Transition Stories Of Student Veterans

Kelley J. Jenkins

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TRANSITION STORIES OF STUDENT VETERANS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of Mississippi
In partial fulfillment of the requirements the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Higher Education and Student Personnel

by
Kelley J. Jenkins
May 2020
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the transition experience for student veterans enrolled in the three largest universities in Mississippi: Mississippi State University, The University of Mississippi, and The University of Southern Mississippi. Schlossberg’s Transition Theory was used as a lens for viewing the results of this study. This phenological approach will take a social constructivist worldview in order to describe the veteran transition experience. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews, transcribed, and analyzed. Each veteran’s story was written in a narrative form to provide rich detail for better understanding of their experiences.

The interview transcripts were analyzed and five themes emerged. Theme one, Trouble Relating to Other Students, discussed several reasons student veterans attribute to their not being able to relate to traditional-aged students. The second theme, Lasting Effects of Military Service, examined both the positive and negative effects of military service that have carried over to the classroom. Theme three, Financial Struggle, discussed the financial hardships most participants faced even when receiving military education benefits. The fourth, Types of Support, described the types of support student veterans depend on while they make their transition to the college setting. Finally, theme five, Institutional Interaction, discussed the interactions students had with the institution and how these interactions affected their transition.

The themes were then applied to the framework of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory. The 4Ss of Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies were all discussed in terms of the data gathered in
this student. This application helps to fill in the gaps in research where further exploration is needed in the realm of student veteran transition.

These findings give a better understanding of the transition of student veterans from military service to college life. Implications for higher education were presented to be begin addressing some of the issues student veterans face. Further research is also suggested to expand the knowledge of how to support this special population.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The military and higher education have been linked since the establishment of the United States Military Academy at West Point (1802) (United States Military Academy, n.d.), the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis (1845) (United States Naval Academy, n.d.) and the inception of the Morrill Act of 1862. This required land grant institutions to provide military training in their curriculum (Abrams, 1989). The next military college to be created was the United States Coast Guard Academy, founded in 1876 and located in New London, Connecticut, (United States Coast Guard Academy, n.d.). It would be 67 years before the establishment of the United States Merchant Marine Academy (1943) in Kings Point, New York, (United States Merchant Marine Academy, 2013). The connection between military and higher education continued after World War II with the creation of the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, providing education benefits to soldiers and allowing them to attend college (Olson, 1973). The United States Air Force Academy would open in Colorado Springs, Colorado, in 1954 (United State Air Force Academy, n.d.). This relationship was further strengthened in 2009 with the creation of the Post 9/11 GI Bill which allows for a percentage of tuition to be covered depending on how long the veteran served. It also provides veterans with a monthly housing allowance (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012).

As of May 31, 2018, there are a little over 1.3 million men and women serving in all branches of the military (United States Department of Defense, Defense Manpower Data Center,
Each year a number of the service men and women are discharged from service. The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (2018b) reported that in September 2016 there were over 20.3 million living veterans ages 18 to 85+. Of these living veterans, 790,090 were not utilizing their Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits. When combined with other forms of GI Bill benefits over one million students were receiving education funding due to military service. This number has grown from 397,589 in 2000 (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, Veteran Benefits Administration, 2016). In a 2018(a) report of 2017 figures, the Department of Veterans Affairs reported spending of over $13 billion on veteran educational benefits alone. With the number of veterans taking advantage of their education benefits continuing to grow and this large amount of expenditure, it becomes important to ensure these student veterans are successfully achieving their educational goals.

In order to fully assist student veterans in their pursuit of a degree, higher education institutions must understand the needs of student veterans and how the transition into higher education can affect them. Further research is needed in order to gain this understanding. According to Jones (2017), “there remains a distinct lack of scholarly research into the lived experiences of student veterans” (p.118). This study hopes to fill a portion of that lack, specifically at the research site.

For example, as of Fall 2017, the University of Mississippi, enrolled over 20,000 students, with 103 verified student veterans. This is up 72.8% from Fall 2014. It is also important to note that this is the first semester veteran enrollment was tracked at this institution (Gregory, 2018). As of September 2017, there were 191,411 living veterans in the state of Mississippi (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018c). In 2017, over $88 million was spent in the state for veteran educational benefits (United States Department of Veteran Affairs, 2018c).
Affairs, 2018a). These numbers are likely to increase as the years progress. In order to offer the most veteran friendly programs in the country, all universities in the state of Mississippi will need to continue to increase their services for veterans. By talking to veterans on several campuses in the state, this study will help officials understand veteran transition experience when entering higher education and how best support them in their transition.

**Statement of the Problem**

As the veteran student enrollment increases, the issues these students face during transition will become more prevalent on college campuses (Nichols-Casebolt, 2012). Making the transition from military life to civilian life can be challenging, and with the added stress of pursuing a degree, many veterans are overwhelmed (Kirchner, 2015). In order to best serve this population of students, college campuses must understand the special needs of student veterans and provide services to help support them during transition (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009). This study will tell the transition stories of fifteen veterans at Mississippi’s three largest universities.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the transition experience for student veterans enrolled in public 4-year universities. The transition experience will be generally defined as the student veteran’s adjustment to life as a college student after serving in the military.

**Research Questions**

The research questions are as follows: 1) How do student veterans describe their transition experience? 2) How effectively do public universities support veterans in their transition experience? 3) How might public universities improve support services for veterans?
A preliminary study was conducted with six participants. Further data was gathered using the same semi-structured interview as the preliminary study. I recruited students who were military veterans, rather than those using the education benefits of a parent or spouse, using criterion and snowball sampling. The data was organized using NVivo software (Version 12.5.0; NVivo, 2019) and was analyzed using coding techniques and horizontalization to identify themes.

**Theoretical Framework**

For this study I have chosen a qualitative design grounded in social constructivism. With social constructivism a person is seeking to understand the world in which they live. They are attempting to assign meaning to their experiences and the experiences of others. From the social constructivism worldview, I selected a phenomenological approach for this study. I examined the phenomenon of college transition through the eyes of student veterans. I collected their lived experiences in order to get the full picture of the participants’ transition as well as the commonalties of this population (Creswell, 2013).

I also employed Schlossberg’s Transition Theory to guide my results. This theory was developed by Nancy Schlossberg in 1981. This model focuses on an individual’s assets and liabilities in the 4S areas of situation, self, support, and strategies. Each of these areas work together to illustrate a subject moving into, through, and out of a transition (Schlossberg, 1995). Schlossberg’s Theory has been applied to many areas of adult development. It has been applied to those moving through the Alcoholics Anonymous program (Streifel & Servanty-Seib, 2006) as well as parents adjusting to life with a special needs child (Costantino, 2010).

This theory was developed for use with adults in order to examine where they are in a transition, what coping strategies they bring to the change, and in what areas they need additional
support. Students make the transition to college in different seasons of life. Some enter as young freshmen out of high school, others after years in the workforce and still others after military deployment. Schlossberg’s Theory looks at individuals where they are and takes their unique situation, self, support, and strategies into account. By better understanding where students are in their transition, educators are better able to support them in this big step in life (Schlossberg, 1995).

I will be using my results to describe each of these areas for student veterans in the state of Mississippi. I hope to uncover ways institutions can bolster the strengths of students in each area as well as remediate their liabilities during the transition to college life.

**Overview of the Methodology**

The purpose of this study is to describe the transition experience of student veterans. The key word is *describe*. In order to provide the level of detail needed, a qualitative research design is appropriate. I also approached this study from a phenomenological standpoint. I want to understand how each of my participants see their transition from military life to college life.

The study is being conducted at three institutions in the state of Mississippi, The University of Mississippi, the University of Southern Mississippi, and Mississippi State University. With a 6.4% of Mississippi’s population made up of veterans, (United States Census Bureau, 2010) it is an ideal location for the study.

Data has been collected during a preliminary study with six participants through semi-structured interviews. Nine additional interviews were conducted. Each veteran’s story is presented in a detail rich, narrative story. It is my hope that this rich data will give the reader an insight into what it is like to be a veteran coming to college after their time of service. This will also add to the validity of my study. The stories and my analysis have been reviewed by the
participants themselves and key staff that serve this population, all in the hopes of obtaining valid data that will be helpful in assisting future veteran students.

Definitions of Terms

**Phenomenological Study** – Uses the lived experiences of an individual to describe a phenomenon, in this case college transition. Considers both their subjective and objective experience with the phenomenon.

**Post 9/11 GI Bill** – Short name for the Post 9/11 Veteran Education Assistance Act of 2008. This act provides education benefits for all individuals who served on active duty following the 2011 terrorist attacks (September 10, 2011). These benefits can also be transferred to a dependent.

**Social Constructivist Worldview** – Seeking to understand the world in which we live. Attempting to assign meaning to the experiences of others.

**Student Veteran** – For this study, a veteran enrolled in undergraduate study at the University of Mississippi.

**Student Veteran of America (SVA)** – An organization established in January 2008 to provide programming, resources, and support for a network of student veteran organizations (Student Veterans of America, 2016).

**VA** – Abbreviation for Veterans Affairs. Also known as the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. This office deals with administering all forms of veteran benefits.

**Veteran** – A man or woman who once served on active duty with any branch of the military. They have since separated from the military with an honorable discharge.
Delimitations

The participants in this study were delimited to student veterans enrolled full time at three Mississippi public institutions. As the focus of the student was to describe the transition experience, both undergraduate and graduate students were recruited as well as those enrolled in fully online programs. These universities were selected because they were the three largest in the state (IHL-Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning, 2019). By opening the study up to three universities in the state, the focus is on the transition experiences rather than the university.

Limitations

Several limitations have presented themselves. One is the time span between the transition experience and the interview. Eleven of the participants were in their last year of study. The time between their transition and the interview could have made some of the details less clear. The lack of diversity in gender, ethnicity, and branch of service could also have affected the results. Prior college attendance could also have changed students transition perspectives. My presence could also have biased the responses. Participants could have answered based on what they thought I wanted to hear versus what actually happened. Finally, I could have misinterpreted the data.

Significance of Study

It is my hope that this study sheds further light on the transition experiences of student veterans. Through my review of the relevant literature, I found very few studies include female participants in any large numbers. In fact, of the studies I examined, approximately 56 student veterans participated in research and only nine of those participants were female. As of September 2016, female veterans made us 9.1% of the total veteran population (United States Department of Veteran Affairs, 2018b). Their voice needs to be heard in the transition
discussion. I was able to recruit and interview three female participants. This is two more than any study discussed in my literature review.

**Organization of the Report**

This study will attempt to tell the transition stories of student veterans at three universities in the state of Mississippi. The findings are illustrated using the 4Ss of Schlossberg’s Transition theory in order to provide university administrators a clear picture of veteran student transition. This will allow them to make informed choices when designing programming and services to assist this population.

Chapter two contains a detailed overview of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory as well as a review of relevant literature. This review illustrates Schlossberg’s use in research outside the realm of education as well as within higher education. The review then discusses recent articles and research on veteran transition in general. The section ends with a discussion of studies using Schlossberg’s Theory to examine student veteran transition.

Chapter three presents a description of the study including a detailed reasoning for the selection of the research design. A full description of the research sites and the preliminary study are also included. A description of how participants were recruited, data collection, and data analysis are described along with the ethical considerations of the study. Foreseeable limitations are also outlined.

The fourth chapter presents the results of my study. It includes the narrative story for each participant as well as the themes that emerged from the data.

Finally, the fifth chapter discusses my themes and how they relate to Schlossberg’s Transition Theory. A discussion of how my study fits into the landscape of current literature as
well as considerations for higher education administrators is included. Suggestions for further research are also included.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Theoretical Framework

Schlossberg’s Transition Theory is the guiding framework for this study. Schlossberg (1995) broadly defined transition as “any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (p. 27). An event is something that takes place to change the course of one’s life. Examples of events can include, getting a new job, moving to a new town, having a baby, or the loss of a loved one. A nonevent occurs when an expected event does not take place. Examples include not getting an expected promotion, being denied from the college of one’s choice, or being left at the altar, (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrio, 1998).

Perception is a determining factor in the transition process. If an individual does not define a change as a transition, then it is not a transition (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). Schlossberg (1995), used menopause as an example:

If, for example, menopause does not have much impact on a particular woman, and does not change her set of assumptions or her relationships, then, in our view, it cannot be regarded as a psychosocial transition (though, or course, it is a biological change). If, however, another woman experiences menopause as an event that marks her passage from youth to old age or from sexuality to nonsexuality, it does constitute a transition for her (p. 28).
Once it is established that a transition is taking place, the next step is to determine the type of transition. Transitions can be either anticipated or unanticipated. Anticipated transitions are the expected changes that come with the life cycle such as marriage, becoming a parent, and retiring. Unanticipated transitions are not predictable and are unexpected in the cycle of life. These can include being fired, getting divorced, or the sudden death of a spouse (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

When an anticipated event does not happen, this can lead to a nonevent transition. Nonevents can be classified as personal, ripple, resultant, and delayed. Personal nonevents deal with an individual’s personal aspirations. For example, not having children, never getting married, or never getting a promotion. Ripple nonevents deal with expectations for someone close that go unmet. Never becoming grandparents is an example. It is a nonevent for the children, but the parents never get to transition into the role of grandparent. A resultant nonevent begins with an event. A car accident that results in a person not being able to have children would be an example. The car accident is the event that led to the nonevent of not being able to become a parent. Finally, a delayed nonevent are events that could still happen such as marriage. It is easiest to think of transitions, anticipated, unanticipated, nonevent, on a change to no change continuum rather than discrete units. It is important to see how much a transition changes a person’s life (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

It is also important to note that the impact of transitions is relative to the person going through the change. What one person considers an anticipated transition, such as marriage, may be unanticipated or delayed for someone who never expected to get married. A single event can have a different meaning to different people (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson use retirement as an example (2006). One person may see retirement as an end to
being productive, while another may see it as a new beginning. In order to help someone in transition, one must first determine how that individual evaluates the situation. Do they see it as a positive or a negative change? How the person feels about the change will determine how they survive with the situation (Goodman et al., 2006).

The relationship the person has to the transition is central to its understanding. Who is the event happening to? Is it the person or someone close to them? For example, an individual would experience a personal illness differently than a family member’s illness. Is the change internal or interpersonal? For example, did the individual lose their job or did they have a disagreement with their boss? Is the transition public? Here the concern is for what others know about an individual, in the previous example, the loss of their job, (Goodman et al., 2006).

When the transition is personal, the person can take stock of their resources and start to put together a plan. But if the change is happening to someone else, such as a child, many times there is nothing to be done. The individual can only sit back and offer support. In the parent child relationship, it is important to understand that parents experience the highs and lows in their children’s life as if the events were happening to them personally. Basically, the setting of the transition effects the reaction to it. (Goodman et al., 2006). George and Siegler (as cited in Schlossberg et al., 1995) found that when subjects identified their best and worst life experiences, “Most of the experiences resided in the family setting, followed by self and work. Worst life events were typically in the health setting, followed by family and self,” (p. 32).

All of these factors play a part in a person coping with a transition, but quite possible the most important factor to take into consideration is the impact of the change. It does not matter to the individual if the change is an event or a nonevent, what matters is the extent to which the change alters their day-to-day life. One can assume the more that a life is altered, the more
coping mechanisms will be needed to get through. Also, bigger changes will take a longer
amount of time for adjustment. For example, changing jobs while remaining in the same town
will require some time to adapt. But moving across the country to a new city for a new job, will
take a more substantial amount of adjustment time. According to Goodman et al. (2006),
“Assessment of a transition’s impact on relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles is
probably the most important consideration in understanding an individual’s reactions.” (p. 39).

