans:

> "I'm sure had I come back and I had known about it, it would have been a lot
> easier, because obviously if you are in an association with veterans that are
> coming back and going through the same type of thing you are and the same type
> of transition, you know, you can always build off the things that they've
> learned…"

Participant 6 explained it was easier to socialize with fellow veterans as opposed to other

students:

> "And I guess it's just easier to find veterans with that student veterans association,
> uh, have a social life with them, whereas having a social life with freshmen,
> sophomores there at Clemson incoming from high school. There were the service
> organizations but, uh, I was trying to kinda relate to other people and it was a lot
> easier to do that with other student veterans."

Participant 13 stated it was easier to connect with fellow veterans: "It's a lot easier to

connect with the guys that I went through training with and be able to keep up with

them." Speaking of his transition, Participant 2 explained how associating with student

veterans was a support mechanism for him:

> "I, I think I had it a little easier than probably most reservists or National
> Guardsmen do because me, and Justin, and Jeff, uh, moved in together, and we
> kinda helped, uh, ease the transition being together 'cause we could talk about our
> experiences and, uh, uh, share, we shared those experiences, so it was definitely
> an easier time, uh, getting back to civilian life, uh, because of that."

The Veterans Administration certifying official explained how fellow veterans were a

source of social support:

> "And you know, some students are still drilling. They are still meeting with their
> unit so I think that's a big part of, you know, the social part of it. I think that even
> if some of the people in their unit aren't necessarily in college, that's still a group
> that's still a social network and support. Um, some students, you know are from
> Columbia, Charleston, I can help them switch their area of drill so that they can
> do that locally here. That way they usually meet other students who are here at the
> University and they are all kind of drilling here together at the research site."

Three participants made it a point to highlight faculty members who were

veterans at the research site. When speaking of social support, Participant 2 made sure to

acknowledge military faculty members:

> "I did have a point I wanted to make about faculty, though… Oh, there's been a couple of faculty who are former military themselves: Dr. A was in Vietnam, Dr. B in the Sociology Department was in Vietnam also."

Participant 12 noted two instance of veteran faculty as social support. Regarding the first

instance, he explained his ex-girlfriend connected him with a veteran faculty member:

> "Actually there was a guy that uh, I had to take sociology with. My ex-girlfriend was a psychology major here and she was telling me about this guy. She's like, you know, you and him would get along good. Name is Bo? Yeah, he's an old Vietnam veteran and he was….me and him just got to talking a lot one day…"

Participant 12 further explained a veteran faculty member helped him gain entrance into

his major when he had a low GPA when he initially re-enrolled:

> "I really lucked out getting in Construction Science because evidently there's a waiting list out the door and people don't get in on probation. They've got like 3.5s and some are still not getting in. I, somehow, got in and that helped me out. The department head at that time was a guy that used to be in the Army."

Participant 9 described the warm climate veteran faculty members created in the college

of business:

> "For instance, the business school – which I've had a lot of experience in – is a very warm climate for military. There is so many – I guess 'cause you've got Colonel A, Colonel B, and Colonel C that are all Air Force retired colonels. And so they kinda provide the culture for the pre-business school as well as the business school for being very, uh, accommodating to those in the military."

Participant 9 further acknowledged the pivotal role a veteran faculty member played in

helping him figure out his class schedule and degree progress:

> "…also what helped was I came back to the business department and worked mostly with Colonel A – I had already known him from before I left. Um, so he

helped a lot in figuring out what classes I need to take and pretty much took me under his wing and set up what I needed to do to get out here in the time frame I wanted to graduate in. And so he was pivotal in that process."

Reliance of fellow veterans for social support was a strong theme noticed by the researcher. Military influence likely contributed to this. Fellow veterans were able to relate to one another easily and understood the challenges of being a student veteran on a college campus. Participant 10's comments regarding support for the student veteran population clearly illustrate these ideas:

> "If a faculty member maybe, just a regular old faculty maybe tried to make decisions regarding veterans, how do they know what decisions to make? It's almost like you're not in the military – it doesn't make a whole lot of sense. So give us the opportunity to use the resources to help other veterans come in because we know what they are going through. We know they have been through and we are in the best position to help them. It goes back to the thing in the Army, team work, interdependence. Give us the resources and we can help our own because we have been training to do, it's what we know how to do and we care about these people. These are our brothers and sisters in arms. They are our family, our Navy family, Air Force family, whatever. They are ours, they are our people. So, yeah, we know how to help our own… I would definitely go to a veteran. Because it may not be what I define myself as – maybe I think of myself as a smart student rather than a veteran but being a veteran has changed me so much that that's where I am going to go probably. It has changed me on a deeper and more basic level that probably what being a student has, that's probably where I am going to go first. Like I said, coming back from the military to school the Army is more familiar to me by a hundred fold. So I'm going to go with what I know. I'm going to go with the familiar thing – the Army thing. Going to another veteran is going to be a smooth transition and very easy versus talking to an administrator which I might not have in a few years because I've been in the Army; a little bit different. All of a sudden you're thinking simply as a student and not so much as a veteran while if you go and talk to another veteran who also happens to be a student they've got two bases covered as opposed to one by the administrator."

Summary of Support

Participants acknowledged various forms of academic and social support.

Academic support was affected by the subcategories of academic emphasis and pride

found in the military influence category. Student veterans reported a strong emphasis on academics upon re-enrolling which led many to feel they did not need academic support. Several participants, as noted earlier, explained an aversion to seeking help because of the pride, self-reliance, and independence they learned in the military. Some student veterans did, however, seek out academic support, which usually consisted of the utilization of their academic advisor.

Student veterans reported the utilization of social support in many different forms. The variety of support sources was explained somewhat by the invisibility category, as student veterans chose selectively to reveal their veteran status and affiliate with groups like the student veterans association. The variety of support mechanisms contributed to the unique re-enrollment experience of individual participants, which is discussed in the navigating re-enrollment category later in this study.

The most prominent vain of support was found amongst fellow veterans. It is important to note that participants did not always officially affiliate with student veterans to garner this support. Rather, student veterans tended to rely on military colleagues whom they already knew or faculty member to whom they were introduced. What was clear is student veterans felt more comfortable associating with one another. This is a byproduct of maturity and difficulty relating to peers, two subcategories under military influence. Even clearer was the desire to help fellow veterans because of the common military experience and challenges they shared.

Support was affected by perceptions of campus attitudes, a subcategory of campus culture (discussed in the next section of this study). In particular, participants' reliance on

fellow veterans resulted from mixed perceptions of campus attitudes towards student

veterans. In the next section of this study, the researcher examines the effects of campus

culture on student veterans' re-enrollment.

<center>Environment</center>

The environment category consisted of campus culture. Much like support,

campus culture did not heavily influence the success of student veterans' re-enrollment.

The environment did, however, illustrate how certain features of campus culture were

prevalent to student veterans who re-enrolled. The following section discusses these

features in detail and links them to the overall grounded theory which explains student

veterans' re-enrollment.

<u>Campus Culture</u>

The campus culture category provides an environmental context for the overall

theory. Specifically, participants acknowledged the research site's athletic culture, and

more specifically football, as an aspect of campus culture which created an avenue for

socialization and acknowledgement. Student veterans also highlighted varying

perceptions of campus attitudes, including student, faculty, and administrative attitudes.

Despite the research site's rich military heritage, participants expressed mixed

perceptions of the institution's honoring of this military heritage. Figure 6 presents a

visual breakdown of the campus culture category.

Figure 6. Campus Culture: Sub-categorical Breakdown
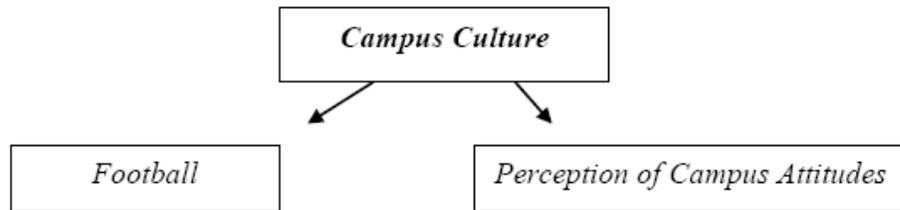
Football

Football was a staple of campus culture at the research site. Accordingly, seven participants mentioned football when discussing their social transitions. Participant 3 remembered his perceptions of his first student veterans association meeting; his comments explained how important football was to the organization: "…their first meeting, but they didn't really talk about much – they set up football seats and stuff like that around sports…" Participant 5 explained how the student veterans association used football to help people connect with one another and the campus culture: "You know, they do a lot of stuff with football games…tailgating and things like that. So, it kinda helps you feel plugged into that scene since it's such a big part of the atmosphere here at the research site." Participant 2 further expressed the socialization that occurred at football games: "Sometimes we'd hang out during the football games. We didn't have the block seating like we do now in the football games, but, um, we'd, um, tailgate together, just in general hang out I guess." Participant 6 made a similar observation: "And also, with the, the, athletics, the football games, the tailgating – kinda hanging out with all the members of the student veterans association." Participant 10 noted that he became involved in ROTC through tailgating for football games: "Actually while I was tailgating

with a student veteran, because we use to tailgate right out in front of the ROTC building,

I started talking with one of the instructors. Got me to sign up for ROTC!" Participant 15

described the social aspect of football: "To be real honest with you, the football games I

could care less if we won or lost, I was more often than not tanked and enjoying myself

with friends."

Football also offered an avenue for appreciation and acknowledgement for the

military. Participant 2 remembered the time when the student veteran organization was

able to participate in the annual military appreciation game:

> "We did, uh, one cool thing when we got back, was, being part of the vet's club
> when they had military appreciation day that year, they let the club walk down the
> hill before the football game, so that was pretty cool. Got a lot of applause from
> that and that was a really great moment for everyone who walked down the hill,
> so that was pretty awesome."

Participant 15 expressed he was unable to be involved in military appreciation

ceremonies at football games; this is something he wished he had had the opportunity to

do:

> "Um, oddly enough, I've had reserve duty on all military appreciation days. And I
> can't help but laugh, but, that would've been something I would've been involved
> in. Actually, I think two times I had military duty, one time I was racing. But, um,
> long story short, I have yet to make it to a military appreciation game. And, um,
> that's something I would've done…"

Participant 10 told a story about his father running into the institution's president at a

football game:

> "I know that last year during football season, my Dad just happened to be sitting –
> let's see – I think he was at the football game and he rode the elevator with the
> president. And my uncle played basketball here so my name was known a little bit
> around the university, so he introduced himself. 'David's brother – yeah!' He
> was talking about me a little bit saying my son is back at the university and he
> said, 'Oh, what does he do?' 'Oh well actually he's a veteran,' uh, my Dad says

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that the president just said that, 'Hey, tell him that I have the utmost respect for him. If he needs anything, he can knock on my door.' And so hearing that my Dad says that's what the president said – You know what, that's setting a great attitude for the university. It kinda even set me back awhile. He really is that good of a guy. It's incredible. He's a cool guy."

Participant 7 explained the football venue was the only place military service was acknowledged by the institution:

"… it's really sad, uh, former military institute that doesn't have Memorial Day or Veterans Day – they don't remember that at all. Except they do – they do the military appreciation day football game, but very little support whatsoever."

The above comments from Participant 10 and Participant 7 provide a transition to a subcategory of campus culture, that of perception of campus attitudes. As the next section explains, participants observed mixed perceptions of appreciation, interest, and support at the institution amongst student, faculty members, and administrators.

Perception of Campus Attitudes

The researcher assumed the military heritage of the research site would prompt positive perceptions of campus culture and attitudes. While some participants acknowledged positive outlooks and interactions, other student veterans expressed mixed and negative accounts. The following section describes the mixed perceptions of campus attitudes amongst students, faculty, and staff.

Positive perceptions.

Participant 10 expressed a holistically positive view of the campus community's attitudes towards military appreciation and acknowledgement:

One of my fears was that a lot people were going to start seeing veterans as baby killers, civilian killers, whatever and not see them in a good light. Once I've actually gone out and talked to people, it seems that regardless of their political affiliation, they could be hard core conservative, hard core liberals, whatever, it

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seems that the vast majority see the veterans as trying to do something positive for the country. It seems they all have a degree of respect, admiration, a little bit of that awe I was talking about, and certainly appreciation. The first words out of the mouth is 'thank you' because they realize what we are trying to do by protecting these citizens. And regardless of our methods in doing so they all realize that our purpose is to protect this nation. So they always say thank you. Clemson, I would say the appreciation is pretty huge. I hear that from a lot of students, hey, wow, thank you. They may not even know what it means what we are doing. We're protecting liberty here and they may not know what liberty is. They may not realize exactly how we're protecting their freedoms or exactly what their freedoms are. They don't know their rights exactly but still they say thank you. I think that the University's administration is especially thoughtful. I know the last two years I've gone to football's military appreciation day. It is always so special. They really do a good job with it and I think they try to keep in mind that, hey, these people are the reason we're here. These veterans are the reason we get to live our lives the way we want to and not the way some other dictator in power may want us to. We get to express our freedom because of these people and we want to show them our appreciation. I think the University does a great job.

Participant 2 noted the institution had a pro-military attitude: "The research site is kinda pro-military in general, so I think you would probably not see those people at what I call a more liberal institution I would think." Participant 9 described the warm climate that business school faculty members created for student veterans:

"I've found that it completely depends upon the culture of their school. For instance, the business school – which I've had a lot of experience in – is a very warm climate for military. There is so many – I guess 'cause you've got Col. A, Col. B, and Col. C that are all Air Force retired colonels. And so they kinda provide the culture for the pre-business school as well as the business school for being very, uh, accommodating to those in the military."

Participant 9 further stated faculty members were accommodating to those in the military: "But, um, teachers I found here at Clemson are very, um, easy to work with when they know you have military obligations. Like as far as moving tests, letting you make up assignments with no penalties, etcetera." Participant 13 also observed accommodation on behalf of faculty members:

"Um, the last two years, uh, during the first two weeks of December – during exam time – we've had huge week long inspection that I had to be at, and, um, so the teachers were very accommodating and very helpful with both years working with me and moving the exams to the week prior to exam week, getting their affairs in order – 'cause, I mean, they didn't really have to…"

Participant 12 explained faculty members expressed genuine concern when he learned that he may be called again to active duty: "Yeah, like my teachers were….actually when they were trying to recall me, I had to fly out to Kansas City, so that came up then. As far as my teachers that I had, they were genuinely concerned." Participant 10 observed faculty members did not stereotype him if they discovered he was veteran:

"I'd say a lot of them once they find out that I am a veteran, they don't condescend to me like, 'Oh, he's coming back from Iraq; he might have PTSD, or he might not be as fast on learning as everyone else.'"

Participant 11 characterized faculty as overwhelmingly supportive:

"The same way: very positive. Uh, and most of the faculty members, when they find that out, they understand that you're…I guess they assume you're more mature than the classmates just by virtue of being older. Again to restate what I'm saying, the faculty have been overwhelmingly supportive…"

Participant 7 offered faculty were very helpful and supportive:

"Actually, 'cause I know them – 'cause I've worked essentially alongside them and taken class from them, so I knew them on a personal level, and every single one has been supportive about my deployment, about hurrying up the class or just letting me take my exam early just to get ready – they've been extremely helpful, extremely helpful, in that department. I think I took a semester off before I started classes, so, yea, same thing – they understood that I had been out of that type of thinking for two years, so you know, you forget stuff – very helpful. I can only speak of good of the people I've taken classes from."

Participant 13 also noted faculty members were very supportive:

"…I mean there was no – that I could see – griping or – they were just very open to what I was going through and understanding of 'Well this kid's gotta take all five or six of his exams early, and I really wanna help him out.' That was the feeling that I got from them, both years. So it was just a very good experience all

around."

Participant 4 described how faculty members praised her for her military experience:

> "Um, most of 'em praise you. I mean every one of them that found out I was in the Marine Corps always for some reason liked to bring it up all the time. So, I don't know why but they will. But I guess they love the fact that you've been, that you've done that."

Participant 10 noted his club advisor, a faculty member, respected his veteran status:

> "You know I talked to a couple of, for example, my club advisor, you know, he shows a lot of respect. He comes from California, so a little bit different mindset over there, but still a good bit of respect."

Participant 2 expressed faculty members supported the troops and had a positive attitude

towards veterans:

> "And so I haven't really seen anything negative. I'm sure there's some who, for whatever reason – probably political, don't like what we're doing over there, but I think most of 'em, at least from what I've seen, have been of the opinion 'support the troops, even if you don't support the war.' So that's been pretty positive."

The Veterans Administration certifying official declared faculty members who were

veterans themselves were wonderful with the students:

> "Well, a lot of faculty that we have now were in the military. So I think a lot of those faculty members do try to participate in the student veterans association. Um, of course we have ROTC here on campus, we have military leadership, and of course those faculty members are wonderful."

She further stated that all faculty were helpful:

> "I think in general most of the faculty works well with students. I k now a lot of times I have to call a faculty member because - does this course meet a requirement, can you help me look at this student's information and I generally have to tell them that the student receives a VA benefit part of that is that we are going to go through this curriculum. 'Can you help me go through this student's information?' They are always very helpful. If a student has to withdraw from the University for Active Duty or for some type of mitigating circumstances usually the professors will work with them for any unfinished work, get incompletes extended, you know. I think in general the faculty is very helpful to the student veterans. I haven't come across any situation where they haven't been. I haven't

had any student complain to me, and I do think that if the student was unhappy about something, I think they would do that with me, you know."

The administrative assistant to the dean of undergraduate studies noted the following about faculty members: "I don't know of any professor on campus that is not willing to help. There's probably more that bend over backwards to help a vet than anything."

Student veterans acknowledged positive attitudes from administrators to a lesser extent. Participant 4 remembered her administrative contacts were very helpful:

"My administrators are great. Like my advisors and everybody in the Ag Ed department – they're great. They work with me at everything. When I'm having a problem in something they'll try to help me if they can, otherwise they'll try to tell me who to talk to. And like I said, they even kept contact through email ever since I've been gone for four years, so, those are the only people I talk to administratively."

Participant 3 noted his re-enrollment was aided by the helpful attitude of one administrator in particular:

"I knew, and I pretty much knew what I had to do. Excuse me. Um, I can't remember her name – there was someone – a woman – her office is out in Martin – and I guess she works a lot with veterans… I'd been in contact with her and she'd told me what I needed to do once I got back to get into school, so she helped me out."

Participant 13 told a story how an administrator prioritized his application for re-enrollment after she found out he was a veteran:

"The only time is when I was reapplying, um, kinda saw how the – kinda saw how the reenrollment process worked. And before I explained to them that I was a veteran, it was kind of a 'Okay, well send it back – send your application in and just kinda sit in line and wait', but as soon as the subject of why I was reenrolling came up, it seemed like it was – it seemed to me like my application just jumped to the front of the line."

The administrative assistant to the dean of undergraduate studies explained how administrators would often operate by "a different set of rules" to accommodate student

veterans:

> "…we all have an understanding that when we deal with veterans, we have a different set of rules that we go by a lot of times... We will go out of our way…But I think all of our administration people have really been good with them, getting them out and getting them back in and working with them."

Only two participants articulated positive attitudes amongst the general student population. In particular, two student veterans highlighted attitudes of awe expressed by female students. Participant 10 talked about driving to class with a female classmate who, during the drive, found out he was a veteran:

> "I was driving a girl who goes here – we work together, too – we were carpooling to the meeting and I had never really spoken to her before, even though we had worked together for several months, and, you know, we just started talking back and forth, you know and I just happened to mention that I was in Iraq and did this. She was like, 'Wow! Hold up (threw up her hands)….hold up! Who are you? I thought you were some chilled 20 year old guy that, you know – what in the world is going…you know?' Mostly it's just a feeling of respect, a little bit of awe, uh, and I have had the friends who gush…"

Participant 1 noted a similar perception of female students' attitudes towards him: "And uh, the girls, it's kinda of an admiration thing, you know it's like 'Wow – why – why did you join?' – that type of thing."

Negative perceptions and perceptions of indifference.

While many participants acknowledged positive campus attitudes, the researcher also observed negative perceptions and perceptions of indifference in student veterans' remarks. Participant 5 expressed frustration over the lack of acknowledgement of Veterans Day:

> "I mean there's no, like for Veterans Day, there's no…Like that's probably never even talked about on Veterans Day or where they're asking for if there any veterans or even just a mentioning of our veterans or anything. That never happened at least in the four Veterans Day events since I've been here… I would

have appreciated them just saying something about our veterans or something in class, you know, with the military history that this school has. I think it would have been neat to say, 'Hey man, say thanks to a veteran next time you see him!' Or just say something positive about the veterans that have done so much for the country…"

Participant 7 exhibited visible frustration when speaking of the institution's attitude and acknowledgement of veterans:

"No, and it's really sad, uh, a former military institute that doesn't have Memorial Day or Veterans Day – they don't remember that at all. Except they do – they do the military appreciation day football game, but very little support whatsoever."

In a follow-up question, the researcher asked Participant 15 (when he was re-interviewed) if he saw any of the research site's military heritage embedded in the campus culture. Participant 15 replied, "Not really. ROTC will blow a bunch of smoke up and oh this, that, and the other – it's just propaganda. At this point, no different from anybody else. Or, the campus is not…" The Veterans Administration certifying official explained she was surprised that student veterans were not acknowledged often, especially since the research site had a rich military history:

"You know, I don't think they think about it at all. Um, Clemson has such a rich military history and it often surprises me that there isn't a little bit more student veterans. Um, I know I do some work with graduation and I wanted to work on some type of proposal or something where these students could be recognized at a graduation ceremony. You know some type of sash or cord or something. I think a lot of times just in the general population of the student body they don't even know they are there. Other students don't think about it."

Despite generally positive perceptions of faculty attitudes toward student veterans, Participant 2 highlighted a time a faculty member was reluctant to work with so he could attend drill:

"Um, then I had a professor who, uh, for the whole semester told me I couldn't uh, reschedule my final exam even though I had, uh, two weeks of military

training starting in final exam week – all my other professors were like, 'Oh yea, that's no problem.' But he, he kinda fought me the whole semester and then about two weeks before the end of the semester, he was like, 'Alright, we'll reschedule it.' He really just didn't wanna make the final ahead of time. I don't know if he was paranoid – he was a new professor – and I don't know if he was paranoid that I was gonna share his final with everyone else in the class or what, but it took some, uh, 'discussions', debating to get him to do that."

Participant 14 remembered a particularly troubling experience where a faculty member

had saved a quiz on which he had performed poorly:

"Uh, I just remember – because we got deployed, like, at the start, like early January – like one of my professors had saved a quiz when I was like, 'We're deploying, sir', and he had saved this email, this quiz that I had bombed. That was kinda cruddy. Well, I mean, he was like 'Good to have you back – I saved this for you.'"

He further stated he felt uncomfortable in his academic department:

"I would say that in the math department, uh, it seems that a lot of people were anti-war, but that doesn't mean they were anti-military. It definitely makes me a little uncomfortable being around them at times, that they would look at me differently."

Participants were much more critical in their perceptions of administrators'

attitudes. Participant 12 referenced a particularly frustrating experience he had dealing

with the registrar's office:

I was trying to get reinstated and he wouldn't…no leeway at all. I'm like, 'Look I've been a student here almost since 2000.' You know I told him the whole story. And he wouldn't….he was like, 'If I did that for you then I would have to do it for everybody.' Like, everybody hasn't been at Clemson for on and off like 8 years. Like, you know? Like you know…8 years, 4 year degree. Like come on, give me some more! And maybe that's just in my eyes but I'm like you know, here I am and doing good. I've found something that I like. You know I'm enrolled in it and I only have one WR. And you know, I was on academic….I wasn't wanting it as a cushion – I explained all this to him. I was wanting it so I could take classes over and I used that WR to take the classes over. Like when I came back, my goal I set for myself, was like, 'Hey, I want to graduate with a 3.0.' I'm like, 'Hey, I can do that.' Like I mean I've been making like 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5s since I've been back but it's not going to pull my 1.8 up…it's like a 2.5 now, but it's not going to pull

it up without retaking these classes that I've got a D or F in. And so that's the only reason…I told him, 'Look, that's the only goal I set for myself,' and uh, that was like no help at all. Like basically like, who else can I talk to? If you were in my situation, what would you do? Like basically, he would do nothing. Hey, I'm not turning this into like a complaint session. I'm just telling you the stuff I encountered. Like when I did need help and trying to get somebody to take it into consideration…like, 'Hey, I'm not like a traditional student.' That wasn't even a factor in the equation. Maybe I just don't push it enough because I'm not loud and proud, I'm just proud, but I don't like talk about it all the time. You know what I'm saying? So maybe I wasn't pushing it enough, but I talked to that guy for about a half hour but it was out of his…you know he didn't do that on a daily basis that required something a little extra and he wouldn't …I would have to get the registrar's recommendation and I can't do that. I said like, 'Where's he at?' He said, 'You have to have an appointment…and I'm going to tell him not to talk to you because I already have…'"

Participant 15 recounted the difficulty he faced dealing with administration to get his

veterans benefits:

"…the VA process, because that was an utter cluster for me. Uh, they've got a new girl – uh, new woman, I guess – who's in charge of it. The old one – my God – there's no word for her other than a 'bitch'. The old one, my goodness: she didn't wanna help you to do anything. Um, I came in and told her everything – because I was activated long enough I bought into the active duty GI Bill because it worked out better for me in the long run – so I go in there and tell her exactly what I'm doing, I fill out all the paperwork that she says I should, and they say, you know, give or take two months. Two months comes and goes and they say, 'Oh, we'll give it another month.' Three months comes and goes…Turns out that I didn't fill out a specific piece of paper that she should have told me to fill out, so I fill out that. Well, then I – basically she washes her hands of it and says "It's your problem now." And then, so – I could look it up in my records – but there are probably several five or six hour phone calls on hold with the VA – imagine what that does to your cell phone bill, too. And it was just utter – all a mess. I don't know if they've gotten any better but Lord I hope so."