In summary, individuals can go through both anticipated, unanticipated, and nonevents.
Nonevents can be further classified as personal, ripple, resultant, and delayed. When working
with someone in transition it is important to understand the relativity and context of the
transition, but the most important factor to consider is the impact of the change. Factors that
influence transition and Schlossberg’s 4 S System will be discussed in the next section.

**Things to Consider**

Now that the types of transitions are defined, it is time to discuss how individuals cope
with transition. Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (1995) attempted to represent “the
extraordinary complex reality that accompanies and defines the human capacity to cope with
change” (p.47). In this theory, there are four major factors that impact how a person is able to
cope during transition. Each factor has several different elements (see Figure 1) (Schlossberg et
al., 1995). The four factors are:

1. The Situation variable – What is happening? For example, the transition to retirement
differs from the transition of having a baby.

2. The Self variable – To whom is it happening? Each individual is different in terms of life
issues and personality.
3. The Support variable – What help is available? Supports and available options vary for each individual.

4. The Strategies variable – How does the person cope? People navigate transitions in different ways. We call them the 4 S’s (Goodman et al., 2006. p. 55).

The variables within each of these factors determine how one deals with change. Each set of variables can be considered either assets and/or liabilities. It is important to understand the relationship these factors have to one another and how the individual going through the transition evaluates them before we can understand how they work. It is also noteworthy to observe the options each individual face as well as their group in society (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Figure 1

*Diagram of the Relationship of the 4S’s (Goodman et al., 2006. P. 56)*

Every person experiencing a transition has their own unique set of strengths and weaknesses or assets and liabilities. Schlossberg’s model uses a ratio of assets to liabilities and
allows for changes in that ratio as the situation changes. This ratio can help to better understand why different people react differently to the same transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995). For example, two men are diagnosed with cancer. One completely breaks down at the doctor’s office and the other begins to explore treatment options. The first man’s wife just left him and he just lost his job. His liabilities outweigh his assets and for him, it is harder to cope with the change. The second man has a healthy relationship with his wife and adult children, has a good job with great insurance, and has a strong faith. His assets outweigh his liabilities and he can therefore, cope with the change.

Another key to understanding transition in the person’s appraisal of situation. Is the transition seen as negative, positive, or neutral? How the person sees the change will impact how they feel about and cope with the transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Lazarus and Folkman (as cited in Schlossberg et al., 1995) indicated that individuals can make both a primary and a secondary appraisal of the situation at the same time. The primary appraisal “refers to the perception of the transition itself” (p. 50). It is in this assessment that the individual determines if the change positive, negative, or neutral (Schlossberg et al., 1995). In other words, what is happening and how do I feel about it?

At the same time, the person can engage in a secondary appraisal and assess the resources they possess for coping with this change. In other words, what am I going to do? These resources include the 4 S’s – Situation, Support, Self, and Strategies. It is the results of this appraisal that help the individual choose which coping strategies to use. As seen in Figure 1, the 4S’s are cyclical, and feedback from this initial appraisal can lead to further assessment. Schlossberg uses the example of early retirement. At first this may seem like a great opportunity, but when the individual takes stock of the 4S’s it can create anxiety. This anxiety
will cause the individual to reappraise the situation and decide to continue working (Goodman et al., 2006).

It is also important to point out when assessing how one copes with a transition, we are not looking at a single point in time. The process takes place over a period of time. During this phase, the individual will assess and reassess all of their resources and their feelings regarding the change may evolve from “woe is me” to “this was actually for the better” (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

When using Schlossberg’s Theory, it is important to consider cultural differences as well. According to Sussman (as cited in Schlossberg et al., 1995), part of an individual’s resources for coping with change are the options available to them. These options are divided into two: structural and psychological. Sussman uses unemployment as an example:

When unemployment is structural, more people are affected and the individual alone can do less about it. Opening up the opportunity structure requires political action, such as legislative changes in the retirement age, thus changing the options for older people. Psychological options are related to the individual’s skill in perceiving and utilizing alternatives (p. 51)

Throughout history certain groups have been limited on their structural options. Minorities and women were historically oppressed until the groups organized and changed the political landscape to open up new options for themselves. Individuals can also improve their structural options by furthering their education in order to open up new career paths for themselves (Goodman et al., 2006).

Psychological options can be objective (at some point in history women were not allowed to work outside the home) or subjective (“because I am a woman I will not apply to truck driving
school”). Schlossberg noted “A fine line exists between actual options and the perception of actual options” (p. 51). Any discussion of options with a person going through a transition will be multifaceted (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

When using Schlossberg’s 4 S’s, it is important to consider how an individual balances assets and liabilities, how they appraise the transition, and their cultural view of their options (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Goodman illustrated how the 4 S’s interact with real life in the following:

Everyone uses coping strategies, everyone has some kind of support system, everyone has a personal way of being in the world, and everyone has a unique situation. Yet there is an overriding concern. Some individuals’ Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies are qualitatively so restricted that one cannot consider the 4 S’s alone. As Cooke said, one’s resources for coping—the 4 S’s—are determined by the outside world. If people’s concerns relate to feeding their families or dealing with ill children without health insurance, their resources are qualitatively different than those of middle-class professionals (p. 60).

The 4S’s in Detail

Situation


Trigger – What initiated the transition?

As defined earlier, a transition can take on many forms (event/non-event, anticipated/unanticipated), as long as it is life altering. A trigger to a transition is external but
causes an internal change. A change in health can cause an individual to evaluate their relationships. A change in jobs can cause an individual to rethink career goals. Events in the life of someone close can also be triggers. The illness or retirement of a spouse can trigger fears of aging and death in their partner (Goodman et al, 2006).

A trigger is different from the transition itself. A transition denotes a change in status. A trigger “is a specific life event that precipitates the decision to learn at that point in time (p. 54). The trigger may not be directly related? to the transition (Aslanian & Brickell, as cited in Schlossberg et al., 1995). For example, a stay at home mom whose husband leaves her, decides to go back to school. The trigger is the husband leaving. The transition is her moving from stay at home mom to student (Goodman et al., 2006).

**Timing – How does the transition relate to one’s life plans?**

Adults tend to have a set schedule in their mind of when certain events should happen. This social calendar can dictate whether events are occurring on or off schedule for that person. Anxiety can result if events occur earlier or later than the individual planned. Many life events were once linked to an age. For example, “You should be married by age 25.” “You retire at age 65.” Over time, the rigidity of this structure has lessened, but some still use age to judge how successful they are in life (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Timing also includes events or non-events experienced at “good” or “bad” times. For instance, finding out one is pregnant soon after starting a new job, might be considered a positive event but at a bad time. Events occurring at a good time will be much easier to handle than events or non-events that occur at a bad time. Even though the timing is relative to the individual, it can play a key role in their coping strategy (Goodman et al., 2006).

**Control – What can the person control about the transition?**
Some transitions are of the individual's own making while others are created by other entities. For example, a family choosing to move across the country for a new job versus a family member being forced to relocate. According to Schlossberg, “The issue here is how an individual perceives control over his/her own life” (p. 54). The deciding factor is how the individual responds to the transition. Goodman (2006) explained:

Even if the transition is beyond the individual’s control, the response to it can be within the individual’s control. The two sources of control – internal and external – interact. Counselors can help adults explore the degree to which the trigger or transition is in or out of their control and the degree to which they can control their reaction to it (p.62).

**Role change – Does the transition force the person to change roles?**

Not all transitions force the individual to assume a new role. Those that do can either be classified as role gains (becoming a parent) or role losses (retiring). Either category can be seen as positive or negative (Schlossberg et al., 1995). According to Merton, (as cited in Goodman et al., 2006) a “role” is defined as “behavioral enacting of the patterned expectations attributed to a position” (p.63). But what if the position has no incumbent? Assuming a role that has never been held before, such as a newly created job title, will be more stressful than one where a role model is available. The level of difficulty for a role change will depend on whether or not it is a gain or a loss, positive or negative, and if there is a role model available (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

**Duration – How long will the change last?**

The expected duration of a change can greatly affect how the transition is perceived. A permanent change is viewed differently than one that is known to be short term. For example, being confined to a wheel chair for six weeks following surgery is much different than the
adjustment needed when being confined to wheel chair permanently. Painful transitions are easier to accept when the person knows they are for a limited time. If the change is seen as a positive, knowing it is permanent will make the adjustment much easier. Possibly the most stressful aspect of duration is uncertainty. When one does not know how long the change will last, it creates stress and can have a negative effect on adjustment (Goodman et al., 2006).

*Previous experience with a similar transition – Have they been through a similar change before?*

Generally, when facing a situation that one has gone through before, the second time around will be easier. Successfully moving into a new job will make changing jobs in the future easier. On the other hand, if the first change did not go well and left an individual feeling deflated, the second will be much harder to cope the second time around. Schlossberg (1995) revealed:

Past experiences to some extent determine the person’s mental set, and if that past experience was unfavorable, then the mental set may be something of a self-confirming prophecy. Of course, given possible changes in the balance of assets and liabilities (discussed earlier), the correlation between successful assimilation in the past and at a later point in time is by no means perfect (p. 56 & 57).

*Concurrent stress – What else is going on?*

A transition in one area of a person’s life can many times cause a change in another area. For example, a new job. A new job with the same company, in the same town, is one thing, but a new job with a new company, in a new state is something different. Simply moving offices and changing job duties will have a much smaller impact than having to move to a new state, find a house, sell one’s old house, and find all new places to shop all while learning a new job. With greater impact comes greater stress (Goodman et al., 2006).
**Assessment – Does the person view the transition as positive, negative, or neutral?**

How an individual assigns responsibility for the transition affects how they appraise the situation. “Does he/she see the divorce as attributed to the other’s deficiencies, to his or her own deficiencies, to societal problems, or to idiosyncratic causes?” (Schlossberg et al., 2005, p. 57). Understanding how an individual assess the change will help explain their behavior (Goodman et al., 2006).

**Situation summary**

Every transition is different. Each person will handle change differently based on their situation. Situations will vary by trigger, timing, control, role change, duration, previous experience with a similar change, concurrent stress, and assessment (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

**Self**

The concept of assets and liabilities again becomes important when considering the second of Schlossberg’s S’s: self. What assets and liabilities does the person bring to the transition? Many times, it is difficult to get a clear picture of self, but Schlossberg has acknowledged certain characteristics that are significant for someone going through a transition. These include personal and demographic characteristics (socioeconomic status, gender, age and stage of life, state of health, and ethnicity) and psychological resources (ego development, outlook – optimism and self-efficacy, and commitment to values) (Schlossberg et al., 1995) as well as spirituality and resilience (Goodman et al., 2006).

**Personal and demographic characteristics**

**Socioeconomic status**

Rubin’s study (as cited in Schlossberg et al., 1995) found that socioeconomic status held importance in the transition to the empty nest. Rubin’s study found that women of a higher
socioeconomic status expected that their children would one day go away to college. When the time came, the change was easier to handle because they had anticipated the transition and were able to prepare for it. Women for whom money was a struggle were faced with uncertainty. Would they be able to afford college for their child? These women faced a harder adjustment when their children left because they had less time to prepare for the change (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Gender

Gender plays an intricate role when viewing a person in transition. Many researchers believe that society contributes to the differences between men and women. Men are raised under the assumption that it is not acceptable for them to show emotions or admit to any one they have a problem while women are free to show emotions. This allows men to appear more emotionally stable (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Appearance aside, “women’s greater capacity for intimacy and mutuality may make it easier for them to assimilate certain transitions,” (p. 67). Research has shown that men prosper on either no emotional or positive emotional experiences and become troubled with emotional ups and downs. Women, on the other hand, are capable of assimilating a wide range of emotional experiences (Goodman et al., 2006).

No matter what gender roles play a major part when considering work and family issues. Tannen’s 1990 research (as cited in Schlossberg et al., 1995) on the ways men and women communicate found that because girls and boys are raised in different cultures, they listen and speak from different viewpoints. The male viewpoint is that of status and independency while the female’s is one of connection and intimacy. Because of this difference, communication between men and women is similar to cross-cultural communication. Men also want to automatically try and solve a problem whereas women prefer to develop ideas through
discussion. When the two sexes try to communicate, they expect a response that is not in the other gender’s nature to give. The difference in power held by men and women also plays a role. This difference is seen in different wages, different job titles, and different opportunities. This power difference and differing communication styles create a dissimilar worldview among men and women. This gender worldview will have an effect on how an individual’s view a transition (Goodman et al., 2006).

Though the gender gap is slowly beginning to close and gender stereotypes are lessening, there is still a great number of differences as a result of gender. These differences must be considered when working with individuals in transition, (Goodman et al., 2006).

**Age and Stage of Life**

There is an array of data on the relationship between age and ability to cope with transition, according to Spierer, 1977 (as cited in Schlossberg et al., 1995). However, only a brief overview will be given in this section. It must be pointed out that researchers agree that chronological age is unimportant in comparison to psychological age (the capacity to respond to societal pressure and the tasks required of an individual), social age (the extent to which an individual participates in roles assigned by society), and functional age (the ability to function or perform as expected of people in one’s age bracket, which in turn, depends on social, biological, and personality considerations), (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Another complication of age is simply the aging process itself. In other words, the physiological and biological changes that occur over the lifespan are transitions in their own right (Goodman et al., 2006).

Because of these factors, life stages, rather than chronological age become more useful when viewing transition issues. Fiske and Chiriboga (1990) (as cited in Goodman et al., 2006),
found abundant stage differences with respect to number of significant life events, ratio of positive to negative experiences, and nature and sources of stress. As mentioned earlier, the later stages of life one might reflect on things they did not accomplish and shift thinking from years since birth to years of life remaining (Goodman et al., 2006).

Midlife has traditionally been seen as a major phase of transition. However, there is no clear definition of when the midlife crisis occurs. It has been defined as from age 40 to age 60, beginning at age 35 with no end, the fifth decade of life or when one begins to think of years remaining rather than years from birth. Midlife can vary based on gender (women are seen as middle age before men) and socioeconomic status (higher status midlife starts later than working class), (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Pearlin and Lieberman (1970) (as cited in Goodman et al., 2006) may have shown that the “midlife crisis” was invented by the media. Their study found that while it is feared things get harder as we age, younger participants had clusters of major transitions of work, family, and job changes. The midlife crisis was further tested by Costa and McCrae (1980) (as cited is Schlossberg et al., 1995). They discovered no clustering of crisis by age. In short, the stage of life rather than chronological age must be considered when working with someone in transition.

State of Health

Similar to age, an individual’s state of health can not only affect their ability to cope with transition, but may also be the stress that causes transition. Recovering from an acute illness, can leave a person unchanged, with no altering of self-perception. On the other hand, a short-term illness can remind someone of their mortality and leave a lasting impression. Long-term illness can deteriorate a person’s health and leave them with little physical strength and emotional
energy to deal with additional changes. State of health can be both objective and subjective and individuals can be either pessimistic or optimistic about their health (Goodman et al., 2006).

Ethnicity

While further research is needed on the relationship between racial and ethnic background, it is believed that the effects these factors have on coping with transition are resolved through value orientation and cultural norms (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Psychological Resources

Psychological resources are “personality characteristic that people draw upon to them withstand threats,” (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978, as cited in Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Ego Development

Ego development is when individuals in the same situation behave differently based on their frame of reference and level of maturity. At a higher level of maturity, individuals are more self-sufficient, can endure ambiguity, and think more critically. Lower levels of maturity, individuals will follow instructions without questions and conform to rules and stereotypes. Knowing the level of an individual’s ego development will assist in helping to guide them through their transition. (Goodman et al., 2006).