Participant 7 expressed his perceptions of administrators' negative attitudes when he

discussed his experience dealing with the human resources department:

"Um, I dealt with HR on some pay issues and that was a royal disaster – they had misinformation on the web and I told them – two days later they change the Website before they even reply to me about it being incorrect. So I don't know, it's just kinda smoke and mirrors. We'll just leave it at that. I just, I just – I got no

respect for them about their outlook toward military."

Participant 2 remembered a lack of care about his unique circumstances as he tried to

gain in-state residency:

> "I'd say – my limited contact it's been like 50/50 good and not so good. I'm not gonna say the not so good was 'bad' but the initial contact with, uh, in-state residence approval person, uh, it didn't seem she was too interested in my, uh – she didn't even care I was – actually, I would label that as a bad experience… Uh, it's certainly not as bad as it could be. Like that in-state tuition obviously got resolved. It's better than – that lady at the time told me there was another reservist who was actually suing the state of South Carolina about that. She basically just told me 'Follow that case, that's all you'll be able to do.' But, I'm not gonna put too much emphasis on that because most of my experiences have been pretty positive, so, can't get hung up on one negative thing."

In his second interview with the researcher, Participant 2 further discussed this situation

and described the bureaucratic perception of the administration:

> "Bureaucracy is bureaucracy. If you can navigate the military you can navigate the school too because the school is so dependent on the state for money. They follow a lot of requirements the state sets, which is government in nature. You are going to have like paper work issues you've got to work out and then you are going to have the same level of "they just don't care." Not that they don't care but they don't listen to personal stories. They have to have form 2988 filled out in triplicate and submitted and notarized and all that, so whatever your personal experience is, they just don't care. Again not that they don't care they just can't do anything about it. Their rules don't let them make exceptions, which kind of bothered me last semester. I went to talk to them to find out if there was any way I could just drop my first semester or my first year at Clemson, throw all the grades out, take all the classes over again. They just wouldn't do it."

Participant 9 described a less than warm feeling he encountered from the financial aid

office: "Uh, other experiences I've had in, uh, financial aid office – and obviously they

have more stringent rules and they have their hands tied a bit more – but I've found less

warmth coming from that particular department."

Participants denoted students' attitudes consisted of apathy, curiosity, or mild interest. Participant 15's comments regarding his friends' attitudes toward his weekend duty alluded to apathy: "For instance, my friends know we're having a party and I'm like, 'Hey, I gotta go to Charleston', and they're like 'Yea, sucks for you.'" Participant 6 noted students were interested in what he might offer their student organization as opposed to his military experience:

"Um, as far as being a veteran, I mean there wasn't a whole lot of interest – I mean like they didn't ask me any questions… So, I don't know – they're just so much more interested in I guess what maybe I could offer them if I was a part of their fraternity or sorority or something…since I wasn't involved in any of their similar clubs and interest – just no interest."

Participant 4 asserted college students did not care about the military:

"Most of 'em – it's according to which group you're around. Some of 'em don't give a shit… Some of 'em could care less what you do and where you've been and other ones care but they really don't – like they'll act like they care when they're around people or on Veterans Day, but basically none of 'em really care because they're college students and they don't really care about the military."

Participant 3 attributed student apathy as a byproduct of the length of the United States' involvement overseas:

"I guess – I guess the attitude of everyone has kinda died down in later years about veterans. I'm pretty sure, you know, earlier years, would've been more supportive, but nowadays I haven't really seen anything more. You get what I'm saying?"

Participant 2 observed students as generally apathetic to his veteran status:
"Um, I'd say there's either, uh, mild to moderate interest or support, or just general apathy. Um, not really blaming anyone for that, but I think I've heard a whole bunch of people call this generation really apathetic in general to social issues, to political issues, to, uh, international issues, and I think that was kinda evident."

Summary of Campus Culture

The category of campus culture explained environmental factors which influenced

student veterans' re-enrollment. Participants noted football as an aspect of campus culture that offered avenues of socialization, connection, and appreciation for student veterans. Participants' perceptions of campus attitudes varied from positive to negative and indifferent. For the most part, student veterans expressed positive perceptions of faculty members' attitudes, helpfulness, and treatment of student veterans. Perceptions of administrators' and students' attitudes were much more varied, as participants acknowledged apathy, unhelpfulness, and indifference amongst community members.

The varied perception of campus attitudes explained why student veterans were more inclined to seek support from fellow veterans. Participants who held negative perceptions were more likely to reach out to fellow veterans who understood and were sympathetic to their unique circumstances. Football and tailgating offered avenues for socialization and appreciation which bolstered social support for student veterans.

Student veterans' invisibility affected participants' perception of campus attitudes. Administrators and faculty who were, at least initially, unaware of a student's veteran status may not have been able to assist the student veteran in a manner which satisfied the student.

Finally, student veterans' perceptions of campus attitudes were affected by participants' navigation of re-enrollment. Specifically, student veterans' paramount concerns involved finances. Because participants expressed difficulty with financial aspects associated with re-enrollment, they were more likely to have negative or indifferent perceptions of campus administrators. The final category, navigating re-enrollment, is discussed further in the next section.

Navigating Re-enrollment

   The category of navigating re-enrollment explains how participants literally managed college re-enrollment. Included in this category are student veterans' descriptions of the re-enrollment process and articulation of challenges they faced during re-enrollment. More specifically, student veterans explained challenges associated with adjusting from military to college life, change (in terms of friends graduating), forgetting and having to remember academic information, and financial considerations. Figure 7 on the following page presents a visual representation of the navigating re-enrollment category.

Figure 7. Navigating Re-enrollment: Sub-categorical Breakdown.

The diagram shows a central box labeled "Navigating Re-enrollment" with arrows pointing to the following boxes: "Financial Considerations," "Change," "Remembering and Forgetting," "Structure and Routine," and "Unique Experience."
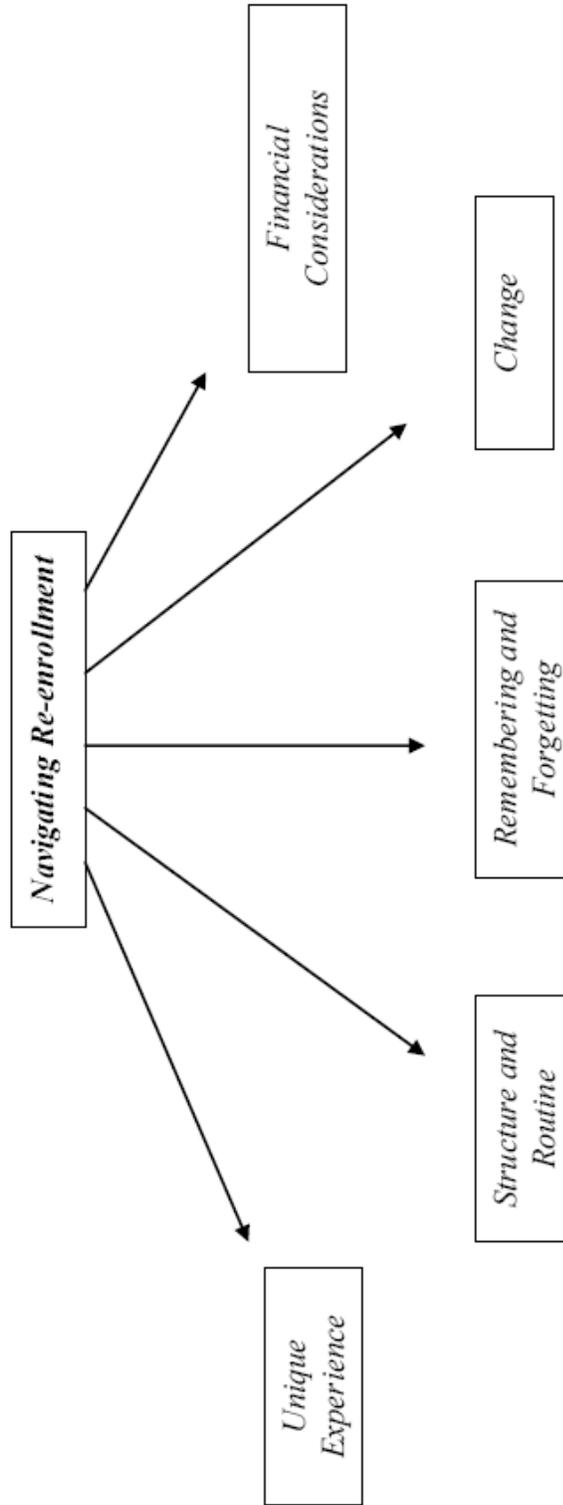
Virtually every participant characterized the process of re-enrollment as easy or not difficult. Participant 13 noted that he was re-enrolling while he was in his military training school:

> "Um, it was pretty straightforward. Um, didn't have – that I can recall – any hang-ups – and mostly I say that because when I did I was halfway across the country, or out in Texas or out in Arizona, I can't remember which. Um, but I didn't have any real problems with it that I recall. So I was pretty satisfied with it."

Participant 8 felt the process was simple: "Um, the reenrollment process for me was like I'd never even missed a semester or a year. I, uh, was still a student and came back in and registered for classes. Uh, it was very simple." Participant 6 also described re-enrollment as simple: "It was very simple. They didn't make it very difficult at all." Participant 1 expressed of the re-enrollment process, "Um, it really wasn't that difficult." Participant 3 stated, "Uh, overall for me, I'd say it hasn't been that difficult." Participant 5 also noted little difficulty: "The reenrollment process – uh, it wasn't really that difficult for me." Participant 11 noted the re-enrollment process was not as difficult as initial enrollment or military discharge:

> "It would be fairly easy. In fact, much easier than the initial enrollment process. Uh, far less paperwork coming back in… I knew it was much more smooth than the military discharge. Uh, basically, simply reenrolled for the Fall semester of that year and, uh, I don't remember having to fill out any paperwork that would have been related to the military service being recalled off the IRR (Inactive Ready Reserve)."

Numerous participants noted re-enrollment was simplified because they were previously enrolled at the research site, as opposed to re-enrolling in college at a new institution.

Participant 9 stated:

"Uh, for me it was pretty easy because I started out my first two years here at the research site. Uh-hmm, also what helped was I came back to the business department and worked mostly with Colonel A – I had already known him from before I left."

Participant 2 described re-enrollment as, "…straightforward for me since I had already been enrolled at the research site before my deployment." Participant 7 explained he knew where to go and what to do when he re-enrolled:

"It was pretty easy for me because, uh, I guess I have been here a long time… 'cause I just – I just knew where to go on everything. So I'd say reenrollment was easy… just knowing where to go, who to talk to directly – so it really wasn't a problem as it would be for other people I guess."

Similar to Participant 7, Participant 10 characterized re-enrollment as a familiar process: "Hmm – I would say it was familiar because I had been here before." Participant 4 explained her process was easy because she was coming back to the research site: "It was easy for me because I'd been here before at Clemson." Participant 12 noted his re-enrollment process was easy even though it had been a long time since he had first enrolled at the research site:

"Um, it was really easy 'cause I was here at Clemson cause I was already a student before in 2000. So I was a student here in 2000 and I pretty much had to fill out one form to gain reenrollment."