Outlook – Optimism and Self-Efficacy

An individual’s outlook on life can greatly determine how they cope with changes. Though outlook itself is a product of many different factors. Optimism and self-efficacy are important parts of one’s outlook (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Seligman’s research found that although life exacts hardships on both optimists and pessimists, optimists have a habit of coping with them better (Seligman, 1991). According to Seligman, (as cited in Goodman et al., 2006):
In other words, those who feel that have control over their lives or feel optimistic about their own power to control at least some portions of their lives tend to experience less depression and achieve more at school or work; they are even in better health (p. 70). Seligman does make it clear that optimism is not a remedy for all things but being optimistic does help improve physical well-being, achievement, and overall welfare (Seligman, 1991).

One’s explanatory style, how they view a transition or event, can give details on how they cope with the event without becoming depressed. Most transitions are both bad and good. A person’s explanatory style is decisive in how they cope with a transition that is both positive and negative. Those with negative explanatory styles are pessimists and those with positive explanatory styles are optimists. This explanatory style can determine how people deal with the loss of a job (Seligman, 1991).

Self-efficacy forecasts how a person will manage a transition and is related to one’s outlook. Self-efficacy is a person’s belief that they can have control over their own behaviors, their motivations, and other environmental aspects. It hinges on the person’s belief that they can execute the correct behaviors needed to cope with differing situations (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Another concept to consider, related to self-efficacy is perceived control. The misconception of control is the flawed belief that a person can create a favorable outcome when a positive result is not possible. Taylor gave the example (as cited in Schlossberg et al., 1995) of a cancer patient who has faith in a treatment or doctor. This belief or faith can affect how the person copes with the transition of the disease. When the patient does recover they credit their belief. The death of positive people cannot be explained, but having a positive outlook becomes a resource to those who know death is certain. Self-efficacy and optimism influence how people process a transition and the world, but it is a weakness to believe an optimistic person can control
the entire transition process. That’s where the interrelatedness of Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies comes into play. Self-efficacy and optimism are important, but only tell part of the transition story (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Commitment to Values

A person’s core values and belief system also influence his or her ability to adapt to a transition. Fiske and Chiriboga (1990) developed a list of seven life goals that people can place value on:

- Achievement and work (competence; economic rewards; success; social status)
- Good personal relations (love and affection; happy marriage; having good friends; belonging to groups)
- Philosophical and religious (living a spiritual life; doing God’s work; having a philosophy of life; seeking the meaning of life; being wise; being morally good)
- Social service (helping others; serving the community; contributing to human welfare or some aspect of it)
- Ease and contentment (freedom from hardship; security; self-maintenance; peace of mind; health; simple comforts)
- Seeking enjoyment (recreation; exciting experiences; entertainment; seeking pleasurable sights, sounds, feelings, and tastes)
- Personal growth (self-improvement; being creative, learning new things, knowing yourself, meeting and mastering new challenges) (p. 216).

While a value system may be effective at one stage in life, as one ages those values tend to change. Therefore, the same value system will be ineffective in different stage in life (Goodman
et al., 2006). For example, a new college graduate may value achievement and work, but at age 40 their values may have shifted to good personal relations and social service. Based on these values, change will be weathered differently in each life stage.

A person’s religion must also be considered in a time of transition. With religion, comes norms of that culture that will affect a person in transition. Goodman (2006) gives the example of a Catholic woman going through a divorce. While this change is hard by itself, when the stigma associated with divorce in the Catholic church is added, then transition becomes even more difficult (Goodman et al., 2006).

Spirituality and Resilience

A concept related to religion that also warrants discussion is spirituality. Though religion can make up a part of spirituality, it does not embody the larger concept that runs through all religions and cultures. “Religion general refers to an integrated set of beliefs and activities, whereas spirituality is central to a sense of meaning and purpose and has be conceptualized as the meaning gained from life experiences,” (p. 73). By including spirituality in Self, one can understand a person’s need for transcendence, meaning, and connectedness. In understanding a person’s spirituality and how they find meaning in life, new methods for coping with transition may be unearthed (Goodman et al., 2006).

Ideology also plays a role in coping with transition. Schlossberg (1995) used the example of those who moved to Canada during the Vietnam war. They did so not to avoid going to war, but because they believed the war to be immoral or considered themselves a refugee from a tyrannical government. They did so for ideological reasons. Their transition to a new country was made easier by their belief that the US was behaving immorally or corruptly (Schlossberg et al., 1995).
The resiliency of a person is also a factor in how they deal with transition. Resilient people are those who are able to bounce back from difficulty, weather life’s troubles, and grow stronger from those tough experiences. A resilient individual exhibits a mixture of characteristics such as: flexibility, proactivity, focus, organization, and positivity. The concept of hardiness is related to resilience. It is made up of challenge, commitment, and control. These two concepts relate to how the same change can have one person unable to function and another thriving on the challenge (Goodman et al., 2006).

Self Summary

People face change with differing psychological patterns and resources. These will differ in relation to ego development, outlook, commitments, values, spirituality, and resilience. Each person will bring a different mix of these into a transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995; Goodman et al., 2006).

Support

Stress and transition can be dealt with more effectively with the presence of social support. Support can be in many different forms, so it is important to have an operational definition. This section will cover types of support, functions of support, and measurement of social support, (Schlossberg, et al., 1995).

Types of Support

Support types are classified based on the source of the support. According to Goodman (2006), there are four sources of support: 1) intimate relationships, 2) family units, 3) friend network, and 4) communities.

Intimate relationships involve a great deal of trust, sharing intimate details of one’s life, and supporting one another. This level of closeness creates a relationship that becomes an
important resource during a crisis. There are differences between males and females in intimate relationships. Men have a harder time forming intimate relationships. Once established, the loss of these relationships can be more painful for men. Therefore, it is suggested, the death of a spouse is harder for a man to deal with than for a woman. These bonds run so deep that even a former intimate relationship can be a source of support during a transition. Just knowing that one is able to form these relationships can be a source of comfort in a troubling situation. In this way, a former intimate relationship gives hope for a future one, (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Researchers have studied the family unit for many years in an effort to identify the characteristics of a family that promote its ability to adjust to change and make it easier for the members of the unit to adapt easily (Goodman et al., 2006). For example, new parents who have family members close have an easier time adjusting to parenthood than those with no support.

The support of a friend network is also important during a time of transition. A traumatic by product of a move to a new location is the loss of friends. Friend loss can also be a product of a divorce or the death of spouse. Losing this support network in these types of situations can further add to the difficulty of a transition. On the other hand, having friends to lean on during a crisis can mitigate the blow of a sudden change (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

The need for support from organizations that individuals can reach out to for help is becoming more apparent. These organizations can include: community support groups, religious groups, political groups, and other such groups of formal agencies. There has been an increase in this type of support over the years. They can take the form of support groups, workshops, lectures, or seminars and focus on a specific transition, such as divorce, death of a spouse, retirement, or returning to school (Goodman et al. 2006).
Functions of Support

According to Caplan, (as cited in Schlossberg et al., 1995), the function of a support system is to help individuals assemble their resources (both psychological and physical), control emotional liabilities, apportion tasks, and provide additional supplies of funds, tools, and materials. Support networks also provide counseling in order to help the individual navigate a situation. The idea of support coming from some combination of the key elements of affect, affirmation, and aid came from Kahn and Antonucci, (as cited in Goodman et al., 2006). Affect is the expression of love, respect, liking, or admiration. “Affirmation refers to expressions of agreement or acknowledgement of the appropriateness or rightness of some act or statement of another person,” (p. 76). Aid, also referred to as assistance, can be the exchange of information, time, entitlements, and money. In addition to affect, affirmation, and aid, honest feedback is also a function of support. This feedback can be either positive or negative. (Goodman et al., 2006).

Measurement of Social Support

In 1975, Robert Kahn (as cited in Goodman et al., 2006) created the model of the “convoy” of social support. This concept states that a person moves through their life surrounded by a set of people who are significant to them. These people are related to them by the giving and/or receiving of support. There are two key features of this model: 1) it implies movement and change and 2) emphasizes receiving as well as giving of support (Goodman et al., 2006).

The convoy is a network centered about one person. The center person is the focal point, and it is their welfare and actions that are the concern of the researcher. Each convoy is a support network around the focal person. The support network ends with the people whom the focal person has a direct relationship of support. The convoy is the delivery system. This
system includes individuals who are constant over time and are not tied to a specific role, those individuals that are to some extent role related and likely to change over time, and the individuals that are directly linked to a role and will most likely change, (Goodman et al., 2006).

Figure 2 gives an illustration of the social support convoy. The circle center represents the focal person. The fist circle represents unwavering support, regardless of role. This contains life partners and close family and friends. The next circle shows those that are somewhat related to a role, such as work or neighborhood friends. The outer circle is the support that is likely to change over time, co-workers, supervisors, neighbors (Goodman et al., 2006).

Figure 2

Convoy of Social Support (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 78)
With this model, Kahn (as cited in Goodman et al., 2006) also developed a way to measure social support. The individual in transition, an adult, distinguishes the people they are closest to and places them into categories. These categories can include co-workers, neighbors, family, friends, etc. They then rate each individual in terms of support offered. The functions of support, affect, affirmation, and aid are thus gathered and measured (Goodman et al., 2006).

**Support Summary**

Individuals going through a transition need support. This can come in different types and serves different functions. By knowing the types and functions we are able to operationally define support. Social support can be measured using Kahn’s Convoy of Social Support (Goodman et al., 2006).

**Strategies**

In order to keep themselves safe from harmful life situations, people will develop coping strategies. George and Siegler (1981, as cited in Schlossberg et al., 1995) defined coping as both overt and covert behaviors individuals use in response to a stressful situation. Coping can occur before, during, or after the tense situation, (Schlossberg et al., 1995). According to Lazarus (1980), “In my view, stress itself as a concept pales in significance for adaption compared to coping... stress is ubiquitous, an inevitable feature of normal living...What makes the major difference in adaptational outcome is coping, and so we should give special attention to it in our research on human functioning.”

Leonard Pearlin and Carmi Schooler (1978) recognized significant life strains and the strategies people used to cope with them. They divided these strategies into three types:

1. responses that change the situation out of which stressful experience arises
2. responses that control the meaning of the stressful experience after it occurs
but before the emergence of stress

(3) responses that function more for the control of stress itself after it has emerged. (p.6).

Coping strategies are developed as a product of psychological resources. These include:

- self-esteem – one’s positive attitude toward themselves,
- self-denigration - the extent to which a person holds negative attitudes toward themselves,
- and mastery – the extent to which a person feels the changes in life are under their control rather than being left up to fate (Pearlin & Schooler, 1980).

Goodman (2006), gives the example of someone who is chronically unemployed. This extended state of unemployment left the person with a bruised ego, low self-esteem, and high self-denigration. Despite trying to change, redefine, and manage the stress of the situation, lasting damage was done to self-esteem. This will affect the coping strategies this person uses in the future.

The question will always be asked, which coping strategies are best in each different situation? People have many options in each area of stress. It is noted that those using individualized coping strategies will handle interpersonal situations better than work situations. In some cases, a group coping strategy may be needed. One must never assume that one strategy will be effective in every situation. Some personages will be more effective than others at coping with change (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Pearlin identified only a portion of responses people use to deal with life changes. But the research does give a systematic way to think about coping strategies. The list below gives strategies used to cope with Pearlin’s three types of strategies.

1) Responses that modify the situation – negotiation, optimistic action in occupation, self-reliance vs. advice-seeking, and exercise of power vs. helpless resignation
2) Responses that control the meaning of the problem – positive comparisons, selective ignoring, substitution of rewards

3) Responses that control stress after the situation – emotional discharge, self-assertion, passive forbearance (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Coping is not a unidimensional behavior. It is achieved by a number of perceptions, behaviors, and cognitions and acts at many different levels. Psychological resources for coping are distinct from coping responses. Making this distinction clear will assist when working with adults in transition. While psychological resources for dealing with the stress of life is important, coping cannot be understood completely without looking beyond the individual’s personality traits and paying more attention to their response to a specific situation. (Pearlin & Schooler, 1980). Goodman (2006) notes: “Pearlin and his associates identified a number of coping strategies. None contains magic; rather, effective coping means flexible utilization of a range of strategies as each situation demands (p. 81).

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) agreed with Pearling and Schooler that the coping strategies a person used is more important that than the event or stress. How the person views the situation is more important than the actual event. Weather a person sees a transition as detrimental or not is the key to how they will react.

While assessing the changes in their life individuals also engage in coping strategies. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), there are two ways of coping: problem focused and emotion focused. Problem focused coping directs efforts to defining the problem, creating different solutions, weighting each solution in terms of cost and reward, choosing a solution, and acting. This type of coping aims to change the situation. Emotion focused coping attempts to minimize emotional discomfort, (Scholssberg et al., 1995). This can include: distancing,
selective attention, avoidance, positive comparisons, and minimization (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).

According to Goodman (2006), there are four coping modes available when individuals want to reduce the discomfort of a stressful situation: inhibition of action, information seeking, direct action, and intrapsychic – “refers to the mind sets individuals employ to resolve problems that arise” (p. 81). Wishful thinking and denial are included in intrapsychic and can be the reason individuals are able to keep going despite their situation. Pearlin (1980) acknowledged “selective ignoring” as a coping strategy while Lazarus (1984) feels people who are able to cope effectively use both direct action and emotion focused strategies.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) also pointed out that the ability or non-ability to change the situation determines the coping strategy a person will choose. If the situation cannot be changed, an emotion focused strategy is employed, if it can be changed a problem focused strategy.

Those helping others in transition must remember that in order to cope effectively one must be flexible enough to use multiple coping strategies. The ability to cope is a process that is ever changing as the subject assesses and reassesses the situation. While helpers may want to help the individual take control of the situation, in many instances the event cannot be controlled and attempting to do so will only cause frustration (Schlossberg et al., 1995). How effective these coping strategies are is a complicated question. One must be careful not to solely focus on outcome as a measure of effectiveness. What is more important to focus on is how effective the person was a coping, even if the desired outcome was not achieved (Goodman, 2006).
Strategies Summary

One’s ability to cope effectively is based on the coping strategies they employ. These are developed as a product of psychological resources. There are many different coping strategies to employ and someone who is flexible to use different strategies will be able to cope more effectively. The focus should be on who effectively one copes, not the outcome of the situation (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Review of Recent Literature

Schlossberg’s Transition Theory can be applied to numerous areas of research. Streifel and Servanty-Seib found that the steps used in the Alcoholics Anonymous program parallel the concepts in Schlossberg’s theory (2006). The theory can also be applied to individuals transitioning from one career to another. One such transition takes place through the Second Careers and Nursing (SCAN) program at Azusa Pacific University. This programs trains people to be registered nurses as a second career. The article addresses how the SCAN program helps participants move in, though, and out of this career change (Dela Cruz, Farr, Klakovich, & Esslinger, 2013). Bowen and Jensen (2017), used Schlossberg’s as their theoretical framework when studying the life satisfaction of late life (after age 50) divorcees. Parents coping with the reality of having a child with disabilities can also benefit from using Schlossberg’s theory to help move through this major life adjustment (Costantino, 2010). Swain (1991) examined the transition from being a professional athlete to no longer participating in the sport using this theory.

While Schlossberg’s Transition theory can be used in any adult transition, where it has proven very applicable is in the higher education setting. A 2018 study by Browne, Webb, and Bullock sought to understand the transition of educators in the medical field from the clinical
setting to the educational one. The purpose of the study is to recognize factors that can “help or hinder individuals in making the transition into the identity of a successful, self-identified medical educator” (p. 217). The researchers are attempting to hypothesize the process of moving from the stable state of the individual’s primary profession, through the changes that create the identity of a medical educator using psychosocial transition theory (Schlossberg).

Data was collected in 2015 through three focus groups comprised of individuals that had transitioned successfully to the medical educator identity. During the focus groups the researchers were looking for factors that helped or hindered the transition and if any inferences could be made to assist others struggling with their transition. The three groups were made up of six women and nine men from senior medical educators at Cardiff University’s School of Postgraduate Medical and Dental Education in the United Kingdom (UK). Participants were recruited from self-identified medical educators and participation was voluntary (Browne, Webb, & Bullock, 2018).

The researchers theorized that Schlossberg’s Transition Theory would be the best lens through which to analyze the focus group data. The data, which had been audio recorded, was coded and charted against the 4S’s of the theory. From there, seventeen sub-themes were identified that aligned with the 4S’s of the theory. Further analysis of these sub-themes allowed the researchers to recognize key factors within each of the 4S’s that contributed to the subject’s identity as a medical educator. In terms of Self, there was also evidence of a connection between the medical educator identity and the participants personal values. The degree to which the individual had chosen to become a medical educator was a key factor in the area of situation. Participants indicated a lack of support resources when making their transition. Resourcefulness
and energy were key to the participants developing their own coping strategies (Browne, et al., 2018).

The authors do highlight some limitations of the study. One is sample size was small. This makes it difficult to generalize to a larger population. The study also took place in the UK. Therefore, the results are specific to that country and to senior medical educators. A similar study could be conducted with university educators in general and in the United States.

In her 2014 dissertation, Samantha E. DeVilbiss uses Schlossberg to examine the transition experiences of traditionally aged, first-time, full-time students who were conditionally admitted to a public, four-year, mid-sized, Southeastern United States institution. DeVilbiss hopes that by increasing understanding of the transition experience of this population, institutions of higher learning will be able to aid these students in this vital period and retain them through to degree completion.

DeVilbiss used a qualitative phenomenological method to conduct her study. She defined traditional-aged as 18 or 19 years old and the sample was made up of students who had graduated high school in May and June 2013 and enrolled in college for the first time in August 2013. Using a combination of criterion, stratified purposeful, and homogenous sampling, DeVilbiss identified eight study participants, four women and four men. Data collection consisted of two interviews lasting from thirty minutes to one hour. The first interview took place during the first month of the semester and the second interview was conducted during the last two weeks of the semester. Interview questions focused on the participants transition experience from high school to college and the coping mechanisms they used to deal with the transition (2014).
Through the use of data reduction techniques and clustering and thematizing, DeVilbiss (2014) was able to identify six themes: 1) increasing independence, 2) intensifying demands and difficulty, 3) learning what works and what doesn’t, 4) leaving loved one’s behind but keeping some in one’s life, 5) uncovering new support, and 6) finding one’s place (p.95-100). By further examining these themes, the researcher was able to map these experiences to the 4S’s in Schlossberg’s theory (2014). Themes one and two relate to Situation, themes four and five to Support, theme three to Strategies, and theme six to Self.

The implications of this research include the need for institutions to find what coping resources their students in this population possess when entering college and use these to help the students grow in other areas. Programming to address students having difficulty changing roles was also found to be helpful (DeVilbiss, 2014).

The researcher did acknowledge some limitations of the study. First, the participants were all new students, straight from high school. Transfer students and/or students of a different age may have different experiences. All participants were also conditionally admitted. Fully admitted students who did not require remediation will have different coping strategies. The location of the study can also change it results. The author suggests conducting similar studies with different sub-populations in different geographic locations to further research in the area of transition to college (DeVilbiss, 2014).

The shift of coming to college for the first time is not the only transition students will face. While research on retention and persistence is always at the forefront in higher education, very little is being conducted on students who are forced to stop attending due to mental health issues and the problems they face when transitioning back into the college setting. In a 2017 study, Paige Wiggington sought out the experiences of students returning to the University of
Pennsylvania from a leave due to mental health issues. Wiggington wanted to find what source of support these students had on campus and how the institution can learn from these students and provide better support.

All participants in the study were between the ages of 18 and 25 and had experienced an interruption in their studies due to a mental health issue. The researcher used snowball sampling and started with a single, trusted, student contact. Portraiture was used at the method of study and is very in depth and suggest a smaller sample size. The sample for this study was four, three women and one man. The data was collected over a period of seven months (summer 2016 until January 2017) and consisted of unstructured interviews lasting from sixty to ninety minutes. In vivo coding was used to identify similar phrases and themes were identified from this data. This analysis and the researchers own reflection let to portraits of each participant (Wiggington, 2017).

Several themes emerged from the interviews and portraits. All participants found the already difficult transition of moving from high school to college heightened by mental and physical health issues. The theme of both self-inflicted pressure and pressure from outside sources to be successful in college was troublesome to the researcher. Although the pressure to be successful was lessened upon their return, the participants noted limited support available on campus. The students were able to find treatment outside the institution and were grateful for the help. The University of Pennsylvania is very focused on classification. The participants had a hard time identifying themselves with one of the classes upon their return (Wiggington, 2017).

These themes point to the self, situation, and support areas of Schlossberg’s Theory.

The small scale of this study makes its results limited to only its participants. Returning to campus after leaving for other reasons should be studied and on a greater scale. Detailing how
these stop outs effect graduation timelines and outcomes would also be helpful. The author also made suggestions to assist students in their transition back into school. These included: peer advisors, creating a healthy social climate for those returning, creating returning student orientation sessions, and intuitions embracing students on leave in order to foster their return (Wiggington, 2017).

Transition not only occurs when students enter college, but when they leave as well. Student athletes may face additional obstacles when leaving college as they may not have had the same amount of time devoted to career exploration as the average student. Bjornsen and Dinkel (2017) explored student athlete transition from sports using Schlossberg. Interestingly, they did so from the coach’s perspective rather than the students. They sought to accomplish two goals:

1) to explore coach insights of the factors facilitating a successful transition from sport for college student-athlete, and 2) to explore coaches’ perspectives on the existing academic and career-related supports/programming as well as the need for additional supports/programming to effectively prepare student-athletes to successfully transition from sport (p. 251).

The sample included 14 coaches, twelve men and two women. All were from NCAA, Division-1 universities. The researchers used purposeful sampling and worked with the Assistant Athletic Director of Academic Success to recruit one coach from each sport. The coaches participating came from both men’s and women’s sports and had an average experience of 11.6 years. A phenomenological model was used for this study and data was collected through semi-structured, hour long interviews. The interviews took place in the Fall of 2014.
The researchers NVivo 10 software to assist with data analysis. Important quotes were identified and grouped to form themes (Bjornsen, A.L. & Dinkel, D.M., 2017).

Four themes emerged from the data: 1) satisfaction with current practices, 2) preparation for transition, 3) transferrable skills, and 4) resources needed for a successful transition. Theme one matched the Support potion of Schlossberg’s Theory and praised the interpersonal and institutional support from the school’s athlete academic support staff. Theme two aligned with the situation segment of the 4S’s and highlighted the need for student athletes to engage in career exploration early in their time in college. The fact that these student face major time constraints because of their sport was also a focus of the discussion. Theme three mapped to the self S, and discussed skills developed through sports that translate to the workplace. The skills included teamwork, time management, dedication, punctuality, and being a good sport. Theme four dealt with strategies for transition. The coaches suggested that additional programming be added for students to learn to manage their personal finances, allow for job shadowing, and being available to the student even after they graduated. A mentoring program with current and former student athletes was also noted as a needed program (Bjornsen, A.L. & Dinkel, D.M., 2017).

While this study was one of the first to look at student athlete transition from the coach’s perspective, there are some limitations and needs for further research. The sample size was small and not all sports were represented. Football is not offered at this school so the perspective of a coach in this sport could vary. The school was also making the transition from a Division-2 to a Division-1 that might have some bearing on the results (Bjornsen, A.L. & Dinkel, D.M., 2017). Because of these limitations, other types of schools with other sports offerings might benefit from a similar study.
One can easily infer from the previous discussion that Schlossberg’s Transition Theory is an appropriate lens through which to view the transition experiences of adults. Further discussion illustrates that the theory can also be used to examine the transitions of different populations within higher education. The specific transition under examination in this study is that of student veterans. This transition from the life of a serviceman or woman to a student has been examined in many ways and programming has been developed to assist this population. The following discussion is a brief overview of recent studies with this population as well as programs that have attempted to help with their transition. It spans the last ten years and is organized chronologically.

Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell (2009) sought to understand the issues that combat veterans face when transitioning back into the college setting. The overall goal was to examine how higher education administrators support veteran students in this transition.

Participants for this study consisted of twenty-five students, 6 women and 19 men. Twenty-four enrolled full time at one of three public research universities and one at a four-year regional university. Two of the participants interviewed deployed more than once to Iraq or Afghanistan. Nine had attended college prior to active duty deployment. Students currently on active duty were not included in the sample. For this qualitative research, the authors select a case study approach. The researchers agreed to end the study with twenty-five participants after consistent themes emerged (Ackerman et al., 2009).

The authors were able to define four themes: 1) reasons for joining the military, 2) deployment, 3) serving in war zones, and 4) assimilating into the campus culture within the responses of their participants. From these themes, suggestions on how to accommodate this special population are outlined. Using the themes, they uncovered, the authors give a list of five
guidelines for campuses to follow in order to help the veteran population. These guidelines include: 1) developing student-centered policies for activation and deployment in order to make the withdrawal process an easy one 2) maintaining a connection with deployed students, 3) giving thought to the special services offered to veterans so that their needs are met just as the needs of any other special populations are met, 4) making sure the institution is doing all it can to be veteran friendly, and 5) sharing best practices with other institutions (Ackerman et al., 2009).

This study contributes to the overall research in the area of veteran services. The emerging themes and guidelines present in the article are a good foundation for further research. Other researches can build on this case study in order to increase the literature and knowledge of this population. With additional information from the original researchers, such as a full description of their methods, other investigators can easily repeat this process with other types of institutions (land grant institutions, community colleges, historical black college and universities, etc.) to see if the same themes emerge. The authors themselves highlighted other studies in the areas of gender and mental health issues that need further exploring (Ackerman et al., 2009).

In their 2009 article, Burnett and Segoria focused on ways higher education institutions’ student services offices can collaborate with other campus entities as well as outside entities to best address the need of student veterans with disabilities. The basic theme of this study is addressing the hardships veterans who suffer from Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and other physical disabilities can benefit from a collaboration of many offices on campus as well as other veteran organizations.

Burnett and Segoria wished to highlight collaborative approaches that had proven successful on their campuses. They suggested that several areas needed to work together in order for the transition of disabled veterans to be as smooth as possible. The need for university
wide committees including many functional areas of the institution was discussed. The committee would be charged with “creating a campus climate conducive to the success of all military transition students including those with disabilities/injuries” (Burnett & Segoria, 2009, p. 54).

Faculty and staff also need to undergo training in order to understand the needs of veterans and their disabilities. The formation of veteran student groups such as the Student Veterans of America (SVA) can assist with the training. Once a member, institution can be provided with a list of veterans who can take part in training for faculty and staff. The authors found that “Faculty and staff typically respond more favorably when hearing from actual student veterans about what is working and not working for them in the classroom and what can be done to improve the campus climate,” (Burnett & Segoria, 2009, p. 55).

Other suggestions made by the authors included: 1) using faculty and staff who are veterans themselves as veteran mentors is also a good way to serve veterans. Veterans relate better to other veterans so having a faculty member who can talk to a student as a veteran is an excellent service to offer. 2) The needs of disabled veterans also need to come under consideration when designing programs of study. These students must have the same access as any other population. 3) Collaboration also needs to take place within the community, at the state government level, with Veteran’s Affairs, with medical facilities that serve veterans, and with graduate schools (Burnett & Segoria, 2009).

The article gave very few examples of how schools are going about forming these collaborations. The only real examples given were programs instituted at California State University, San Marcos. I am sure time and space prevented the exploration into other schools,
but only focusing on one geographic region may decrease the benefits of the information covered.

Furthering the discussion of veteran students with disabilities, DiRamio and Spires (2009), gave readers information on the new types of injuries sustained by today’s soldiers. While traditional war injuries to muscles and bone are still present and more readily recognized, invisible injuries such as Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) have become more prevalent. The issues associated with these injuries can include inability to concentrate, loss of memory, headaches, dizziness, and blurred vision as well as behavioral changes such as irritability, anxiety, sleep disorders, and depression. From this list, it is easy to see how a student’s campus life can be affected. Di Ramio and Spires (2009) also described an initiative to support the success of the severely injured.

The Severely Injured Military Veterans: Fulfilling the Dream is an initiative put forth by the American Council on Education (ACE). This initiative begins while the soldier is recovering from their injuries in a military hospital. An ACE academic advisor is available at each of the military hospitals. Once the advisor and the student have made an educational plan, the advisor then contacts a National Association of Student Personnel (NASPA) representative at the school the veteran wishes to attend. The final member of the program is the veteran’s champion. These champions are volunteer members of the school’s community, usually veterans, which are there to serve as a mentor to the veteran as they transition into their academic life. The article also gives examples of how student veterans have benefited from the program as well as how some became champions (DiRamio & Spires, 2009).

At the time of the chapter’s publishing, the ACE initiative had been successful, with participants successfully completing certificate programs, associate degrees, bachelor’s degrees,
and graduate degrees. Also, at that time, the program was still in its infancy. For many, the program had acted as a form of non-medical rehabilitation, assisting the veteran in putting not only their academic lives but also their personal lives back together (DiRamio & Spires, 2009).

This piece was very informative of the ACE program that has been developed to assist severely injured veteran transition to the college environment. Additional information needs to be provided on how schools and NASPA members themselves can get more information on helping with the program. It would also be very interesting to conduct a study comparing how students who participate in the program’s success rate differ from those who do not.

In chapter three of New Directions for Student Services, Rumann and Hamrick (2009), “offer frameworks and considerations for student affairs professionals seeking to serve the transition needs of the current generation of student veterans,” (p.25). They also provide a brief history of the education of soldiers including important bills passed to bridge the gap between military and higher education. Rumann and Hamrick (2009) also explain how educational benefits were/are used as incentives for men and women to volunteer for the armed forces. Discussion of how being deployed can affect the enrollment of student soldiers is also included.

The authors made suggestions to higher education institutions. They emphasized that faculty must be aware of the needs of veteran students. This can be accomplished through online training. It is not only faculty that need to be made aware of the needs of veterans. Staff and fellow students can also benefit from programming designed to create awareness of military students in general, war and combat, and service member's experiences as well as the issues they face when entering the college setting. They also encouraged institutions to form partnerships with local veterans’ organizations, the National Guard or reserve personnel, and community organizations that support veterans (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009).
This chapter gives good information on the history of the military and its relationship with higher education. The issues addressed need to be further considered by higher education intuitions. The suggestions need the support of studies that show the effectiveness of the partnerships with local organizations. Further assessment will also be needed to determine if the online training for faculty, staff, and students has an effect on their interactions with student veterans.

Rumann an Hamrick (2010) furthered their interest in student veteran transition by conducting a study of the transition experiences of college students who have returned from war zone deployments and subsequently re-enrolled in college.

All of the participants in this study were enrolled at the same large research focused, land-grant university. The university is located in the Midwest and total enrollment was approximately 25,000 students at the time of the writing. The respondents were required to be a full-time undergraduate student that had withdrawn from the university because of deployment and re-enrolled upon their return. Six respondents (five men, one woman) were identified by purposeful and referral sampling. Five enrolled at the selected institution before deployment and one transferred in from another school. Data was collected through a series of semi-structured interviews and the researchers used an “interpretive theoretical perspective grounded in a constructionist epistemology for this study,” (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010, p. 436).