The researcher found student veterans' perception of the ease of re-enrollment was shared by staff members at the research site. The administrative assistant to the dean of undergraduate studies said:

"Hopefully we make it as easy as possible. There's one sheet that they have to fill out and when they come back, we advise them to see their advisor and anyone else on campus that might can help them get into some classes that could possibly be full or something. We try to make the process as easy as possible."

The Veterans Affairs certifying official similarly explained:

"…for veterans in particular, since I'm the person that processes the former student applications, they see me and I can walk them through that process. As far as the VA is concerned we notify the VA when a student leaves that they are going on active duty or some kind of mitigating circumstances where they have to stop their schooling. I just contact the VA and let them know that they are planning on reenrolling. I think that process is fairly easy."

The researcher's review of six institutions' Websites (which contained various information regarding student veterans' re-enrollment) offered further context which explained the ease of re-enrollment. Three Websites from the research site (Office of the Registrar, n.d.), Auburn University (Student Financial Services, n.d.), and Virginia Tech University (University Registrar, n.d), respectively, provided detailed information regarding veteran benefits. Florida State University, Texas A&M University, and Mississippi State University provided veteran benefits information and additional information. Specifically, Florida State University's Veterans Office supplied information for veterans called to active duty as well as a handbook for veterans (Florida State University Veterans Office, n.d.). Texas A&M University's Veterans Website offered a visual representation of the re-enrollment process in the form of a document entitled *Procedures for Leaving and Returning to Texas A&M* (Scholarships and Financial Aid, n.d.). Mississippi State University's Sonny Montgomery Center for America's Veterans served as a centralized point of information for a variety of services and offices which are critical to student veterans' navigation of the re-enrollment process (Sonny Montgomery Center for America's Veterans, n.d.b). The detail and availability of institutional information regarding student veteran benefits and re-enrollment implies that institutions acknowledge the unique needs of student veterans and attempt to centralize resources in an effort to ease the re-enrollment and transition processes.

The vast majority of participants noted the process of re-enrollment was easy. There were, however, some challenges associated with re-enrollment. The following sections discuss these challenges and their fit within the category of navigating re-enrollment.

Structure and Routine

Participants noted the initial challenge of navigating re-enrollment lay in adapting to a different structure and lifestyle. Many participants described this adaptation in general terms, such as "getting back in the swing of things." When articulating the challenges he faced after re-enrollment, Participant 5 said, "Uh, so that was probably – I mean, that's the bulk of it – trying to get back in the groove of things." Participant 6 offered this description when discussing challenges he faced after re-enrolling:

> "Uh, and, just kinda getting back into the swing of things, the classroom environment, and getting back and listening, note-taking, and everything, so. Um, but I wasn't gone for too long I would say to the point where it was unbearably difficult, but, it – I could tell a difference going back. Just kinda getting back into the routine."

Participant 3 provided this perception of readjusting to college life:

> "…it was a little tricky coming back being out of it for three semesters, trying to get back in the swing of things, going to class and everything, getting used to, you know, all that class stuff, trying to remember everything I learned beforehand which was kinda tricky, but, uh, I caught on to most of it…"

Participant 13 laughed as he explained the initial difficulty he had getting back in the swing of things:

> "I was used to going through in the military training or it was, um, if it was I honestly just didn't understand the material when I came back during the classes I took. But, uh, that first semester was very, very difficult, uh, to try and get back in the swing of things."

Participants' comments about "getting back in the swing of things" alluded to the more involved challenge associated with the mental and physical adjustment from military structure to college life. Several participants mentioned the challenge was, in essence, learning to think for and manage oneself again. Participant 7 articulated this challenge in the following statement:

> "Just the mental transition. Well let's put it like this: In the Army, you're told when eat dinner, etcetera; you're told when to do everything. But here on campus, you have to set aside your own time to study – that might be difficult for some, especially for undergrads."

Participant 8's remarks complement those of Participant 7:

> "Over there, you know you do what you're told and when you're told to do it…. As far as, you know, going out on missions and things. Now when you get back, it's time for you to make your own decisions."

Participant 10 said:

> "…it was a big transition all of a sudden going from being in the Army and pretty much knowing what to do because it you were told to do most of the time to having figure out things on my own."

Participant 13 laughed after the researcher asked him what challenges he faced upon re-enrolling in college. He responded to the researcher's question, saying:

> "Um – going through – had a couple of years of college under my belt, um, was really loose and non-formal, and so to speak as far as disciplinary actions go. Um, went to a very structured, um, 'This is how things are done and there's no questions asked,' type of environment, and then coming back to college life. I mean, it was just kind of a culture shock, really, to go from loose college environment to strict military environment to back to, uh, loose college environment – it was just kinda – just that time period – it was just kinda tough to keep up with where my life was bouncing around to and everything…"

Student veterans also discussed the adjustment challenge in terms of routine and time management. Participant 4 explained it was difficult for her to adjust because she had to learn to balance numerous priorities as opposed to having a set schedule. She

stated:

> "…just having all those things to deal with again when you're used to only having your job, go home to the barracks, and go to sleep, your job again, in that rotation all the time. You got used to a fit schedule and now you have all this stuff thrown at you at one time."

Participant 15 described he liked having his day laid out for him, and how it was frustrating dealing with the intermingling priorities of college life:

> "…you get up in the morning, you go to work, you do your job, if there's nothing to do you don't do anything. And, um, whatever you do, you do it right and the best that you can and all the above, but when you're done, you leave work, and work's done, and you go do your own thing. Your time's not spoken for. You do – I do what I wanna do, not, 'Well, I got a paper due in two weeks – I should probably be working on that – I should probably be thinking about this, and oh, by the way, there's a group meeting…' I really need to have my time."

Participant 6 discussed adaptation to the routine of college life, but in a different way; for him, college life was a "slow down" after coming back from active duty:

> "I was used to an active duty routine, do my PT, going to work – it was like just having a full-time job and then going back to college. It's just two different routines and there's a lot as far as, um, I would say, just slowing down, you know – you're on this routine where you're so fast-paced then you go back to the routine where you go back to school and it just slows way down."

Finally, two participants discussed adaptation to college life in terms of the "culture shock" they faced when they re-enrolled. When the researcher asked Participant 15 about challenges he faced during re-enrollment, the participant laughed and exclaimed:

> "First off, what a culture shock! Wow! You go from, 'This is the time work starts and if you're not here by then you're late, period,' to people walking into class fifteen or twenty minutes late or letting the door slam on their way in – they're not even courteous about it – and I'm just like, 'Really?' And then the guy next to you reeks of alcohol and it's like, 'Wow, it's not – oh the hell with it, I'm gonna go party tonight even though I've got tests in the morning' – it's not a familiar notion…"

Participant 10's remarks also allude to culture shock:

> "All of a sudden it was going from an atmosphere of mostly older people, older than me, uh, you know the definite command structure and, you know, everyone know what their job is and how to do it to a place where there was less discipline present, ah, you know as silly as it may seem, in the Army you get use to everybody wearing the same uniform, being very proper with the way they dress, and always adhering to a standard. Coming back here, even the few years I was gone, things had change and all of a sudden it was wear what you want, wear PJs if you want, the guys may not be shaving or having hair cut right. You know, it was a trivial thing, but you can just see that it was a little bit of shock there, like a different world almost… Because, I mean, we know personally that it's not like taking from one semester to another when you come back; the transition is from one world to another, really. And it really was like coming into a different world… this is not what I'm used to – not my world – you know? I even felt just because I wasn't in full uniform, I wasn't quite dressed…I didn't have my weapon with me! It was a little weird walking around with a backpack instead of an M-16."

In his second interview with the researcher, Participant 10 talked further about the culture shock of adapting to the new structure of college life:

> "I will say also there was a bit of a culture shock coming back. I was used to a place where you knew what you were doing all the time; you knew what you had to do, you had a pretty strict command structure, you had respect for people above your rank, for your elders and whatnot."

The readjustment to different structures and routines was one challenge student veterans faced. In this section, participants explained they had to get back in the swing of things. The following section explains a challenge closely related to readjustment: the challenge of remembering and forgetting academic information.

Remembering and Forgetting

In the previous section, Participant 3 discussed the challenge of "getting back in the swing of things". More specifically, he described school as "tricky", and his challenge as, "…trying to remember everything I learned beforehand…" Several participants

acknowledged the challenge of having to remember – of having forgotten – academic

information. Participant 15 explained information was not fresh in his mind because he

was older than other students, a factor which became apparent when his teacher

referenced material he studied in high school:

> "Uh, a lot of that stuff that I learned – I've been in college now since 2002 – it's your teachers – for instance in my test that's happening this afternoon, my instructor keeps referring to *A Tale of Two Cities* – I read that in eighth grade – which that would have been '97?! Not real fresh in the memory."

Participant 1 said it was challenging remembering academic information:

> "…just remembering basic, like algebra, and that type stuff, um, also with like my core classes that have to do with my major – remembering like basic fundamental principles that, you know, the profession follows. I just had to go back and read some in my books that I kept, but it's basically remembering…"

Participant 4 stated she had forgotten academic material during her deployment:

> "And then, um, another hard part was I forgot most of the things I had learned in high school and, and the two years before at college, so going back into classes it was all new for me – four years later I don't know how I forgot it but I did…"

Participant 5 noted he had to put forth extra effort to relearn necessary background

information:

> "…you know, I was four years removed from math concepts and science concepts, etc. So to go or not be fresh on some foundational information that they assumed you had and so, like I said, maybe delayed me a little bit so I had to put out a little extra effort to try and get some of the background information back."

> The challenge of forgetting and having to remember academic information

provided a challenge for student veterans as they navigated the re-enrollment process.

Other challenges were social in nature. As the next section describes, participants found it

challenging to navigate "change" during re-enrollment.

Change

Participant 10 stated:

> "You know I had been here before, but things had changed. Times have changed, time had passed, friends were gone, new people were here, definitely different customs, different culture even. You know, it's not the same thing we recognized. Quite honestly, for a few weeks, my feelings were a mixture of overwhelming excitement being back here and just an alien feeling that this is not what I'm used to, not my world, you know."

Participant 10's statement provided excellent insight into the social changes student veterans navigated after re-enrolling. Participants explained their friends had graduated or moved on. Other student veterans noted social circles had changed during their absence.

Several participants explained their friends had graduated, leaving them behind in college. Participant 2 said, "…everyone I knew when I was at Clemson had pretty much graduated, uh, since I'd been gone." After the researcher began to notice the theme of friends graduating, he would ask participants if this was the case if they did not mention it themselves. When the researcher asked Participant 12 if his friends had graduated while he was away, he answered: "Oh yeah. I mean like, it's kind of – yeah – it's kinda different." Participant 3 explained how his friends' graduation impacted him socially:

> "One of the biggest things was, though, pretty much everyone I knew when I was here was gone, 'cause I was a senior when I left, so they had all graduated and moved on. So, I came back and meet new people. Um, it's been a little trickier. Like I said, everyone has kinda moved on. There are a few friends left, but they like graduated last, like, in the Spring semester."

When discussing her social transition, Participant 4 exclaimed, "It sucks. I don't have the friends I had when I was here before." Participant 10 described tough social challenges because friends had graduated:

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"Uh, I guess the social challenges were fairly tough. Like I said, all of the people I had known before or been in classes with were the people I had gone to school with, like previously in High School. Most of them were gone… Um, like I said, most of the friends I had previously were gone, graduated or soon to graduate. Um, so you know, it was a little difficult. As I'm not the big one to get out and go meet people, go to parties and stuff…"

Participant 10 mentioned friends graduating in his second interview with the researcher:

"Naturally there was the fact that most all of my friends had graduated, so that was tough… I think that I kinda saw myself as an introvert that first semester. I didn't go out a lot and I didn't get to know people as much. I still kind of had a little bit of a wary attitude, maybe like a stray dog coming up to a bunch of people. He maybe wants to friendly with them but is kind of hesitant because he doesn't know what to expect exactly."

Two participants discussed social changes they noticed in the organizations in which they were involved. These changes were the result of new people moving into the organization. Participant 4's statements evinced this change:

"Um, it just seems like the groups of kids that was here before when I was here were a whole different crowd, a whole different attitude. The ones here now – they just seem like more 'stuck up' I guess you could say, and not as – they have cliques now – and not like we did before: everybody – pretty much everybody – on the Ag side of campus hung out together."