Several themes emerged among the veterans. The first was role incongruities. Soldiers had very structured routines and schedules while deployed. This gave them a feeling that they always knew what to expect. College life does not give them the same structure. Lingering stress from deployment is also a hindrance for these students. The participants in this study also have issues with the immaturity of their fellow non-veteran students. While many of their
undergraduate cohorts are interested in the lives of celebrities, for example, the veteran students are more concerned with completing their degrees. Changes in relationships was also a theme that emerged. Friends the veterans had before deployment had drifted away, many now ahead of the veteran in college standing. Finally, incorporating both the positive and negative experiences of deployment into their current lives was a challenge mentioned by the veterans (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010).

There were limitations to this study. First, not all branches of the armed forces were included in the study. Difference in branch of service could have an effect on the transition of a veteran. The respondents observed also did not have any physical disabilities. As discussed earlier, this factor needs to be considered with working with veterans as it can have a huge impact on their transition into higher education. The study also focused more on obtaining in-depth responses from the respondents rather than being able to generalize their responses back to the general veteran population.

Gender differences can also affect the transition of student veterans as addressed by DiRamio and Jarvis (2011). They tackled the difficulties faced by women in the military. Military Sexual Trauma (MST), PTSD, gender roles, responsibility of care, developing a voice, and help seeking are all issues female veterans face.

DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) set out to highlight the differences between female and male veteran’s transition to college. They showed that even though females face the same adjustment issues males do when entering college after active duty, there are several factors that make their transition different. One factor to consider is the rate at which females are sexually assaulted while in the military. PTSD is more prevalent in female veterans and many times goes undiagnosed. Gender role difference are also a factor that can determine how a student
transitions into college. Women in the military must choose whether to act more feminine or more masculine to deal with their male-dominated environment. They must also face the consequences of how others will treat them based upon their choice. Women have a propensity for taking care of others. This can create strong emotional ties to colleagues still in service and the veteran worries about whether or not they are cared for on the battlefield. Female veterans also feel silenced when returning to school. Many times, they could not speak out while in service and faced the same silencing effects when returning to the classroom. Women are more likely than men to seek help with an issue and therefore seem to cope better with transition. All of these factors are important for student professionals to understand when assisting a female student veteran in her transition.

The authors do a nice job addressing the many issues that female veterans face. They also gave some valuable insights into how women warriors can be an asset to an institution of higher learning. The piece does fail to give specific strategies for dealing with women’s issues. Additional research needs to be conducted on what strategies work best when working with female veterans in higher education.

In a 2015 article, Kirchner provided educators working with adult students with an overview of veteran students in transition. He also offered advice for easing their adjustment as well as suggestions for further research for understanding this population.

Through his research, Kirchner (2015) provided several factors that make student veterans transition from military life to college life different to that of other students. First, service members are used to a regimented way of life. The freedom experienced in college life can take some getting used to for them. He also found that student veterans are older than
traditional students, with an average age of 33, are more likely to be first generation students, and their needs and experiences are not understood by the general public.

The author suggested that adult educators need to offer services that increase retention and graduation rates in this population. Educators also need to be aware of programs and services that they can offer that will make them more military friendly. The availability of student veteran organizations (such as SVA) and veteran resource centers “provide a risk-free atmosphere to interact with peers who have similar experiences and understand military culture,” (p. 117). These resources help battle the feeling of isolation experienced when moving into a new social environment. Institutional support such as veteran specific orientation sessions, veteran advisors, and at least on full time staff member devoted to serving veterans were suggested as well as further training for faculty. This will help faculty better understand the needs of student veterans (Kirchner, 2015).

The following topics were suggested as avenues for further research: 1) effectiveness of support initiatives for student veterans, 2) effects of veteran resource centers on veteran retention, graduation rates, and student satisfaction, 3) learn what faculty members think about veterans, including stereotypes and stigmatizations surrounding PTSD, 4) factors that affect veteran retention and graduation rates, and 5) determine the influence veteran support services have on student satisfaction. Continued research in these areas could justify additional funding to provide the programming and services needed to support this population. “Until data demonstrates veteran resource centers, student organizations, and additional programs significantly impact retention, graduation, and overall satisfaction rates for veterans, universities and the federal government can argue against needed support,” (Kirchner, 2015, p. 121).
This article did an excellent job in highlighting the main issues student veteran’s face when transitioning from military to college life. The need for further research in order to justify adding additional funding for veteran services, in my opinion, hit the nail on the head when it comes to veteran services. Institutions of higher learning could be doing more to serve the student veteran population, but without documented need, it is hard to be approved for additional funding. Hence, my selection of this topic.

Blaauw-Hara (2016) presented a new way to look at student veterans. Rather than developing services focusing on students’ deficits, focus on their strengths. The purpose of his study was to identify key strengths of student veterans and apply them to success in classes and students’ persistence.

The study was conducted on a rural community college campus enrolling just under 3,000 students. A qualitative case-study approached was used and participants were recruited by flyers and word of mouth in 2014. Six respondents, all male, were identified and asked to complete a survey before participating in a semi-structured interview. The researcher used a grounded-theory protocol to code both the survey and interview transcripts. Once all coding was complete, three strengths were identified: 1) a drive to complete the mission, 2) an enriched understanding of the world and its citizens, and 3) a connection to the larger community (Blaauw-Hara, 2016).

Military life had taught these students to persist and never give up, gave them a better understanding of the world and made the more accepting of those in it, and how to be good teammates. Using these strengths as a basis, institutions can develop better methods for working with student veterans in transition (Baaau-Hara, 2016). According to Baauw-Hara (2016) institutions can clarify the mission by creating manuals for students detailing where to go for
help in different situations. Just as each job had its own manual in the military, each major could have their own manual with standardized syllabi for required classes. Standardization across websites, writing prompts, and other common materials would be helpful for student veterans.

Allowing student veterans to draw from their real world experience and connect it to the course material is also a method to not only allow the veteran to express themselves, but to educate others as well. Faculty would need to learn all they could about the veteran population and then discuss, in private, with the student, once they have self-disclosed that they are a veteran, to make sure they are willing to share with the class (Baauw-Hara, 2016).

The students in this study expressed a desire to be connected with not only other veteran students, but the student body as a whole. It is important to not only provide veteran student groups, but also groups that encourage team building with non-veteran students as well. Organizing study groups with other non-traditional students could be a fantastic way for students to connect with others while avoiding the irritation of traditional students who may not be as focused on the same goals (Baauw-Hara, 2016).

This was an excellent study with a different perspective than most articles. The idea of focusing on strengths rather than weaknesses when designing initiatives to help student veterans’ transition is optimal. The only drawback is the limitation of no female participants in the study. Having the female perspective may identify additional strengths on which to focus.

In a 2016 paper, Falkey highlighted many of the issues faced by today’s student veterans. She gave an overview of the transition challenges veterans face, including the lack of structure college life presents, the need for remedial education, challenges of being a nontraditional student, financial issues, and adjusting to family and civilian life simultaneously. Veteran academic and personal issues are not the only challenges they face. Physical injuries, including
TBI, as well as mental health issues (PTSD) will have to be addressed during veterans’ transition as well.

The literature reviewed in this paper illustrated the need for further research with the student veteran population.

Despite the relatively high percentage of nontraditional adult students, the field is open to research for programs that address these emerging populations’ needs. Three groups that have been under addressed in the growing body of literature on the needs of adult students have been identified as adults with disabilities (Rocco, 2001), students of color (Ross-Gordon, 2003), veterans (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Other research identifies three groups of students who would benefit from supportive attention from faculty and staff: Veterans appear again, identified as veterans returning from Afghanistan and Iraq who delayed their education to serve in the armed forces; unemployed workers; and post-GED students moving into college coursework (Katopes, 2009; Kenner & Weinerman, 2011). (p. 29).

The author also pointed out that “relatively little is known about today’s student/veteran population,” (Falkey, 2016, p. 31).

The paper further discussed survey results from studies asking campuses what they intended to do to support veterans as they returned to campus. The most popular responses included training for faculty and staff on how to work with veterans, seeking federal and state funding to help financially support the implementation of veteran support programs, providing increased training for counseling staff to assist veterans with specific health issues such as TBI and PTSD, creating veteran centers, and increasing budgets for programs and services, (Falkey, 2016).
Falkey also gave examples of veteran programs currently in place at institutions and addressed the need for the Veteran’s Administration (VA) and institutions to work together to serve the students (2016).

This paper is an excellent resource for a researcher wanting to work with student veterans. It extenuates the need for further research and gives some good starting points. Examples of what other institutions are doing to serve veterans provides an excellent resource for institutions as they develop their own programs.

One such program is the Conceptual Comprehensive Service Model for Student Veterans presented by Lange, Sears, and Osborne (2016), in a practice brief. This is a model for the support of veterans that has been implemented at a Midwest institution enrolling over 400 veterans.

The authors began with a brief description of the problems veterans face and how many institutions are ill-equipped to effectively serve this population. Their model uses existing services available on campus but arranges them into four core service areas: 1) Academic Services, 2) Career Services, 3) Disability Services, 4) Veteran and Family Services. Figure 3 is Lange and company’s list of services that fall under each area. Lange et al. (2016) provided three case fictitious case studies to illustrate how the model worked.

The authors also provide a list of services that all student veterans will benefit from, no matter their situation. These included, peer support, financial assistance and advisement, academic related supports, psychological counseling and career counseling. Finally, guidelines for implementing a similar program are listed (Lange, et al., 2016).

This was a telling example of how intuitions can easily use existing services to serve the student veteran population. Additional training may be necessary, but many times all of the
needed pieces are in place, they just have to be organized for veterans. In their implementation guidelines, the authors encourage institutions to conduct focus groups with veterans to:

Conduct focus groups with student veterans to learn about their transitional experiences, perception of campus climate, and identified barriers. Including student veterans by way of surveys and focus groups is effective for giving student veterans buy in with regard to their input being used to strengthen and shape programming (Lange, et al., 2016, p. 280)

I hope that my study can help contribute to this step at my research sites.

Figure 3

*Conceptual Comprehensive Service Model for Student Veterans List of Services for Veterans*

(Lange, et al., 2016, p. 283)

Another veteran specific program was highlighted in a practice brief by Osborne (2016). This brief detailed the creation of a first-year experience course specifically for student veterans. The brief began with a description of the problem. Stressed are cognitive injuries faced (TBI, PTSD) as well as physical disabilities. It is also pointed out that veterans are less likely to self-
identify as disabled due to the emphasis the military places on “physical toughness and self-efficacy,” (p. 286). Many times, the student veteran doesn’t even know that they can qualify for academic accommodations through the student disabilities office. In order to assist with educating student veterans on the support available to them and overall ease their transition into college, a first-year experience course was piloted (Osborne, 2016).

The course was started at an institution enrolling approximately 400 veterans. It lasted eight weeks and allowed students to earn two hours of elective credit. The 21 male participants, ranging in age from 22-26, were divided into two sections and represented a number of ethnicities. While this type of course is recommended in the American Council on Education (ACE) and the SVA, there are few courses specific to veterans and there is even less data on their outcomes. Most of the time veterans are forced to enroll in the orientation course along with their traditional aged classmates (Osborne, 2016).

Strategies specific to this population are needed. The first-year veteran transition course had several intentions:

1. welcome new student veterans and to educate them of the assistive resources on campus and within the community;
2. support their academic readiness through skill development (e.g., note-taking, reading comprehension, effective writing strategies);
3. create a safe and communal space where they could reflect on their transition, beliefs, assumptions, and discuss their new mission as students with other veteran peers; and
4. integrate them into the university by way of campus activities and student organizations. (p. 286).
The course was designed around adult learning concepts. This allowed for the course to be more self-directed and allowed for more integration of the veterans’ life experiences. The course was also framed around key concepts of men’s studies, “an interdisciplinary field devoted to the study of men, masculinities, gender, and power,” (p. 287). The students had two required readings and class time focused on entering into discussions of their transition experiences (Osborne, 2016).

Evaluation of the course revealed that the participants had a sense of community within the class. They felt authentically engaged with their classmates and were able to communicate openly about their vulnerabilities. The class was not intended to be a form of therapy, but a place for students to discuss their military-related stress. Introducing students to the services offered on campus also resulted in several students registering with disability services. The participants also were able to explore their masculinity and advocate for more campus programming geared toward male students (Osborne, 2016).

The course did have its limitations. One was the lack of female enrollment. It was unclear to the author why this was the case, as many of the leadership positions in the veteran student groups were held by female students. Another limitation is expense. Some institutions will not have the funds to create a new course that will have low enrollment (Osborne, 2016). Implementation of this type of course would require evaluation for effectiveness.

The study of veteran transition has become so prevalent in literature that a model specific to the transition of student veterans has been developed. In their 2017 study, Williams-Klotz and Gansemer-Topf used this model, the Student Veteran Academic and Social Transition Model (SVASTM), as the lens for their research. The purpose of their study was to better understand how students with military experience (SWME) transition to higher education and answer the
question “What do SWME perceive as their needs related to their successful transition to the institution?” (p. 84).

They began by explaining their framework, SVASTM. The model consists of four components that affect how student veterans transition: 1) cornerstones, 2) auxiliary aid, 3) environment, and 4) navigating (re)enrollment. Livingston and associates, the developers of the model, are able to show the interconnectedness of these concepts and how they influence the student’s transition. (See Figure 4 for diagram).

Figure 4

Student Veteran Academic and Social Transition Model (Williams-Klotz & Gansemer-Topt, 2017, p. 84)

Cornerstones included the fact that veterans put more emphasis on academic success now than they would have before their military service. The discipline of military life carries over to student veterans treating their academic career as a mission and working hard to complete the
mission in a timely manner. The disconnect between the regimented lifestyle of the military and the freedom of college live is also included (Williams-Klotz & Gansemer-Topt, 2017).

Auxiliary aid refers to the social experiences SWME have on campus as well as the campus environment they encounter when transitioning. Feelings of isolation can result as veteran’s transition to both civilian life and student life simultaneously. The need for support, both on and off, campus is included in auxiliary aid. On-campus veteran groups is a good example (Williams-Klotz & Gansemer-Topt, 2017).

The environment is very important to the veteran’s transition. Veterans enrolling soon after service might see the campus environment as unwelcoming. This view of staff and fellow students may be real or perceived. Staff and faculty need to be educated on the needs of SWME so that campus is an environment is welcoming and encourages a healthy transition (Williams-Klotz & Gansemer-Topt, 2017).

Student veterans now have access to the funds that can cover their college expenses. Many times, however, they do not know how to access them. Student veterans face delays in receiving their funds, which lead to delays in paying tuition, buying books, or covering living expenses. The confusion and delays can cause student veterans to have a harder time making the transition (Williams-Klotz & Gansemer-Topt, 2017).

With the framework in mind, the researchers used the Survey of Military and Veteran Students to collect their data. This survey was given to 355 undergraduate students enrolled in 13 different institutions in one Midwestern state. The students had self-identified as veterans. The participants provided their demographic information and answered two open ended questions. The first asked them to evaluate their transition to their institution and the second
asked them to suggest programs and services that could improve transition experiences. (Williams-Klotz & Gansemer-Topt, 2017).

The researchers used inductive content analysis to evaluate the data and arrived at three themes: 1) lack of in-processing, 2) lack of community, and 3) institutional invisibility. Lack of in-processing called for a set of structured steps for a student veteran to follow as they enter the institution. This includes steps to follow in order to receive their educational benefits as well as how to register for classes. Lack of community focused on student veterans need to socialize with like-minded people. They feel disengaged with the general student population and preferred to socialize in groups with other student veterans. Institutional invisibility dealt with students feeling like their military service did not matter to the institution. This encompassed difficulty transferring military credits, faculty who were unwilling to accommodate absences due to service, and policies that made it difficult for veterans to feel comfortable in their surroundings (Williams-Klotz & Gansemer-Topt, 2017).