Participant 3's comments complemented Participant 4's statements:

"And, uh, luckily I'm a member of a fraternity – it's an engineering fraternity. I was a little hesitant about at first coming back, just 'cause some of the ways things were being handled in there. I did go back, and that was a big change for me too because they had all moved on and there was a whole brand new group of people and, for the most part, a whole lot younger than I was. So, that's been a little trickier, too… I enjoy hanging out with them, but it seems now they're more concerned with parties or what they can do to seem more like a social fraternity instead of the professionalism – I've seen the professionalism die down a lot more."

Student veterans had some difficulty navigating social change. The greater

challenge, however, concerned the financial navigation of re-enrollment. The following

section details how participants acknowledged the financial considerations which

accompanied college re-enrollment.

Financial Considerations

The most common theme – and perhaps the most difficult challenge – student

veterans highlighted regarding navigating re-enrollment was financial challenge. The

Student Veterans of America's *Campus Kit for Colleges and Universities* specifically

highlights financial concerns for student veterans:

- Issue: The active duty GI Bill (Chapter 30) provides only $9,675 per year to cover tuition, & fees, books, and living expenses. This covers only 60% the average cost of college;
- Concern: Student veterans may be forced to work multiple jobs on top of the GI Bill to pay for school. This is in addition to possible issues readjusting from deployment;
- Issue: Processing for Department of Veterans Affairs educational benefits can take up to eight weeks. Then these benefits are setup on an after the fact or monthly basis. Colleges & Universities require payment for tuition, fees, books, etc. up front or early in the semester before benefits have been received by the student veteran;
- Concern: Many veterans are unable to pay the costs of education upfront. Student veterans often incur late fees while they wait to receive benefits to pay tuition (Student Veterans of America, 2008a, pp. 2-3).

Participant 15 alluded to anxiety he had regarding financial responsibilities

when he first re-enrolled:

"You know, I had – my specific circumstances – I still had Life Scholarship which helps tremendously, and I also was fully removed from my parents which is a benefit of the military because you get extra financial aid because you're a dependent. So it wasn't terrible, but it was more, 'How do I pay my rent, how do I eat, how do I..?'"

When he first re-enrolled, Participant 6 was focused on taking care of financial

considerations. He said, "Uh, I guess you know I was kinda focusing more on the

financial side and getting everything taken care of financially…"

Participant 14 said:

> "I just wanted to know how to get my check. And so I was still in the reserves and I had to – I was still getting money. And even when I finished the reserves, I was eligible to still get my money – the people there were really great. Uh, you know, I gave them my forms and I was still able to get my tuition money which was really nice, because we don't get paid a whole lot."

Participant 11 explained his greatest concern was getting his full-time job back:

"…actually at the time I was just in part-time and my biggest concern was getting back

full standing at my job..."

As Participant 10 noted, "Uh, some of the big concerns obviously were tuition."

Several participants shared these concerns. Participant 2 described his concern with his

ability to afford out-of-state tuition:

> "Uh, the first challenge I had right off the bat was, um, before I, uh, was deployed, I was considered an out-of-state student at the research site because I was, uh, from Charlotte, uh, North Carolina, and so that, that, was a financial challenge to begin with, uh, because it would've been actually, uh, 20, uh, for the whole – I believe it was for the whole year – it would've been around $20,000, and that's what I had in my bank account, roughly, from Afghanistan."

Participant 5 expressed his frustration with rising tuition costs:

> "…you know, things like that aren't as easy for me cause I'm trying to be a student and stuff, pay for tuition that goes up 5% every year. And as example, my student aid hasn't gone up but my tuition goes up 5% every year and so it becomes more and more difficult for me to pay tuition and I guess each year you just kind of go with less, um, because you understand the value of the education, um, and so I target financial risks…"

Related to tuition concerns, student veterans talked about problems and

frustrations with veteran benefits. Participant 9 explained the version of the G.I. Bill for

which qualified did not cover tuition:

> "Uh, with me, specifically being in the Guard, yes. Uh, I only qualify – because

I'm not a combat vet or anything like that – I don't qualify for VA medical coverage, I don't fall in that category. So for me, the only G.I. Bill I qualify for is Chapter 16 for select reserve, and that's $327 a month. Uh, I did also have the option of choosing the G.I. Bill kicker because of my career field, which is an additional – I think - $280 give or take. But certainly not enough to cover anything more than rent."

Participant 4 said the hardest part of her re-enrollment was finding a way to finance it:

"…but the hardest part was being able to come up with the money again because the G.I.

Bill we have only pays you at the end of the month – it doesn't give you money up front."

Participant 2 relied on loans to supplement his finances. He said, "I've taken out a lot

since I've been here. The G.I. Bill didn't really cover those too well."

Participant 12 explained he had to declare a major in order to receive his G.I. Bill

benefits:

"Uh, getting veteran benefits was a little different because like at the time I left Clemson I was undeclared. Uh, to get the G.I. Bill benefits you have to be a degree seeking major so I had to get accepted into a college so that was a little….that was harder than actually like reenrolling in Clemson… I mean, it kinda was because that's the whole reason I was undeclared when I was here because I didn't know what I wanted to do. So now it's like, you know, if you're coming back, 'I gotta decide quick…'"

Participant 2 described the administrative challenges he and others had when trying to

solidify G.I. Bill benefits:

"…and you better have all your paperwork otherwise they'll just tell you to call back later and you have to go through the whole thing again. 'Cause I know some other students have had problems with their G.I. Bill, either not getting what they're supposed to or just not getting it at all. So that's a big deal, a big deal for me."

Participant 9 commented further on administrative challenges associated with veterans

benefits:

"And, uh, I've had some problems with that getting back pay – sometimes it takes

a couple months to get everybody a check off, to fill all the squares and say, 'Yes, you do belong on this list but we have to check it against this other Excel spreadsheet to make sure you qualify.' It's a goat-rope, working with the financial aid office. But I'd imagine that's anybody, not just me.

Participant 15 stated it took a long time for him to get his veterans benefits straightened out:

"…it took me nine months to get my VA benefits straight. And I was thankful that I had savings that I could float myself, but I got something on the order of a $12,000 check from the VA when I finally got it straightened out…"

Summary of Navigating Re-enrollment

Navigating re-enrollment highlighted student veterans' experiences and challenges during college re-enrollment. Participants discussed the adjustment of transitioning from structured military routine to college life. Student veterans talked about change in terms of friends graduating and leaving them behind and changing social circles. Participants described the academic challenges they encountered through forgetting and having to remember academic material and information. Finally, student veterans highlighted financial considerations which were paramount in their re-enrollment.

Military influence had considerable effects on student veterans' navigation of re-enrollment. The structure and routine were byproducts of increased discipline and maturity formulated during their military experience. The culture shock which some participants highlighted was related to maturity and difficulty relating to peers.

Support also influenced participants' navigation of re-enrollment. The challenges of forgetting and having to remember academic information were exacerbated by student veterans' reluctance to seek out academic support. That said, these challenges were

indirectly offset by participants' increased academic emphasis resulting from military

influence. The social support, particularly from fellow veterans, eased the social

challenges brought on by graduating friends and changing social circles.

Campus culture, specifically student veterans' perceptions of campus attitudes,

was evident in the frustrations encountered with the administrative aspect of re-

enrollment. The following excerpt from the Student Veterans of America's *Campus Kit*

for Colleges and Universities provided further context for this finding:

- Issue: Student veterans often have to navigate multiple departments to utilize the range of benefits and resources available to them. They often handed from one department or staff member to another until they find what they need or simply give up;

- Concern: Colleges & Universities often do not provide full time staff members to act as the point of contact for veteran's benefits and programs. This leads to frustration on the part of student veterans;

- Issue: Information specific to veterans is often not easy to find or is organized with bits of information spread through many sources of information;

- Concern: It can be frustrating to not be able to easily find information specific to your needs as a student veteran. Delays in finding this information, or outdated information can have a negative impact for student veterans (Student Veterans of America, 2008a, pp. 3-4).

Student veterans found financial challenges most problematic, a fact which explained

their negative or indifferent perceptions of campus administrators. The next section of

this study provided a synopsis of the entire grounded theory which explains student

veterans' management of the transitions associated with college re-enrollment.

Synopsis of Student Veterans' Management of Academic and Social Transitions during

Re-enrollment

The following section is a synopsis of the grounded theory which answers the research question: How do student veterans manage college re-enrollment after deployment, training, or self-induced military absence? The researcher denoted five categories which described and affected student veterans' re-enrollment: (a) military influence, (b) invisibility, (c) support, (d) campus culture, and (e) navigating re-enrollment.

Military influence explained both academic and social facets of student veteran re-enrollment. Participants described an increased academic emphasis upon returning to college which ultimately benefitted their academic transition. Student veterans were more mature both in age and life outlook. Increased maturity impacted social transition because student veterans found it difficult to relate to younger students. Maturity bolstered academic performance as student veterans had different priorities and expressed increased discipline. Through maturity, student veterans developed a sense of humility and humbleness. On the aggregate, participants explained it was difficult to relate to non-military peers who had different priorities, different mindsets, and who had not experienced the world as they had. Student veterans displayed pride in their military service that translated into interdependence and self-reliance. Participants felt they could navigate the transitions of re-enrollment because they had been tested in the military and were ultimately capable of individually handling college life.

Invisibility explained that the student veteran population was often – whether

intentionally or not – an unseen population on campus. Student veterans' social transitions were affected, as participants were less likely to be connected to campus either through living on campus or through getting involved in campus opportunities. Military influence – particularly difficulty relating to peers and maturity – explained this phenomenon. Student veterans, because of their age, maturity, and unique life circumstances generally chose not to live on campus. Moreover, student veterans often opted not to involve themselves on campus because they had different priorities and because they had difficulty relating to peer groups. Student veterans chose to selectively identify themselves as veterans because they did not want to receive preferential treatment, did not want to be seen differently, and did not want flaunt their military experience. Student veterans' military influence – through maturity and pride – affected participants' selective identity. Because student veterans were more mature and humble, they did not disclose their veteran status because they did not want to be seen as bragging about their military experience. Additionally, pride influenced disclosure as participants did not want to be treated differently during re-enrollment; they could make it on their own.

Student veterans sought mostly social support. Because of military influence – specifically academic emphasis – student veterans were less inclined to pursue avenues of academic support. Additionally, pride affected student veterans' pursuit of academic support, as participants tapped into individual will and self-reliance to succeed in the classroom. Social support took on varying forms specific to the individual. Friends and family were vital to some participants, while others relied on support through student

organizations, jobs, and fellow veterans. Fellow veterans – students, faculty, and administrators – played a pivotal role in support for student veterans. Because student veterans had difficulty relating to non-military peers, and because they were invisible to the overall campus population, student veterans tended to congregate with fellow veterans. Fellow veterans were able to understand the needs of student veterans and relate to their military experience, and offered both academic and social support.

Aspects of campus culture affected student veterans' re-enrollment. Football, a cultural staple of the research site, provided avenues of socialization and acknowledgement which ultimately bolstered social support for participants. Perceptions of campus attitudes varied; faculty were, on the whole, perceived as helpful and supportive, while administrators and students were seen as apathetic or unhelpful. The negative perceptions of students and administrators undergirded student veterans' propensity to seek out fellow veterans for support. Furthermore, the negative perceptions of administrators were explained by the unique challenges student veterans faced when navigating re-enrollment.

Student veterans' navigation of re-enrollment was a unique, individual experience. Student veterans tended to re-enroll alone and had to adapt from military structure to college life. Military influence affected the transition from the military to college, as participants had to learn to adapt from a regimented environment to a lifestyle which was much more unstructured. Student veterans found their friends had graduated, a factor which increased the likelihood to seek social support. Social support was often sought amongst fellow veterans; this was explained by military influence as participants

noted it difficult to relate to non-military peers. Student veterans acknowledged they forgot academic information during their deployment, a challenge that was offset by their increased academic emphasis and discipline. Financial considerations were a paramount concern and student veterans had to navigate institutional bureaucracy to receive veterans benefits. The frustration evident in bureaucratic navigation affected student veterans' perceptions of campus attitudes, primarily in regards to administrators.

The story of student veteran re-enrollment is one of perseverance, individual will, and the ever apparent overarching influence of military experience. Student veterans navigated the academic transition of re-enrollment with relative ease, drawing on their maturity, discipline, focus, and self-reliance. Their social transitions were more complex: student veterans either found ways to congregate with fellow veterans or blend in with the campus community to fulfill their college experience. Though there are common elements in student veterans' management of re-enrollment, it is important to remember that the experience varied from student to student. The management of the academic and social transitions of college re-enrollment ultimately rests on the shoulders of the individual student veteran.

Implications of Grounded Theory Explaining Student Veterans' Management of Academic and Social Transitions during Re-enrollment

The following section discusses the implications of the grounded theory which explains student veterans' management of academic and social transitions during re-enrollment. This section is designed to showcase the predictive power of the grounded theory specific to the research site. This section is subdivided into two subsections: (a)

academic implications and (b) social implications.

Academic Implications

The grounded theory developed from this study explains most student veterans will have little overall difficulty in terms of academic transition. However, student veterans may need some initial academic support, as their absence from college may contribute to their forgetfulness of key academic concepts related to their major or the general education curriculum. Thus, while student veterans have an increased academic emphasis (which typically translates into increased academic performance), they may experience temporary academic frustration when they first re-enroll.

Despite minor academic hiccups, student veterans may not be inclined to seek out formal avenues of academic support. They will most often connect with their advisor, however, and the advisor can be instrumental in helping the student veteran lay the groundwork for an informed and successful academic transition. If they seek out academic support, it will most likely be in the form of fellow students instead of campus resources. If they are able to identify one another, student veterans may be inclined to connect with fellow student veterans who are in their area of study or have knowledge of their area of study.

Faculty members may be impressed by student veterans' maturity, focus, and discipline. Student veterans may approach faculty members asking them to accommodate their needs in terms of drill or military leave. If they are able to identify student veterans, faculty members may pick up on resentment or irritation in terms of student veterans relating to their classmates. While some students may be naïve, student veterans will

bring real world, practical experience with them into the classroom which ultimately augments their academic experience and transition.

Social Implications

Student veterans will experience more difficulty with the social transition following re-enrollment as opposed to the academic transition. It is likely that students with whom student veterans were friends prior to their absence have graduated or joined new social circles. Thus, student veterans are forced to seek out new avenues of socialization, a task which is complicated because they have a difficult time relating to younger, non-military peers.

For student veterans who were previously enrolled at the institution, navigating social circles may not be as problematic; this is because they may have been involved in social, academic, or service organizations and clubs prior to their absence. Their social outlook and priorities may have changed, creating a new role for them within their friendships and organizations. Student veterans who are re-enrolling in college but who are new to the institution may find the social acclimation more difficult. They may tend to isolate themselves and, depending on their military experience and personal demeanor, may not be inclined to join a student veterans association.

The military is often a familiar and comfortable setting for student veterans. The comfort and familiarity means student veterans may ultimately seek each other out whether formally – through affiliation with ROTC or a student veterans association – or informally – through randomly identifying fellow student veterans. That said, student veterans' invisibility may inhibit socialization. As a result, student veterans will utilize

previously established support networks such as friends, family, and members of their military unit. Thus, avenues of social support will sometimes be external to the institution and university community.

Self-disclosure is an individually-motivated choice for student veterans. Many student veterans will tend to not disclose their military affiliation and veteran status. The underlying motive for non-disclosure is the desire to avoid individual notoriety and, as a result, blend into the campus community. It is important to note that blending in is not the same as being connected to campus or feeling apart of the campus community.

<div align="center">Chapter Summary</div>

The fourth chapter of this study provided an in-depth overview of the data analysis procedures, presented the researcher's findings, and discussed the grounded theory that explains how student veterans manage the academic and social transitions brought on by college re-enrollment. The researcher described data analysis procedures in great detail and offered practical examples to illustrate their application within grounded theory methodology. The findings of the study were presented in a narrative formed from the words of participants, sources of data triangulation, and the researcher's own observations and thoughts. Finally, a summary of the grounded theory and theoretical implications were provided to explain and predict the practical application of the theory.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

<u>Introduction</u>

Chapter Five is the final chapter of this study. In this chapter, the researcher discusses the research findings in relation to Schlossberg's (1984) theory of adult transitions. Additionally, implications for practice are noted. Finally, the researcher notes the limitations of the study and makes recommendations for further study.

<u>Theoretical Implications</u>

Nancy K. Schlossberg's theory of adult transitions (1984) served as the theoretical basis for this study. Transitions are defined as events or nonevents that result in change (Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989; Schlossberg, 1990). Leibowitz and Schlossberg (1982) noted transitions are vulnerable and uncertain periods of time for people. More specifically, transitions alter a person's roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions (Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989; Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002).

<u>Transitions</u>

This study validated many elements of Schlossberg's (1984) theory in regard to transitions. Leibowtiz and Schlossberg's (1982) description of the uncertain and vulnerable nature of transitions was apparent in this study. Student veterans noted financial vulnerability in terms of difficulty receiving veterans benefits and paying for college. Some participants displayed uncertainty in terms of getting the classes they wanted and needed and uncertainty regarding curriculum changes which occurred during

their absence. Many student veterans noted things had changed while they were away, especially in regard to friends who graduated and departed the research site. Having to make new friends and navigate new social networks created uncertainty for participants. Student veterans further noted the confusion and uncertainty of navigating the bureaucratic processes of re-enrollment into college. Finally, some participants noted the difficult transition from the military, a structured environment, to college, a relatively unstructured environment. The difficult transition implies a sense of vulnerability in that the success of transition ultimately depends on the individual to adapt to a new system after being told what to do and how to do it for an extended timeframe.

Type of Transition

Schlossberg's (1984) original theory highlighted four types of transitions: (a) anticipated, (b) unanticipated, (c) chronic 'hassels', and (d) nonevent. Anticipated transitions are those which individuals can prepare for, while unanticipated transitions are irregular and typically involve crises. Chronic 'hassels' are detrimental to an individual's self-esteem and can prevent the individual from taking the necessary steps to make a change (Schlossberg, 1984). Finally, transitions may take the form of a nonevent, or an anticipated transition that never occurred.

This study confirmed the assumptions of the varying types of transition. The transition of re-enrollment was an anticipated transition for student veterans. While some participants noted minor difficulties with re-enrollment, most student veterans noted the process of re-enrollment was relatively easy. Student veterans prepared for the transition of re-enrollment in advance of returning to college. Some participants prepared for the

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transition by staying connected with advisors during their absence or deployment. Other participants actually completed re-enrollment processes and paperwork off-site (sometimes during absence or deployment) and in advance of their return to campus. The advanced preparation for the anticipated transition of re-enrollment meant student veterans, on the whole, were able to navigate re-enrollment processes fairly smoothly.

The process of re-enrollment was anticipated; the challenges which emerged following re-enrollment were unanticipated and sometimes problematic. Student veterans found they had forgotten academic concepts during their time away from college and had to re-learn material to succeed academically. Participants experienced unanticipated financial transitions when their benefits were delayed or incorrectly processed. Another unanticipated transition was culture shock, a byproduct of the adjustment from military structure and routine to the relatively unstructured college lifestyle.

Schlossberg (1984) explained chronic 'hassels' can prevent individuals from making a change. As participants explained in this study, student veterans have a strong sense of pride, self-reliance, and individual will. While these qualities can be beneficial, they can also be detrimental. Student veterans expressed stubbornness in regard to seeking help and support; this aversion to help was explained by pride. Because student veterans were reluctant to seek support, it was often solely on their shoulders to change their circumstances.

The researcher found nonevents to be closely related to unanticipated financial transitions. An example of a nonevent in this study is student veterans who, after filling out the appropriate paperwork, did not receive their veterans benefits.

<u>Context of Transition</u>

The context of a transition refers to the individual's relationship to the transition. The context takes into account the setting of the transition, and whether the transition was personal, interpersonal, or communal. Oftentimes, elements of transition fit all three categories – personal, interpersonal, and communal. The degree to which a transition alters an individual's daily life, as opposed to the event itself, is most important to the individual (Schlossberg, 1984). Schlossberg further explained that the altered state of a person's life impacts the availability of coping resources needed to successfully navigate transition.

Most student veterans experienced the transition of re-enrollment alone. Thus, the transition was mostly personal. Student veterans time away from college varied for a variety of reasons, one being length of deployment. Participants tended to return to college alone and with few initial connections to fellow student veterans. The resulting initial effect was academic and social isolation.

Some participants were able to connect with fellow student veterans but only after they re-enrolled. That said, many student veterans noted it was difficult to find other student veterans. Furthermore, some participants noted an aversion to affiliating with existing student veterans groups and seeking avenues of support. Thus, the transition of student veteran re-enrollment was a unique individual experience.

Many participants lacked knowledge of available coping resources, such as academic and social support. Other student veterans expressed the lingering influence of do-it-yourself military pride. Student veterans were taught to be self-sufficient in the

military, a factor which equipped them to succeed as individuals but catalyzed reluctance to utilizing coping resources.

Situation, Self, Supports, and Strategies

Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) and Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) denoted four broad categories of coping resources: (a) *situation*, (b) *self*, (c) *supports*, and (d) *strategies*. These categories are commonly known as the *4 S's*. The availability of resources in the four categories often predicts how individuals will cope with transitions (Sargent & Schlossber, 1988; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). *Situation* resources are found in an individual's survey of the entire context of the transition. The experience, attitude, and awareness a person possesses comprise *self* resources. *Supports* include financial and emotional support sources and networks. Finally, individuals must employ a number of methods of coping with the transition, which constitutes the *strategies* component.

Situation

Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) explained the type of transition, individuals' perceptions of the transition (positive or negative, expected or unexpected, etc.), and whether or not the transition was mandated or self-selected were elements which determined *situation* coping resources. In the case of student veteran re-enrollment, the transition was anticipated, positive, and self-selected. In other words, student veterans had a great deal of initial control over the transition, as they were able to direct their individual re-enrollment process. The situation changed, however, after re-enrollment. The positive perceptions of re-enrollment turned nervous or anxious as student veterans

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had to navigate bureaucracy, secure financial assets, and navigate new or altered social circles. Following the re-enrollment process, student veterans faced unanticipated transitions and nonevents. While these transitions created some challenges, student veterans ultimately seemed to retain a positive, focused outlook. Thus, *situation* coping resources were aided by student veterans' desire to come back to college, initial preparation for transition, and maintained focused outlook despite encountering unexpected challenges.

Self

The *self* coping resources were the most important for student veterans. Because participants re-enrolled alone and because they desired a certain level of invisibility, they had to rely on themselves in their individual transitions. Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) delineated individuals' strengths and weaknesses, outlook, and unique experiences were aspects of *self* coping resources. Student veterans were uniquely prepared to encounter and overcome challenges associated with transitions because of their military experience. Student veterans excelled at remaining disciplined, focused, and mature in their navigation of re-enrollment. Participants highlighted an increased academic focus which resulted from their military experience. The maturity, discipline, and focus are all positive elements of *self* coping resources.

Self-reliance and individual will were both positive and negative examples of *self* coping resources. In other words, student veterans' greatest strength could also be their greatest weakness. Participants described an aversion to help and a tendency to rely on individual will to persevere. While the dedication and strength of character are admirable,

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student veterans' self-reliance limited opportunities for support, especially academic

support. Another aspect of *self* coping resources limited veterans' socialization;

participants were highly critical of non-military peers, as they expressed gaps in age,

maturity, and worldview. Criticism and difficulty relating to peers evolved from student

veterans' military experience, and is a negative example of a *self* coping mechanism.

Supports

Sargent and Schlossberg (1998) described *support* coping resources as people

who aided or hindered a person in transition. The researcher found participants to rely on

a variety of support sources. Examples of *support* coping resources included faculty

members, administrators, fellow students, employers, friends, and family. The most

prominent support was fellow veterans. Student veterans relied heavily on the

experiences of fellow veterans throughout the re-enrollment process. Some student

veterans chose to live together. Other student veterans chose to affiliate with the research

site's student veteran association. Several student veterans acknowledged faculty

members who were themselves veterans, and who played an important role in their

college transition. Even veterans who were outside the institution (for example, members

of reserve units who were not enrolled at the research site) were prominent figures of

support.

Strategies

Strategies are coping resources which incorporate elements of *situation*, *self*, and

support to form what Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) refer to as a "plan of action" (p.

60). Student veterans used a multifaceted approach to manage the transitions associated

with re-enrollment. *Situation* variables, such as student veterans' desire to re-enroll, complemented *self* components, such as student veterans' ability to remain focused on achieving their educational goals. *Support* elements were important, especially the support from fellow veterans; that said, student veteran re-enrollment tended to be an individual experience.