The findings of this study aligned well with the components of the SVASTM. This allowed Williams-Klotz and Gansemer-Topt (2017) to make suggestions for best practices such as providing information to SWME before they enroll. The development of materials that will assist with a seamless in processing was also encouraged. The limitations of the study were also discussed and used as suggestions for future research. Further research on subpopulations based on academic preparedness, gender, race, and ethnicity were all encouraged. The study also ignored institutional context. Each institution would have to evaluate their personnel, policies, practices, and structure in order to create an environment that supports student veteran transition (Williams-Klotz & Gansemer-Topt, 2017). I hope my study will accomplish this suggestion at my research sites.
Through the above review of the literature relating to student veterans in transition, several themes have emerged from the body of research 1) The civilian public, including institutional faculty, staff, and fellow students do not fully understand the life of a veteran. 2) Training detailing the special needs of student veterans is needed for faculty and staff. 3) This training will also need to include the issues faced by veterans suffering from TBI and PTSD as well as physical disabilities. Many times, student veterans will not disclose this information. 4) Student veteran’s military training and regimented lifestyle lead them to being more motivated students. 5) Student veterans have issues relating to their fellow students and need the support of other veterans. The establishment of a veterans’ student group, such as SVA, is very important.

These themes pair nicely with the 4Ss in Schlossberg’s Transition Theory. Theme one illustrates the situation the student veteran is when moving in to the college setting. Themes three and four go towards the understanding of the student’s self and their personal assets and liabilities. Themes two and five will assist the student in the support function. All of the themes discussed will lead the student veteran to develop strategies for coping with the transition to the college life. For further development of these ideas, I will now briefly discuss current literature using Schlossberg’s Transition Theory applied to veteran student transition. This discussion spans the last seven years and is arranged chronologically.

DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) used a modified version of Schlossberg’s theory to address the transition from military service to civilian life. This transition involves adjustments in many areas of the veteran’s life including personal, social, academic, and vocational. Service men and women returning or beginning college study present a special challenge for the institutions at which they study, not only with the increase in number but also with the special characteristics associated with their military service.
Throughout this article, the authors attempted to give higher education professionals a lens through which to view veteran students who are going through this transition process. Schlossberg’s 4S model of transition was adapted to use when assisting students with military experience. Each of the 4Ss was given a new name. Situation (Assessment): Why did the student return to college? What aspects of the transition can be controlled? Self (Analysis): This stage involves the student taking stock of what resources and shortfalls they bring to dealing with this transition. Support (Assistance): This step encouraged the student to find support in both role and non-role dependent atmospheres. Non-role dependents support comes from family and friends while role dependent support comes from student organizations, campus programs, and other institutional programs. Strategies (Action): From the exploration of situation, self, and support, the student develops strategies for coping with the transition to college and civilian life (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011).

This article gave a process for understanding where a student veteran is coming from when assisting them. In order to complete the model, a student would have to be willing to share personal information with the school official. Many students do not feel comfortable sharing this information. The article gives no methods on how to obtain the information needed to use the model to serve this population of students. The adaption to Schlossberg’s theory does not seem to be based in any research conducted by the DiRamio and Jarvis. From what I could glean from the article, the authors used other theories dealing with transition and assigned these new titles to the 4Ss. In my opinion, further research would be needed using this adaptation to verify that is effective in serving student veterans.

The purpose of an article by Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughey, and Harris (2011) was to inform academic advisors of the unique transition issues student veterans face using the lens of
Schlossberg. “I hope this article will help advisors maximize student-veterans’ strengths, minimize their risk factors, connect them with the resources that facilitate academic success, and help them overcome barriers to achieving their academic goals” (p. 56).

Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughey, and Harris (2011) give a brief description of Schlossberg’s theory and provides a list of questions advisors should ask to gauge where the student veteran is in their transition. The goals of advising from the perspective of Schlossberg are to facilitate personal and academic success. These goals are achieved by helping students develop strengths in each of the 4Ss. In order to do so, advisors must talk with student veterans and understand what their situation is in each of the four areas. The list below provides the areas covered by the authors:

1) Reason for transitioning to higher education – Their reasons for leaving the military may be viewed as positive or negative. This can project on to the way they view their transition into higher education.

2) Role change and culture of higher education – The student’s role in the military and the culture that was included with that are very different than their new role in the culture of higher education. It is important to know how the student veteran views their new role as an individual in the unstructured world of higher education as opposed to their team member role in the highly structured environment of the military.

3) Skills developed from transition into the military – It can be helpful to remind the student that they have already successfully transitioned into the military. They can apply the same abilities in make this new transition.
4) Higher education is a temporary transition – Higher education has an endpoint, graduation.

5) Working with diversity – Those serving in the military come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. This causes them to be more culturally aware and tolerant of other cultures on campus.

6) Social and family support – Student veterans have lost the support of those they served with and tend not to relate to the general student population. It is important to understand what social and family support the student veteran has in place during this time of change.

7) Lingering call to duty – Although student veterans are not on active duty, many could potentially be called back into service. Advisors should be aware of military withdrawal policies and what they will need to do in order to return to their studies.

8) Physical disabilities – Deployment many times ends in physical injury. Being aware of available resources to assist students, will allow advisors to refer student veterans accordingly.

9) Mental health issues and treatments – With the invisible nature of TBI and PTSD, advisors should be aware of the signs and able to connect student veterans with the needed services both effectively and sensitively (Ryan et al., 2011).

The article ends with suggestions for services and supports for this population. The suggestions include veteran student groups and student veteran mentors to allow veterans to work through their transitions together. Veteran specific orientation sessions help connect student veterans with the needed services early and student veteran panels help faculty and staff.
better understand their specific needs. Advisors are also encouraged to review campus resources to know what is available to students (Ryan et al., 2011).

This article provides an excellent resource to advisors in beginning to understand the transition experience of their veteran students. It also helps them develop a database of services on campus they can refer a student to should the need arise. The drawback is that the article is primarily a best practices guide using the research of others. It does not actually ask the student veteran how they view their transition and the services they needed during that time. Further research studies examining the transition through the experiences of the student veteran are needed.

In her 2012 study, Wheeler did ask student veterans about their transition. “This study sought to understand the process veterans experience as they leave overseas deployment in support of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and negotiate the various changes such a transition entails” (p. 775). Schlossberg’s Transition Theory was used as the guiding framework for the study. Wheeler hoped that the results of this study could be used to assist community colleges in better assisting the student veteran population.

A case study approach was used in order to provide a clearer picture of the transition process. Purposeful sampling methods of non-proportional quota and snowball sampling were used to identify nine participants, eight men and one woman. All nine met the criteria of the study: to be veterans of the armed forces, had been deployed overseas, were now separated from military service, and attending the research site community college for the first time. Data was collected through several interviews ranging from 60 to 90 minutes long. All participants were asked the same questions but interviews remained semi-structured in order to discuss additional topics (Wheeler, 2012).
After coding, three themes emerged: 1) academic experience, 2) personal connections and interactions, and 3) benefit bureaucracy. Within academic experience, several issues were discovered. The first was the academic preparedness of the participants. All had delayed entry to college, a risk factor for nontraditional students, and the majority of participants chose the community college because they felt they needed remedial help before going into a four-year institution. All but one of the participants were happy with their decision to start at the community college. They appreciated the small class sizes and extra attention from faculty as well as the opportunity to “catch up.” The veterans in the study also highlighted their dislike of the orientation they were required to attend. They just wanted to get their classes and did not feel the need to be shown around campus. All of the study participants also felt their military experience had a positive effect on their academic success. This theme ties in to the self and situation aspects of Schlossberg’s theory (Wheeler, 2012).

The personal connections and interactions directly relate to support. Participants discussed the support, or lack thereof, they received from family and significant others. Both premilitary friends as well as friendships developed while enlisted were highlighted. Some premilitary friends remained supportive after the return home. Several participants felt they had outgrown those friends and severed ties with them. Military friends have a very special bond. The participants felt it very difficult to forge the same types of friendships in college. This is largely due to the lack of common ground between veterans and their traditional aged classmates, mostly referred to as “kids.” The student veterans were mostly annoyed with their peers’ general attitude and lack of respect for authority. Only two of the nine had been able to make friends with their classmates, but even then, they were fellow nontraditional students who were older with more life experience (Wheeler, 2012).
The final theme discussed was benefit bureaucracy. This ties in to the Situation S in Schlossberg. The choices of benefits to use was overwhelming to the participants. The difference in the benefit plans were not clearly laid out for the students and many still had no idea if what they had chosen was what they actually needed. The red tape surrounding the receiving of benefits had many participants very stressed. Although they had separated from the military months before, they had still not begun receiving benefits. This was creating issues with paying rent and purchasing books. For several, these benefits were their sole income and not receiving them was putting their families into financial strain (Wheeler, 2012).

Because student veteran transition did not perfectly align with the linear format of Schlossberg’s Theory. The researcher added an additional stage.

Therefore, applying an additional moving through stage followed by moving in helps to illuminate the veteran experience more fully. In his way, veterans leave military service and become students (moving out), develop an understanding of their role as students (moving through), and fully integrate those changes and their civilian identity with their veteran identity as they navigate the new collegiate environment (moving in) (p. 778).

Based on the themes that emerged, the researcher was able to see a pattern. “the veterans who had progressed to moving in, the final stage as applied here, did so by demonstrating a balance of the 4S System’s coping factors” (p. 786). All but one of the participants had made it to this point, Blake. His lack of coping skills was keeping him stagnant in his transition. The study helps community college administrators better understand where this population of students is coming from and identify current services that need to be bolstered and additional services to be added (Wheeler, 2012).
This study did an excellent job in using Schlossberg’s Transition Theory to help illustrate the transition process of a student veteran. It was very interesting to consider the additional moving through stage Wheeler added. This creates a new way to look at the veteran transition. Additional studies like this one should be conducted at the community college level as well as the four-year institutions. Adding additional female participants would also be helpful to enrich the data on this population.

The purpose of Schiavone and Gentry’s 2014 study was to better grasp the challenges student veteran’s face when transitioning from soldier to student. Using Schlossberg’s as a basis, the authors were able to highlight want impacts student veterans as they make their way into, though, and out of higher education. They used a qualitative case study approach at a large public Midwestern university. Criterion sampling was used to identify six subjects and data was collected through a single semi structured interview lasting from 15 minutes to over and hour.

The researchers did a thorough comparison of their findings to the 4S structure of Schlossberg. In the area of situation, the trigger for the transition from military to college was a common ground. For several, joining the military was a way to ensure a college education could be afforded. Several also noted that the military gave them the self-discipline to pursue academics. Timing was also a common theme within situation. All of the students were starting college later in life and were classified as nontraditional students. They therefore faced the challenges of that population such as being older and having family responsibilities as well (Schiavone & Gentry, 2014).

Control of their situation also emerged as a theme. While they were able to control much of the transition because of their military benefits, they were not able to control their frustration with the distracting behaviors of their classmates. The participants of the study all experienced
their role change from soldier to student differently. National Guard members found it much easier, as their service allowed them the ability to stay connected with their civilian life while also living the life of a soldier. Combat veterans, on the other hand, had a harder time moving from roadside bombs to the classroom. Concurrent stress was the last theme that arose in the situation aspect. Several participants faced a struggle balancing their family and jobs with their student life. Others were also facing psychological issues such as insomnia (Schiavone & Gentry, 2014).

In the Self section, Schiavone and Gentry (2014) discovered themes in three areas: 1) psychological status, 2) physical health, and 3) outlook and self-efficacy. The psychological status of the participants varied depending on the nature of their service: two had combat experience, four did not. There was one exception, as on non-combat participant suffered from insomnia. For non-combat veterans, the psychological effects included frustration with their younger classmates and the struggle making non-veteran friends. Combat veterans on the other hand, were coping with the aftermath of seeing friends killed or permanently injured in battle. They also noted the lack of understanding the American public has on what military service really means (Schiavone & Gentry, 2014).

While none of the participants suffered from physical health issues that affected their daily lives, several had some health concerns. One noted a back injury that, because it is unseen and not a constant issue, might be misunderstood by the general public and non-combat veterans. The two subjects who suffered from insomnia noted the physical toll it can take as well. The non-combat participant attributed it to a feeling of insecurity from not living on a well-guarded base. The combat veteran noted that he had been trained to stay up for hours and only sleep when physically necessary, as he was in constant danger on the front lines. It was now hard for
him to break that pattern and be able to sleep in the security of his home (Schiavone & Gentry, 2014).

Finally, in the area of Self, outlook and self-efficacy. Despite the issues they faced, all the participants had positive outlooks and felt that they would be successful in college life. One remarked “College is easy. People stress about certain things, about exams. I do study…but it’s not as big of a stress emotion, going to college, as it is in the military” (p. 35). The others agreed, feeling that the military had well prepared them for the rigors of college study (Schiavone & Gentry, 2014).

Support for these students came from two areas, non-role dependent support and role dependent support. Non-role dependent support comes from family and friends. The participants noted the lost connections with friends they had made prior to enlisting. The military had changed them into different people and they no longer felt connected to their prior friend group. The relationships with family members were unaffected by their service. Role dependent support comes from those who hold a role in one’s life. The respondents discussed how life in the military was more like a family. Everyone took on the role of supporting and looking out for one another. This was a sharp contrast with college life where the participants felt everyone was out for themselves. Despite this need for the support of other student veterans, only one participant had become active in the campus SVA (Schiavone & Gentry, 2014).

The only strategy for dealing with transition the veterans discussed was sarcasm. This was noted as common among military personnel. When students would become frustrated or uncomfortable, they would use sarcasm and humor to make light of the situation. This allowed them to hide their feelings from others (Schiavone & Gentry, 2014).
This study illustrated how the 4Ss of Schlossberg can paint a picture of who student veterans view their transition. They also mentioned several times that there is a need for further qualitative research in the subject of understanding veteran transition. Again, there was only one female participant in the study. The need for recruiting more females to these types of studies is very evident.

I understand that the last study discussed was published four years ago. Through extensive search of more current data, I was unable to locate additional studies that used Schlossberg’s Transitional Theory to examine the transition experiences of student veterans. I feel the studies and articles reviewed previously adequately show that more research is needed with this student population using Schlossberg’s in order to fully realize the potential of this theory as a tool for making sense of the student veteran transition. In fact, almost every article pointed the needs for further research to better understand student veteran transition. By recognizing the specific assets and liabilities veteran students possess in the areas of Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies, higher education professionals can develop comprehensive support programs to ensure they are serving this special population in the manner they deserve. I hope the following study will help to further this endeavor.

“These students have served our nation and they should have a fair chance to succeed with their educational goals” (Burnett & Segoria, 2009)
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the transition experience for student veterans in three large public universities in the state of Mississippi. The transition experience was generally defined as the student veteran’s adjustment to life as a college student after serving in the military. The research questions are as follows:

1) How do student veterans describe their transition experience?

2) How effectively do universities support veterans in their transition experience?

3) How might universities improve support services for veterans?

As the number of veteran students enrolled increases, the issues these students face during transition will become more prevalent on college campuses (Nichols-Casebolt, 2012). Making the transition from military life to civilian life can be challenging, and with the added stress of pursuing a degree, many veterans are overwhelmed (Kirchner, 2015). In order to best serve this population of students, college campuses must understand the special needs of student veterans and provide services to help support them during transition (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009). This study will seek to better understand these transition experiences and therefore understand what support is needed for this unique group of students.