The basis of the strategy which student veterans employed was a confidence in, reliance upon, and motivation through oneself. Student veterans focused on their academic obligations, drawing from their increased maturity and discipline. While participants were selective in disclosure of their veteran status, they were able to seek out support where and when they needed it. Support was utilized tactically; in other words, student veterans did not rely on support, but rather used it as an auxiliary aid.

Altered Roles, Relationships, Routines, and Assumptions

Transitions alter individuals' roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions (Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989; Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). This aspect of Schlossberg's (1984) was very apparent in this study. Student veterans articulated numerous role changes during and after re-enrollment. Participants explained they were better students who were more focused and more disciplined. This altered their role on campus, transforming them into dedicated students as opposed to bodies in a classroom. Participants who were involved in student organization explained a different social outlook. They alluded to different roles within their organization. Their roles had transformed from a member who went out and partied to a member who provided more social discretion.

Altered roles led to altered relationships. Because veterans were academically focused, faculty tended to view them more positively, respected them, and in some cases praised them for their service. Nowhere were changes in relationships more apparent than in student veterans' relationships with their non-military peers. Military influence created an age, maturity, and mindset gap which produced tenuous relationships between student veterans and non-military peers. For many student veterans, relationships with other student veterans were important. Relationships that may have existed within student veterans' individual military units expanded at the college level to include fellow veterans from other branches.

Student veterans specifically acknowledged altered routines during and after their transition. The transition from the military to campus entailed the navigation of two very different worlds. The profound difference between the institutions of higher education and the military created culture shock for re-enrolling student veterans. Participants explained they had to adjust from a rigid, structured, and regimented work environment to a routine which was much more varied and flexible.

In terms of altered assumptions, student veterans displayed a different mindset upon returning to college life. Participants highlighted characteristics about themselves such as maturity and experience which they assumed non-veteran students did not possess. Student veterans assumed fellow veterans would be less inclined to broadcast their veteran status. Perhaps most insightful was the sense of self-reliance garnered from military service. Student veterans assumed responsibility for re-enrollment and, for the most part, navigated the transitions and challenges of re-enrollment independently.

Limitations

Several limitations exist in this study. Some of the most obvious limitations concern the demographics of the participants. This study was very much the story of white male student veteran re-enrollment. There was no representation of minority or underrepresented student populations and only one participant self-identified as female. The lack of representativeness in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender is noteworthy. While qualitative research is not designed to be generalizeable, a more diverse participant group could have yielded additional data and provided greater context to the study.

Data from this study are not generalizeable because of the qualitative nature of the research. Moreover, the study was conducted at one institution, further limiting general applicability of data and findings. The institution's strong military heritage undoubtedly influenced participants' experiences at the research site. Furthermore, the researcher had to rely on self-reported, and thus inherently biased, data from participants.

The researcher utilized convenience and snowball sampling procedures, which potentially limited the diversity of the sample population and allowed participants to indirectly influence the study by referring individuals whom they knew. As this was the researcher's first qualitative exploration, the researcher undoubtedly made novice mistakes which impacted data analysis and findings within the study.

Another form of limitation was the researcher's bias towards the student veteran population. The researcher has the utmost respect for military veterans and has a tendency to view student veterans in a positive light. This bias stemmed from the researcher having family and friends who served in the military.

Perhaps the greatest limitation was found in the researcher's inability to fully understand the world in which student veterans live. The researcher was not a veteran, and thus it was sometimes difficult to understand certain terminology, attitudes, and relationships. While the researcher developed good rapport with participants, there was still a gap which could have influenced the researcher's interpretation of data. The fact that the researcher was not a veteran offers objectivity, but at the sacrifice of deeper understanding.

Implications for Practice and Policy

This study provides several important implications for practice. Higher education professionals are tasked with identifying and supporting various student populations and subcultures. One of the greatest discoveries of this study was that student veterans are often invisible individuals. Student veterans choose selectively to whom they disclose their status and sometimes decide not to utilize campus support networks and services. Individual student veterans can go unnoticed on campus, thus methods must be devised to identify student veterans and support them.

In terms of practice, identifying student veterans who often shirk self-disclosure is a challenging task. Student veterans are less likely to disclose their veteran status to non-military and non-veteran campus community members. Student veterans are more likely to reveal their military service to their veteran peers. Additionally, veterans are often able to discern fellow veterans without being told of their veteran status. In short, while veterans are able to 'see' each other, they are not necessarily visible to the overall campus population. Furthermore, student veterans may be confused with ROTC cadets at

institutions with a rich military heritage. This confusion has the effect of student veterans being 'lost in the crowd'. Sometimes, student veterans enjoy being lost in the crowd. There is a strong desire to come back, have the college experience, blend in, and complete their degrees. Campus community members must appreciate and respect these wishes and should not try and force identification or association on student veterans.

How can higher education professionals support a population who is (a) difficult to see and (b) may not want help? The short answer is student affairs divisions may not be able to directly support student veterans. The key word is "directly": the genesis of support is the most important variable. Student affairs divisions may have to work indirectly through existing support structures or establish bona fide student veteran support centers staffed by veteran staff members. If the establishment of a student veteran center is not monetarily feasible or does not complement institutional culture and priorities, student affairs divisions will have to coordinate efforts through existing offices and departments. Whatever the outcome, it is vital that support be seen as genuine, authentic, and legitimate to student veterans.

Appreciation and acknowledgement are important, but must be directed at the group level, not the individual level. Student veterans' maturity, humility, and humbleness means appreciation which singles out or promotes the individual may not be well received. Appreciation and acknowledgement should highlight military service on a grand scale rather than promoting student veterans' individual achievements. Moreover, appreciation for veterans should be a constant presence as opposed to a grand event or spectacle. This does not mean large scale acknowledgements (such as a military

appreciation day football game) are not effective; indeed they are. They are effective because they tap into the culture of the institution and allow student veterans to congregate as individuals without being highlighted for individual accomplishment.

An institution's strong military heritage should not be automatically construed as an institution's appreciation for its military population. Appreciation derives from visible acknowledgement in the form of ceremonies, rituals, and traditions, but is perhaps more evident in the attitudes and helpfulness of campus community members. For example, an institution with a strong military heritage may have a strong ROTC program but, as participants noted, student veterans may not be associated with ROTC. It is important to understand the distinctiveness between these populations so student veterans will not slip through the cracks.

One important policy consideration is the need for mandated academic advising for re-enrolling student veterans. While several participants noted they utilized their academic advisor, many others did not. Furthermore, the researcher learned that, while student veterans are encouraged to see an academic advisor, they are not required to seek advising. The initial academic hiccups student veterans expressed could be offset by intentional advising. Additionally, a mandated session with an academic advisor would create an additional point of contact between the institution and the student veteran. The result could be an easier, more informed, academic transition which could ultimately impact the ease and context of the overall transition for the student veteran. More importantly, the mandated session could create an avenue for informal tracking and monitoring of re-enrolling student veterans throughout their tenure at the institution.

Recommendations for Further Study

        This study was designed to inform readers of the student veteran experience as it pertained to academic and social transition during college re-enrollment. Although this study achieved its purpose, the researcher found several topics which should be further explored. The following section discusses the researcher's recommendations for further study related to the student veteran subculture.

        This study lacked representativeness in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender. Future research should seek to incorporate more diverse sample populations and study how participants' experiences are influenced by their race, ethnicity, and gender. In particular, the study of women student veterans would be a worthy topic to pursue, as women increasingly play a prominent role (and often frontline role) in the United States armed forces.

        The researcher studied re-enrolling student veterans in this study. In hindsight, it may have been more appropriate to first study the experiences of student veterans who were activated, mobilized, or deployed. Following an interview, one participant told the researcher that the most challenging part of his college experience was the semester he found out he was being deployed. Participant 8 actually mentioned this in his interview, noting, "…the semester when I was leaving before I went to Iraq was much more stressful than the one I came back…" A study focusing on the academic and social transitions associated with deployment would provide greater context for understanding the same transitions during re-enrollment. More specifically, a study examining

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transitions during deployment would offer a holistic perspective of the spectrum of transitions student veterans face while in college.

A more specific study might focus on the effect military influence has on student veterans' college experience. The category of military influence was very robust in this study. Research that examined in depth components such as pride, maturity, and difficulty relating to peers would shed light on how student veterans see their world, their academic experience, and their peers. In particular, a study which examined the dichotomy (and psychology) of independence and subservience learned through the military would offer profound explanations of student veterans' likelihood of pursuing campus support resources.

Qualitative research could be used to study the campus climate towards student veterans at any institution. For campuses that are concerned with improving their military friendliness, studies of this nature would highlight areas where ameliorations could be made. For campuses at which student veterans are not a priority, concerned constituents could use studies of this type to make a case for a re-prioritization of student veterans' needs. Studies which gauge campus climate towards student veterans should be all encompassing; all constituents – student veterans, 'regular' students, faculty, staff, and administrators – should be included.

Student veterans associations are interesting groups. At the campus level, these organizations have varying degrees of organization, affiliation, and participation. The formation of the national umbrella organization, Student Veterans of America, has created a system that mirrors honor societies and Greek organizations. However, the

movement to establish the national entity followed local grassroots movements to establish campus chapters. A case study approach could be utilized to study select chapters who have chosen to affiliate with the Student Veterans of America organization. A project of this nature would offer insight on the socialization and affiliation tendencies of student veterans and the viability of local student veterans groups on the campus level.

Participants in this study made noteworthy remarks about the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) at the research site. A study which examined the experiences of student veterans within ROTC detachments could yield interesting results. The researcher noted great discrepancy in participants' statements about ROTC. A study designed to extrapolate this discrepancy would offer useful insight for ROTC programs who may intend (but sometimes fail) to be havens for student veterans.

Lastly, quantitative studies are needed to add to the existing qualitative research and create generalizeable findings. Two areas lend themselves to quantitative study. The first area concerns veterans' financing of college. The G.I. Bill has been updated and will soon be implemented; this would provide fertile ground for studies which compare the effectiveness of the new G.I. Bill to that of the old G.I. Bill. This would be a timely topic as the United States has witnessed a presidential administration change (accompanied by shifts in foreign policy strategy) and has faced recent economic turmoil.

The second area of quantitative study should focus on avenues of campus support for student veterans. A researcher could test findings from qualitative research related to support for student veterans. Testing qualitative findings would add to the breadth of student veteran research. Additionally, quantitative examination would provide increased

legitimacy and validity to qualitative findings, and would offer generalizeable data that could be seriously assessed and discussed at any college campus.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Five is the culminating chapter of this dissertation. The researcher discussed the theoretical implications of this study related to Schlossberg's (1984) theory of adult transitions. Limitations of the study were noted in detail and the researcher posited the practical implications which resulted from the findings of the study. Lastly, recommendations for the further study of student veterans were highlighted by the researcher.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Research Site's IRB Approval

CLEMSON
U N I V E R S I T Y

May 26, 2008

Dr. Pam Havice
Department of Counselor Education
307 Tillman Hall
Clemson University
Clemson, SC 29634

FILE COPY

SUBJECT: Human Subjects Protocol # **IRB2008-157, entitled "Discovering the Academic and Social Transitions of Re-enrolling Student Veterans at One Institution: A Grounded Theory"**

Dear Dr. Havice:

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Clemson University reviewed the above-mentioned study using Expedited review procedures and has recommended approval. **Approval for this study has been granted as of May 23, 2008.**

Your approval period is **May 23, 2008 to May 22, 2009.** Your next continuing review is scheduled for March 2009. Please refer to the IRB number and title in communication regarding this study. Attached are handouts regarding the Principal and Co-Investigators' responsibilities in the conduct of human research. The Co-Investigator responsibilities handout should be distributed to all members of the research team. The Principal Investigator is also responsible for maintaining all signed consent forms (if applicable) for at least three (3) years after completion of the study.

No change in this approved research protocol can be initiated without the IRB's approval. This includes any proposed revisions or amendments to the protocol or consent form. Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects, any complications, and/or any adverse events must be reported to the Office of Research Compliance immediately. Please contact the office if your study has terminated or been completed before the identified review date.

We appreciate your assistance in complying with federal regulations and institutional policies. You may contact the Office of Research Compliance at 656-6460 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Laura A. Moll, M.A., CIP
IRB Administrator

OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE
223 Brackett Hall   Box 345704   Clemson, SC 29634-5704   864.656.1525   FAX 864.656.4475   www.clemson.edu/research
Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee: 864.656.4538   Institutional Biosafety Committee: 864.656.0118   Institutional Review Board: 864.656.6460

Appendix B

Interview Questions

- How would you characterize the re-enrollment process?

- What challenges did you face after you re-enrolled in college?

- How would you describe your academic transition after re-enrollment?

- What avenues of academic support did you utilize upon re-enrollment?

- How would you describe your social transition after re-enrollment?

- What avenues of social support did you utilize upon re-enrollment?

- How would you characterize fellow students' attitudes towards you as a
  student veteran?

- How would you characterize your attitude toward fellow students?

- How would you characterize student affairs administrators' attitudes towards
  you as a student veteran?

- How would you characterize faculty members' attitudes towards you as a
  student veteran?

Appendix C

Participant Profile Sheet

Name: _____

Gender: Male   Female   Other: _____

Age: _____

Race: White/Caucasian   African-American   Hispanic   Native American   Pacific

Islander

Other: _____

Year first enrolled in college: _____

Year deployed: _____

Anticipated duration of deployment: _____

Actual duration of deployment: _____

Year re-enrolled in college: _____

Nature of deployment: Combat   Non-combat   Other: _____

Service branch: Army   Navy   Air Force   Marine Corps   Coast Guard

At time of deployment, were you considered 'Reserve' personnel? Yes   No

At time of deployment, were you considered 'National Guard' personnel? Yes   No

Member Check: Phase One

Dear Student Veteran,

I wanted to write you and thank you for your participation in the student veteran research study and bring you up to date on my progress.

I have transcribed your interview, typed your field notes, and have conducted a preliminary analysis of the data. ***At this time, I would like to invite you to offer any feedback you might have for me. Specifically, I am looking for your assessment of (a) the categories, subcategories, and concepts I've seen emerge from the data, and (b) the accuracy of field notes and interview transcript from your interview.***

I have attached a Word document that includes three (3) items:

- The first item is a list of the categories, subcategories, and concepts I have seen emerge thus far during data analysis

  - **Here is a brief explanation of the categories**: Student veterans are often an *'invisible'* population because they selectively choose to whom they disclose their veteran status. Moreover, some student veterans just want to be students. These factors, coupled with a tendency to live off-campus and less involvement on campus can make this population hard to see
  - The *'military influence'* plays an important role in student veterans' transitions for a number of reasons. First, there is a carryover of discipline that allows student veterans to focus more than peers. Veterans tend to be more academically focused, especially *after* coming back to college. The military experience coincides with aging, and student veterans have a higher level of maturity that can sometimes create difficulties relating to peers. There may also be a pride issue that, because they have been taught to problem-solve and think independently, student veterans may be less likely to seek out support.
  - Student veterans do not tend to utilize much campus *'support'*, but instead rely on other student veterans and friends and family. The increased academic emphasis resulting from the military influence minimizes the need for formal academic support for student veterans. Student affairs has not been an avenue of support for student veterans.
  - *'Navigating re-enrollment'* from a process standpoint is not difficult for most student veterans. Each student veteran has a unique experience navigating this process. That said, some elements of commonality include change (friends have graduated, the social scene has changed, curriculum

has changed, etc.) and adapting to new structures and routines (going from the rigidity of the military to the loose-ness of college). The paramount concern in navigating re-enrollment surrounds finances.

- o The *'campus culture'* has an impact on student veterans' re-enrollment. Football seems to offer an avenue for socialization and appreciation (Military Appreciation Day). Student veterans have varying perceptions of the attitudes of community members - there have been both positive and negative experiences with students, staff, and faculty. While student veterans have been acknowledged as a group and they appreciate this, there is not necessarily an overt acknowledgement of student veterans as a student population.

- The second item is a copy of your field notes, which are my observations of our conversation

- The third item is a copy of your interview transcript (Note: while your name is still on this document, I will redact it before the study is published - I have your name on it now because it helps me keep everyone's data organized)

I should have a draft of my final two chapters and, more importantly, the theoretical model for this study by late March. At this time, I may send this model your way to gather your feedback on it as a final measure to increase the validity of the study.

Once again, please know how much I appreciate your time and assistance with this project.

Sincerely,
Wade

Member Check: Phase Two

Dear Student Veteran,

I wanted to touch base with you one more time and update on my research findings.

I have conducted my analysis of the data and have attached a visual diagram which expresses the grounded theory that explains how student veterans manage the transition of college re-enrollment following deployment, training, or self-induced military absence.

The following is a narrative which complements and explains the visual diagram. The narrative is divided into two parts.

***PART ONE** describes the grounded theory in its entirety.*

***PART TWO** discusses implications of the theory and is designed to explain and predict behaviors and attitudes associated with student veterans' management of re-enrollment.*

I welcome any feedback you have regarding the model and the narrative. Please know that your feedback is vital because it helps me better understand and represent the data.

Part 1: Synopsis of Student Veterans' Management of Academic and Social Transitions

during Re-enrollment

The following section is a synopsis of the grounded theory which answers the

research question: How do student veterans manage college re-enrollment after

deployment, training, or self-induced military absence? The researcher denoted five

categories which described and affected student veterans' re-enrollment: (a) military

influence, (b) invisibility, (c) support, (d) campus culture, and (e) navigating re-

enrollment.

Military influence explained both academic and social facets of student veteran

re-enrollment. Participants described an increased academic emphasis upon returning to

college which ultimately benefitted their academic transition. Student veterans were more mature both in age and life outlook. Increased maturity impacted social transition because student veterans found it difficult to relate to younger students. Maturity bolstered academic performance as student veterans had different priorities and expressed increased discipline. Through maturity, student veterans developed a sense of humility and humbleness. On the aggregate, participants explained it was difficult to relate to non-military peers who had different priorities, different mindsets, and who had not experienced the world as they had. Student veterans displayed pride in their military service that translated into interdependence and self-reliance. Participants felt they could navigate the transitions of re-enrollment because they had been tested in the military and were ultimately capable of individually handling college life.

Invisibility explained that the student veteran population was often – whether intentionally or not – an unseen population on campus. Student veterans' social transitions were affected, as participants were less likely to be connected to campus either through living on campus or through getting involved in campus opportunities. Military influence – particularly difficulty relating to peers and maturity – explained this phenomenon. Student veterans, because of their age, maturity, and unique life circumstances chose not to live on campus. Moreover, student veterans often opted not to involve themselves on campus because they had different priorities and because they had difficulty relating to peer groups. Student veterans chose to selectively identify themselves as veterans because they did not want to receive preferential treatment, did not want to be seen differently, and did not want flaunt their military experience. Student

veterans' military influence – through maturity and pride – affected participants' selective identity. Because student veterans were more mature and humble, they did not disclose their veteran status because they did not want to be seen as bragging about their military experience. Additionally, pride influenced disclosure as participants did not want to be treated differently during re-enrollment; they could make it on their own.

Student veterans sought mostly social support. Because of military influence – specifically academic emphasis – student veterans were less inclined to pursue avenues of academic support. Additionally, pride affected student veterans' pursuit of academic support, as participants tapped into individual will and self-reliance to succeed in the classroom. Social support took on varying forms specific to the individual. Friends and family were vital to some participants, while others relied on support through student organizations, jobs, and fellow veterans. Fellow veterans – both students and faculty – played a pivotal role in support for student veterans. Because student veterans had difficulty relating to non-military peers, and because they were invisible to the overall campus population, student veterans tended to congregate with fellow veterans. Fellow veterans were able to understand the needs of student veterans and relate to their military experience, and offered both academic and social support.

Aspects of campus culture affected student veterans' re-enrollment. Football, a cultural staple of the research site, provided avenues of socialization and acknowledgement which ultimately bolstered social support for participants. Perceptions of campus attitudes varied; faculty were, on the whole, perceived as helpful and supportive, while administrators and students were seen as apathetic or unhelpful. The

negative perceptions of students and administrators undergirded student veterans' propensity to seek out fellow veterans for support. Furthermore, the negative perceptions of administrators were explained by the unique challenges student veterans faced when navigating re-enrollment.

Student veterans' navigation of re-enrollment was a unique, individual experience. Student veterans tended to re-enroll alone and had to adapt from military structure to college life. Military influence affected the transition from the military to college, as participants had to learn to adapt from a regimented environment to a lifestyle which was much more unstructured. Student veterans found their friends had graduated, a factor which increased the likelihood to seek social support. Social support was often sought amongst fellow veterans; this was explained by military influence as participants noted it difficult to relate to non-military peers. Student veterans acknowledged they forgot academic information during their deployment, a challenge that was offset by their increased academic emphasis and discipline. Financial considerations were a paramount concern and student veterans had to navigate institutional bureaucracy to receive veterans benefits. The frustration evident in bureaucratic navigation affected student veterans' perceptions of campus attitudes, primarily in regards to administrators.

The story of student veteran re-enrollment is one of perseverance, individual will, and the ever apparent overarching influence of military experience. Student veterans navigated the academic transition of re-enrollment with relative ease, drawing on their maturity, discipline, focus, and self-reliance. Their social transitions were more complex: student veterans either found ways to congregate with fellow veterans or blend in with

the campus community to fulfill their college experience. Though there are common elements in student veterans' management of re-enrollment, it is important to remember that the experience varied from student to student. The management of the academic and social transitions of college re-enrollment ultimately rests on the shoulders of the individual student veteran.

Part 2: Implications of Grounded Theory Explaining Student Veterans' Management of Academic and Social Transitions during Re-enrollment

The following section discusses the implications of the grounded theory which explains student veterans' management of academic and social transitions during re-enrollment. This section is designed to showcase the predictive power of the grounded theory specific to the research site. This section is subdivided into two subsections: (a) academic implications and (b) social implications.

Academic Implications

The grounded theory explains most student veterans will have little overall difficulty in terms of academic transition. However, student veterans may need some initial academic support, as their absence from college may contribute to their forgetting of key academic concepts related to their major or the general education curriculum. Thus, while student veterans have an increased academic emphasis (which typically translates into increased academic performance), they may experience temporary academic frustration when they first re-enroll.

Despite minor academic hiccups, student veterans may not be inclined to seek out formal avenues of academic support. They will most often connect with their advisor,

however, and the advisor can be instrumental in helping the student veteran lay the groundwork for an informed and successful academic transition. If they seek out academic support, it will most likely be in the form of fellow students instead of campus resources. If they are able to identify one another, student veterans may be inclined to connect with fellow student veterans who are in their area of study or have knowledge of their area of study.

Faculty members will be impressed by student veterans' maturity, focus, and discipline. Student veterans may approach faculty members asking them to accommodate their needs in terms of drill or military leave. If they are able to identify student veterans, faculty members may pick up on resentment or irritation in terms of student veterans relating to their classmates. While some students may be naïve, student veterans will bring real world, practical experience with them into the classroom which ultimately augments their academic experience and transition.

Social Implications

Student veterans will experience more difficulty with the social transition following re-enrollment as opposed to the academic transition. It is likely that students with whom student veterans were friends prior to their absence have graduated or joined new social circles. Thus, student veterans are forced to seek out new avenues of socialization, a task which is complicated because they have a difficult time relating to younger, non-military peers.

For student veterans who were previously enrolled at the institution, navigating social circles may not be as problematic; this is because they may have been involved in

social, academic, or service organizations and clubs prior to their absence. Their social outlook and priorities may have changed, creating a new role for them within their friendships and organizations. Student veterans who are re-enrolling in college but who are new to the institution may find the social acclimation more difficult. They may tend to isolate themselves and, depending on their military experience and personal demeanor, may not be inclined to join a student veterans association.

The military is often a familiar and comfortable setting for student veterans. The comfort and familiarity means student veterans may ultimately seek each other out whether formally – through affiliation with ROTC or a student veterans association – or informally – through randomly identifying fellow student veterans. That said, student veterans' invisibility may inhibit socialization. As a result, student veterans will utilize previously established support networks such as friends, family, and members of their military unit. Thus, avenues of social support will sometimes be external to the institution and university community.

Self-disclosure is an individually-motivated choice for student veterans. Many student veterans will tend to not disclose their military affiliation and veteran status. The underlying motive for non-disclosure is the desire to avoid individual notoriety and, as a result, blend into the campus community. It is important to note that blending in is not the same as being connected to campus or feeling apart of the campus community.

Once again, please know how much I appreciate your time and assistance with this project.

Sincerely,
Wade

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