Research Design

The rational for selecting a qualitative study is simple: meaning. According to Creswell (2014), “Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning
individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). In order to fully understand the transition experiences of student veterans and be able to truly tell their stories, I would need to understand what a transition experience means to a student veteran. A qualitative study allowed me to collect their transition stories and hopefully discover what their experiences meant to them.

I approached this study with a social constructivist worldview. With social constructivism a person is seeking to understand the world in which they live. They are attempting to assign meaning to their experiences and the experiences of others. This leads the researcher to seek out broader, more complex, views rather than narrow meanings categorized into only a few ideas. The meaning of experiences is formed by social interactions through the individuals’ cultural and historical norms. Therefore, the researcher tries to focus on the views of the situation held by the study participant (Creswell, 2013). Operating from this worldview helped me answer my research questions effectively. I captured the participant’s meaning of their transition experience and how they interacted with others on campus during their transition.

In support of my social constructivist worldview, I have also selected a phenomenological approach for this study. This approach emphasizes a phenomenon in terms of a single idea. In this case, college transition. A phenomenological study “turns on the lived experiences of individuals and how they have both subjective experiences of the phenomenon and objective experiences of something in common with other people” (p. 78, Creswell, 2013). Likewise, I am interested in how each student veteran sees their own transition and how they see the transition of the veteran group as a whole.
Research Sites

This study took place at three universities in the state of Mississippi, The University of Mississippi (UM), Mississippi State University (State), and The University of Southern Mississippi (Southern). These campuses were selected because all three are veteran-friendly universities (Military Times, 2019) and have dedicated offices to serve veteran needs. As an example, the main campus of the University of Mississippi (UM) is located in Northeast Mississippi in the town of Oxford. As of Fall 2017, the university enrolled over 20,000 students, with 55% female enrollment. Mississippi residents made up 55% of enrollment as well. The enrollment is mostly white (75%). Verified student veteran enrollment for the term was 103, which included 88% male enrollment, 73% Mississippi resident, and 75% white students (Gregory, 2018).

After the three campuses were selected, I contacted IRB to see what permissions and approvals were needed to research at other institutions. Because I was already approved at the University of Mississippi, I only needed approval for the two additional universities. IRB required a letter from the veteran services coordinator giving permission to recruit students on their campus. I reviewed employee directories of the two campuses and located their directors of veteran services. I reached out to each, and obtained written permission. This was sent to IRB and final approval was given.

Once approval was received, I reached back out to each campus’ veteran director. State and Southern referred me to another staff member in their office. I visited each campus and spoke with a staff member. I felt this was necessary to earn the trust of staff and students on each campus. Staff that work with this population tend to be very protective of them. I felt that by talking with the director’s office on each campus to explain my study, they would know my
intentions were to help student veterans. This would make them more likely to provide information to potential participants and otherwise encourage their students to participate in my study. I built a good relationship with the campuses and they were very helpful to me in recruiting prospective participants.

According to the United States Census Bureau (2010), the population of Mississippi in 2017 was estimated at 2.9841 million people, 6.4% of which were veterans (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018c). Many of these veterans will be seeking to use their education benefits. These sites were chosen for several reasons. Most importantly, at least to me, is my vested interest in this student population. I have worked closely with this student population and seen some of the issues they face. I currently serve on the Veteran Advisory Committee at UM in an effort to make the education of veterans better. I feel this research is needed to improve the way Mississippi universities are meeting the needs of student veterans.

As the current Assistant to the Dean for the School of Applied Sciences, many of the students in academic programs in the School are veterans. Improving veteran transition as a whole will directly affect many of the students I work with on a daily basis.

I am also a native of Mississippi, and while my state may not always be seen as the most appealing place to live, (e.g. ranked worst state by USA Today, 2019, 48th worst by U.S. News, 2019, and World Population Review, 2020) it is also known as the Hospitality State. I want that hospitality to be shown to everyone, but especially to veterans and for a very personal reason. My grandfather fought in World War II, and while he could have attended college under the GI Bill, he chose instead to become a farmer. I learned from him to respect those that have defended our nation. I have numerous other family members and classmates that have gone on to serve in all branches of the armed forces. Most have returned to Mississippi to live, work, and
attend school. By conducting my study at the three largest public universities in Mississippi, I hope to improve the lives of as many veteran students as possible. Burnett and Segoria (2009) put it best when they said, “These students have served our nation, and they should have a fair chance to succeed with their educational goals” (p. 58).

**Assumptions**

I have previously worked with this population in my position as the Assistant Registrar at UM. While serving in this position, I supervised the Certifying Official for the University. This position is responsible for certifying to the VA each student veteran’s schedule and that the courses they are taking are degree applicable. This gave me the passion for this group, but also caused me to form assumptions about this population based on the students I encountered.

The students I worked with were proud of their military service and had no trouble identifying as veterans. These students were also very trusting of staff. They were willing to provide us any information we needed if they thought it would help our process improve for them and other veterans. I therefore assumed all veterans would be willing to identify themselves as veterans. My assumption was that all veterans would be trusting of researcher if they thought it would make the next veteran’s transition easier. I have learned through my research that this is not always the case. If they only want to be identified as veterans in order to receive their benefits, they were not willing to participate in my study, even with the promise of confidentiality. I am also no longer a member of staff to them. I am simply seen as a graduate student conducting a study. The trust needed for a study such as this is not automatically earned.

Most of the veterans I came across in my work with the Registrar also were running into issues with the university whether it was financial, their benefits not posting to their account in a timely fashion, or social, problems with professors being derogatory regarding their service. I
assume all veterans face this issue on our campus. I also assume that the veterans fault the university for these issues. I am confident that my assumptions were challenged by my interviews. The biggest surprise for me was the financial need they faced. I assumed their educational benefits were enough to support them while attending college. My data did not reflect this. I also found that my participants did not blame the university for their issues. Instead, the blame was placed on the VA.

**Preliminary Study**

In order to begin my research, I started with a series of pilot interviews. I first obtained approval from the IRB. Once my research questions had been approved, I began recruiting participants. I used criterion sampling and snowball or chain sampling. According to Creswell (2013), criterion sampling is useful for quality assurance because all participants meet some set criteria. In this case, all participants had to be military veterans. Those using the educational benefits of a parent or spouse were excluded as they do not have direct military experience. The participants also had to be enrolled full time at one of the research sites. Snowball sampling was very useful because it built trust with the participants. Once I talked with one student and they told their friends about my study, more student veterans were willing to participate.

With the help of the campus Assistant Director for Veteran and Military Services, I was able to identify twenty possible candidates for participation. Eventually, six veterans volunteered for my pilot study. All were male and they ranged in age from approximately 24 to 47. Specific age was not asked, but an approximate age could be gathered from the transcripts. The participants were not asked to provide their ethnicity, something I added to my remaining interviews. From my own personal observation, five participants were white and one was a member of a minority race. I referred to the interview transcripts and was able to find comments
that pointed to ethnicity. Each participant was contacted through email and provided with an information sheet (see Appendix B) and asked to set up a meeting. I met with the participants in a location convenient to them on campus but that also allowed for their comfort and less background noise.

Data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews lasting from 13 minutes to 55 minutes and were audio recorded. After the first interview, my interview protocol (see Appendix C, D, & E) was revised. Once all six interviews were complete I transcribed each and began to review the transcripts. In order to protect participants’ privacy, each participant was assigned a pseudonym. Subject 1 was deemed Alpha, Subject 2, Bravo, and so on. While I did not need the entire alphabet for this study, I have provided it in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Military Phonetic Alphabet Used to Assign Pseudonyms to Subjects

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<tr>
<th>Military Phonetic Alphabet</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alpha</td>
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<td>Echo</td>
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<td>India</td>
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These interviews gave me insight into my subjects and gave me guidance in what to look for when conducting my literature review and advancing my study. I kept all of the data from this pilot study and incorporated it into the final results. How this data was dealt with is addressed in the remaining sections of this chapter.
Participants

I used criterion and snowball sampling to recruit. My focus is the transition experiences for military veterans into the college setting. I therefore keep the criterion of those who are classified as veterans. I worked with the veteran coordinators to identify students who met the criterion and contacted them by email (see Appendix A). The veteran coordinators at each campus also assisted in recruiting by handing out recruiting material (see Appendix F), talking to students about my study, and encouraging them to reach out to me.

Combined with the data from my pilot study, I identified a total of 15 participants. Of all the studies in my literature review, the most female participants any had was one. I was able to recruit three females to participate in my study. As of September 2017, there were 8,305 female veterans using education benefits in the state of Mississippi (National Center for Veteran Analysis and Statistics, 2017). Their transition experience needs to be explored further. It was nice to have their perspective on transition.

Data Collection

Based on the data gathered from my pilot study, I reviewed my protocol again and ensured the questions I was asking were in line with my research questions, they were. The semi-structured format allowed for consistency of data, as all participants were asked the same questions, but also allowed for further probing when an interesting topic was brought up during an interview. The semi-structured interview was the best form of data collection. All interviews were either audio or video recorded.

Once I started working with students on other campus, I had to find ways to meet virtually and be able to record the interviews. I researched and found Zoom (Version 4.3.5; Zoom 2019) met the needs of my study. Zoom is an online, distance meeting software that
allowed me to create a virtual meeting time and send participants a link to meet. They could use a computer or a mobile device. We could see and hear each other and a video recording of the meeting was automatically downloaded to my computer after the interview.

**Data Analysis**

The first step in my data analysis was to transcribe all of my interview transcripts. All six preliminary study interviews were transcribed by hand. I quickly realized that this was going to be extremely time consuming. A fellow doctoral student told me about a transcription service called Audio to Text Automatic Transcription Service & App (2019) or Temi. This program allows you to upload an audio or video file to their system. The program later emailed you to let you know the transcript was ready. The system was not one hundred percent accurate. It was necessary to proof read the transcript and make corrections. I paid a friend to listen to and correct the transcripts for the nine additional transcripts. This allowed for peer review to check the accuracy of my transcripts. Six interviews were transcribed manually and nine using Temi for a total of fifteen participants.

Once all interviews were transcribed, I wrote a narrative transition story for each of my participants. Basically, a description of the veterans’ transition experience (Creswell, 2013). This allows the reader to get to know each veteran on a more personal level and better relate to their individual experiences. It also intensifies the amount of data available to the reader. It helped readers keep my assumptions and findings in check.

In order to make coding and organization more efficient, I uploaded all transcripts to the NVivo software (Version 12.5.0; NVivo, 2019). According to Patton (2002), computer-assisted qualitative data management programs “facilitate data storage, coding, retrieval, comparing and linking” (p. 442). While the program made it easier to group data into categories, compare
transcript passages, and locate coded themes, a human still has to conduct the actual analysis. I had to name codes, decide what comprised a theme, and how to tell the story (Patton, 2002). Having all data in NiVivo made the process of pre-coding, coding and keeping all of my themes in order much more streamlined. I feel this helped me come to a better understanding of my data because it made searching for specific passages much more efficient and my data well-organized.

According to Saldana (2013), pre-coding is highlighting text that stands out to you in your transcripts. While not the only way to analyze qualitative data, coding is possibly the most popular and involves assigning words or phrases to describe a passage of text. This process is part of the step known as horizontalization. This is a time to identify the key quotes in the data that illustrate how the subject experiences the phenomenon. I began finding commonalities between the first two transcripts. I continued to add possible themes as I coded each transcript. I then began comparing the codes from each participant to reveal common experiences among the participants (Creswell, 2013).

Once all transcripts had been coded. I began to review all material I had added to each code. In total, I reviewed all data three times. Through this analysis I was able to identify five themes: (a) Trouble Relating to other Students, (b) Lasting Effects of Military Service, (c) Financial Struggles, (d) Types of Support, and (e) Institutional Interaction. Each theme also has sub-categories that were identified through the data analysis.

I then took the themes from my data analysis and applied them to my theoretical framework, Schlossberg’s Transition Theory. My literature review corroborated my findings. Many ideas that were discovered in the studies I reviewed were also present in my findings.
Data Validation

*Triangulation.* My themes are based on the combinations of experiences from all of my participants. Each participant had their own perspective on their transition to the college setting. When three or more of the participants said the same thing, this brought triangulation and added validity to the theme and the study (Creswell, 2014).

*Rich description.* As stated above, I wrote a narrative story for each of my participants. These stories are full of details about the veteran’s life before, during, and after their military service. These narratives are intended to convey how their individual experiences have affected their transition process to college life. These descriptive stories should ideally give the reader the feeling of living the journey with each participant, adding an element of realism to my presentation of the data. This rich description gives several perspectives of the content my five analytic themes uncovered, adding validity to the study (Creswell, 2014).

*Member checking.* I used member checking to validate my data. In this form of validation, the researcher invites the participants to review the findings of the study. Creswell (2013) suggests using the data analysis, interpretations, and conclusions for this process rather than just the transcripts and raw data. He recommends conducting a focus group with participants to see if these identified themes and analysis match their experiences. This is also a good way to see if anything was missed. Because participants where located across the state, it would have placed a burden on the participant to convene for a focus group. I also wanted to keep all information pertaining to a participant private. A focus group would have opened up private details to others. Instead of a focus group, I sent each veteran their story for accuracy checking. (Measures were taken at this step to protect confidentiality. These will be described
in the Ethical Considerations section.) Each participant also received the full description of themes for their feedback.

I also shared my findings, all veteran stories and as well as description of themes, with the staff members in the veteran offices on each campus. I wanted to verify that what I have found is consistent with what their students are conveying to them. A focus group with these staff members would not have been helpful in data validation as it is the student veteran’s stories I want to tell.

Although I sent information to all fifteen participants, I have only received feedback from five. The provided minor edits to their stories, none of which effected my themes. They confirmed that their story was an accurate description of their transition experience. They also felt that my themes highlighted the transition struggles of student veterans. My favorite part of data validation was when several of the participants thanked me for my work. They were greatly appreciative of my caring enough to tell the stories of veterans.

Of the three campus veteran staff members, I have received feedback from one. He confirmed that my themes were consistent with what he hears from student veterans. He also indicated that he had been trying to convey this information to his administration since he entered his position. He was very pleased that his observations now had data to provide back up.

Audit trail. According to Given (2008), qualitative research design is constantly changing. Many times, the researcher has to make a snap decision as they are collecting data. In order to assess the research process, an audit trail of these changes is needed. Audit trails are a collection of all documentation regarding the research and can include: documentation of changes in the design, notes, memos, and experiences. My research has an audit trail. I have saved all iterations of my research questions as they have evolved during my pilot study. I have
also audio or video recorded and taken notes during interviews. This collection of documents and recordings has allowed me to evaluate my study.

I have also saved emails giving me permission to conduct my research on other campuses. The approval from IRB is also documented. I am also able to document my travel to the sites for initial meetings with staff and for in-person interviews. The interviews themselves provide and audit trail as many are video recorded. When I am speaking, my camera was active so I can be seen asking the interview questions. The only issue I found was accidentally forgetting to hit record on one of the interviews. Luckily, I was taking good notes and was able to recover the lost data.

**Ethical Considerations**

*CITI training.* In preparation for my work with human study participants, I went through several courses for the ethical conduct of research through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI). I completed the basic course for graduate students conducting human research in 2013 and completed the refresher course in 2016 and 2019. I also completed the Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research Course 1 in 2015. These courses prepared me to conduct my research in accordance with ethical guidelines.

*IRB approval.* I also had approval from the University of Mississippi Institutional Review Board (IRB). After talking with the office about the nature of my study, I was told to complete the abbreviated form. I completed all of the necessary forms and provided all required documentation. My application was approved on August 29, 2016. I then began conducting interviews in my pilot study. After the initial interview, I submitted a protocol amendment on September 26, 2016 in order to update my questions. I then completed the remainder of my pilot interviews. Since beginning the writing process, I have checked with IRB to ensure that my
Approval is still active and that I may continue my study. They confirmed that my application does not expire and that I am clear to continue my research on September 5, 2018. I submitted letters of approval to conduct research at State and Southern along with a recruiting brochure in early 2019. These documents were approved on March 6, 2019.

Protection of participant privacy. Protection of the participants’ privacy is of the utmost concern for my study. They are sharing sensitive and sometimes painful information with me. In order for them to be open and honest with me, they need to know that their identities will be kept completely confidential. Each participant has been assigned a pseudonym from the military phonetic alphabet and will only be referred to by that name in transcripts, notes, and the final study. The only link to the actual student would be the email they sent agreeing to be in the study and the ones verifying their stories. To protect confidentiality, I sent each participant their story as well as two stories from other participants. I made sure the additional stories were from participants enrolled at other campuses so the possibility of them knowing each other was diminished. I did not refer to their pseudonym in the email. The five that provided feedback have an additional link because they only gave edits for their specific story. All emails are housed in my email and will be deleted once the study is completed. These are kept on my personal email which is password protected on a computer that is also password protected. No list exists that matches participants names to their pseudonym.

All recordings and Word documents of transcripts are kept on my personal laptop that is password protected. Backups are housed on a password protected flash drive that is kept locked in my graduate carrel or in my locked office. Interview notes are labeled only with pseudonyms and are kept locked in my graduate carrel. The friend that I had hired to do the transcriptions did not know any of the participants. They are also a professional employed on a college campus.
and know the importance of student record privacy. The audio files and transcripts are housed on the Temi website. My account is password protected and the password was changed after my friend had completed her work. Once my dissertation is finalized, I will delete all files from the site.

Creating a comfortable environment. Many times, recalling time spent in service can bring up painful memories. Students were asked how long they served, if they were deployed, for how long, and to where as background information. The focus of the questions remained on their transition experiences when entering college. I wanted study participants to feel comfortable with the information they were sharing and to be able to speak freely. Participants seemed to feel comfortable answering the questions as none asked to skip questions.

Limitations

While all researchers want their studies to be perfect, there will always be limitations and delimitations. My study is no different. One thing to consider in this area is the time that passed between the transition experiences and the interview. While four participants were in their first or second semester, the other eleven were close to graduation. The time passage between entering college and the interview could have diminished the ability to recall all details of their transition experience.

The lack of diversity in participants can also be viewed as a limitation. The ethnicity of participants was mostly white (53.3%). The gender of the sample was also mostly male (80%). While there was some diversity, adding more diverse perspectives could enhance my findings. The sample also lacked diversity in the branch of service mostly Navy (46.7%) and Army (40%). Marine and Air Force veterans made up only 6.6% each. There were no Coast Guard veteran participants in this study. Differences in branch of service could also have a bearing on
transition. Where the service man or woman is stationed could limit their access to technology when gathering information for the school they will attend and while applying. The exit training can also differ by branch. Some veterans might have a better handle on civilian life when leaving service, making their transition more seamless. This ease could have been attributed to the institution rather than the training.

Several participants had also attended college at another institution prior to enrolling in their chosen Mississippi institution. The experiences at these institutions could have shaped their perspective on the college experience. These perspectives could then have altered their views when entering their Mississippi college. This could cause the transition experience to differ from that of a student who entered directly into a Mississippi university.

Another issue is the participants could have altered their comments to fit what they thought I was hoping to hear. Creswell points out that the presence of the researcher may bias the responses (2014). I attempted to keep my comments and all communications focused on the fact that I wanted to tell their story, in their words. This does not prevent them from forming an idea of what they thought I was looking for and answering accordingly.

Finally, I could have misheard their comments. While most of the recordings are very clear, there are sections where participants spoke quickly or too quietly for the transcript to be one hundred percent accurate. This could lead to misinterpretation of the data. As the researcher, I act as a filter for the information provided by the participant (Creswell, 2014). I can look at a statement and interpret its meaning one way, but that may not be what the participant meant. I hope member checking allowed me to correct this limitation.
Delimitations

The participants in this study were delimited to student veterans enrolled full time at three Mississippi public universities. I accepted both graduate and undergraduate students as well as those enrolled in fully online programs. The purpose of this study was to look at veteran transition as an experience. No matter what level of study (undergraduate versus graduate) the veteran is in or the type of program (online versus in class), a transition experience occurred. This experience is at the heart of this study and it was interesting to find the commonalities of participants despite these differences.

I selected the three largest public institutions in the state based on enrollment (IHL-Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning, 2019). Because of their size, it is reasonable to think they will be attractive to veterans coming to the state of Mississippi. By recruiting participants from all three, it gives a picture of transition in a public institution in the state of Mississippi rather than in just one location. Again, I was surprised at the similar experiences across all three universities.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the transition experience for student veterans in 4-year public universities in the state of Mississippi. This section provides details of my research site, design, and data collection methods. I have also included my assumptions about the student veteran population and how I overcame these assumptions. A description of my preliminary study is included as well as data validation methods. I fully discussed the ethical considerations of the study as well as limitations and delimitations.
CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the transition experience for student veterans at the largest public universities in the state of Mississippi. The transition experience is generally defined as the student veteran’s adjustment to life as a college student after serving in the military. The qualitative nature of the study provided the necessary details needed to tell each veteran’s story. The phenomenological approach provided information on how each veteran viewed not only their transition but how they saw the transition of all veterans. Analysis of interview data uncovered important aspects of veteran transition that institutions need to take into consideration.

This study sought to answer the following research questions:
1) How do student veterans describe their transition experience?
2) How effectively do public universities support veterans in their transition experience?
3) How might public universities improve support services for veterans?

The remainder of this chapter will contain information on participants, each participant’s transition story, and a summary of the analytic themes identified through data analysis.

Participants

All participants were enrolled in at least 12 credit hours at one of the three universities selected as the research sites at the time of their interviews. A total of 15 students agreed to be interviewed. The majority, thirteen, were undergraduates and 2 were graduate students. The undergraduates were in different stages of their studies, with some in their first semester and
others in their last. Both graduate students were in their last semester. The age of participants ranged from 24 to 47. Like most studies in my literature review, most of the participants, 12 or 80%, were male and 20% (3) were female. The female turnout for this study is better than any found in the literature review by 2 participants. The ethnicity was 53.3% (8) white, 26.6% (4) Hispanic, 13.3% (2) black, and 6.7% (1) multiple ethnicities. See Table 1 for pseudonyms, age, ethnicity, and branch of service for all participants.

Table 1

Participant Age, Gender, Ethnicity, and Branch of Service

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>ETHNICITY</th>
<th>BRANCH OF SERVICE</th>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>Hispanic*</td>
<td>Marine Corp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRAVO</td>
<td>27*</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White*</td>
<td>Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHARLIE</td>
<td>25*</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black, American Indian, and White*</td>
<td>Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DELTA</td>
<td>24*</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White*</td>
<td>Navy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECHO</td>
<td>28*</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Hispanic*</td>
<td>Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOXTROT</td>
<td>46*</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White*</td>
<td>Army</td>
</tr>
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<td>28</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Navy</td>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Navy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>34</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Navy</td>
</tr>
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<td>Black</td>
<td>Army</td>
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<td>White</td>
<td>Navy</td>
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<td>Black</td>
<td>Air Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSCAR</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Navy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Ages and ethnicity were not asked in preliminary study. Data was assumed from statements in the interview.

Veteran Stories

The following section contains a narrative story for each participant. In order to answer my first research question, how do student veterans describe their transition experience, it was necessary to understand each veteran’s full story. The following stories give a description of
where the veteran came from, why they joined the military, their time in service, and how they transitioned into their Mississippi university.

**Alpha**

Alpha’s journey begins in a small town in Northern Illinois where he lived until age 12. It was at this time he moved with his mother, an Army veteran, to a southern state. Though his exact career was not clear, he knew he wanted to work in law enforcement. Several family members worked in the profession, and Alpha wanted to follow in their footsteps.

Fast forward to an 18-year-old Alpha. He was a self-described rowdy teenager with no real goals in life. Tensions in the Middle East were beginning to rise and more American forces were being sent in to combat. Alpha’s patriotism, coupled with his family’s military history—mom was in the Army and grandfather fought in the Korean War—caused him to consider joining the military. College was not in Alpha’s plans at all. In fact, he never took the ACT or SAT. As soon as he turned 18, Alpha joined the military. Citing wanting to do something that was the most challenging, he chose the Marine Corp.

In the Marine Corp, Alpha was deployed twice, once to Afghanistan and once to Asia. The Japan portion of his Asian tour was his least favorite time of his service. He simply found the country boring. His favorite time in the military was after returning from his first deployment. He revealed: “It’s kind of like being seniors in high school. You run the show.” There was a certain amount of respect that went along with having been deployed. Other Marines recognized that and treated those that had been deployed with a higher level of reverence, he explained “I think (my)best time in the Marine Corps was finally having a deployment under your belt.”
After completing the five years of service he agreed to, Alpha was discharged from the Marines. College now entered the picture. Alpha admitted he did not conduct any research into what school he would attend. Initially his plans were to attend a university in Mississippi, but he changed his mind. He described his uncomplicated process, “I just looked up online some stuff.” After this he just decided to switch his enrollment to a different Mississippi university. He applied for admissions and was admitted. Alpha mentioned the presence of pretty women at the school as a reason for changing his mind.

As of the time of his interview, Alpha was having an easier time transitioning to college life than he thought he would. The admissions process was easy. With the help of veteran services at the institution, he was able to submit his application and all needed documents quickly and efficiently. Being an older student with no ACT or SAT score and no prior college attendance, he was admitted as a freshman with a special standing. This meant that he was required to successfully complete twelve hours with a 2.00 GPA average in order to be fully admitted to the university.

Each student must attend an orientation session in order to enter classes. Alpha received an offer to attend a smaller session, but he opted instead to attend a regular session, with traditional aged freshmen. He felt many sessions were not relevant to him such as resident hall rules and underage drinking warnings. However, other sessions, such as how to obtain a student ID were very helpful.

Living situations are different for older students. Even with a freshmen classification, students who are over 21 are not required to live on campus. Alpha chose to live at a local apartment complex with four roommates. His living situation was comfortable for him except one of his roommates was very messy.
Alpha’s biggest area of concern was financial. While serving in the military, he was guaranteed a pay check every two weeks. As a college student, his financial situation was quite different and money came less consistently he said, “GI hasn’t hit (GI Bill) FAFSA hasn’t hit.” Due to being admitted as a special student, Alpha was also listed as a non-degree seeking student. This was preventing him from receiving the aid he was entitled to in addition to his GI Bill benefits. This kept him from paying his tuition on time. His GI Bill benefits also included funding for housing and living expenses. Because his benefits had not come through, he also struggled to pay rent and buy food.

Alpha has faced some difficulties in the academic realm as well. For example, he struggled with his summer math class and was unable to find a tutor. He has also had trouble setting up meetings with his academic advisor, explaining “it takes weeks to see her.”

Alpha’s family was supportive of him attending college but were not able to help him financially. Alpha said, “I don't come from money.” He indicated that he had been on his own financially since the age of 18. He noted how hard his dad had worked with an air of pride in his voice, describing his father as “blue collar,” a man who “worked two jobs for 25 years.” He also took pride in the fact that his mother had attended a community college. He revealed that his mother had attended junior college in his home state and earned a 4.00 GPA. “She's the only one in my family to graduate from college,” Alpha stated proudly. Distance also keeps his parents from helping with navigating the ins and outs of college processes and policies. Alpha was essentially on his own.

In addition to financial and academic issues, Alpha was also adjusting to being a civilian again. The word to best sum up his take on his new life is freedom. He described this independence as “having your own opinion and having your own voice.” Though he did not state
it directly, I got the feeling he missed some of the structure when he noted “no one's making sure that you're where you're supposed to be.”

He indicated he had good interactions with campus faculty and staff. He also accepted the fact that he was very different than his traditionally-aged classmates. He summed up this difference succinctly, “I've seen the world. They haven't.” Alpha felt the difference between himself and other students was “pretty drastic.” He understood that interacting with them would be difficult at times, but did not see it being an issue moving forward.

Alpha felt he was well on his way to fully transitioning to civilian life and the college setting. He looked forward to graduating in a timely fashion but worried about studying. He felt that a separate orientation should be created just for student veterans for providing just the basic information that older students need. According to Alpha, the Veteran Services Staff made his enrollment easy, “literally I just told them I wanted to come here and they took care of the rest.”

**Bravo**

Bravo and his siblings learned at a young age to adapt. Because they are children in a military family, they moved around a lot within their home state. They lived in every size town that you can think of, but Bravo preferred medium-sized towns where there was enough to do in order to stave off boredom, but still had the small-town feel. To this day he said he prefers to move around, never staying in any one place for more than six years.

Young Bravo never really knew what he wanted to do when he grew up. He never had the traditional doctor or lawyer aspirations. He knew he wanted to go to college, but didn’t have a career path in mind. There was only one problem, he was lazy. He had played sports until his sophomore year of high school when they became too time consuming. Around his senior year he decided that there was no reason to attend college. Bravo had no idea what he wanted to do
and saw “no point in paying for college” if his path was unclear. So, upon graduation, he began a job as a server in a restaurant.

At the age of 19, his outlook changed. Bravo’s family has a strong military tradition. Both grandfathers and both parents served in the armed forces. He kidded, “I mean we take our Fourth of July and Veterans Day very seriously.” By 2008, the situation in the Middle East was heating up and Bravo couldn’t sit back and do nothing. He explained that he had grown tired of being a healthy man “that says he supports a war or supports the troops but doesn't do anything about it.” It was with that sentiment, he joined the Army.

Bravo’s family was very supportive in his decision. His dad even helped him physically prepare for basic training. Every morning he would wake Bravo for a run, that he had to return from before his dad was ready for work. Having served himself, he also prepped his son for the mental aspect of the military and “all the games that they play.” The training paid off as Bravo did well on his entrance testing and so well on his physical tests he was able to enter the Army with a bump in rank and his choice of job.

Soon after basic training, Bravo was deployed to South Korea where he remained until 2009. He was then sent to Afghanistan from February 2011 until November 2011, when he was sent home. This tour was a “hearts and minds campaign” where American soldiers try to earn the trust of the local people.

Bravo described the challenge he felt personally as “very stressful” but “very rewarding.” Bravo noted two projects that he was most proud of accomplishing. The first was assisting in building a women’s shelter. Bravo noted “they are very abusive towards women over there.” The shelter was a place where abused women could seek refuge and get medical treatment for
injuries such as broken bones and severed ears. These injuries sometimes came at the hands of their own children. Bravo remarked “several ladies had her ear cut off for disobeying her son.”

Bravo’s second proudest accomplishment was guarding engineers as they built three schools for the use of local children. He did miss the “adrenaline rushes” of service but also indicated “You always remember the good stuff over the crappy times.” Overall, he enjoyed his time in service.

Prior to beginning the interview, Bravo mentioned to me that he had sustained a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). Knowing that this can sometimes be a touchy subject, I asked if he felt comfortable talking about his injuries. Generously, he shared his story with me. The more he talked, the more I realized what a remarkable young man he was. His service had earned him two Purple Hearts. The first was for his TBI. During an ambush, the vehicle Bravo was traveling in was hit by a rocket. His head struck the turret, knocking him unconscious.

The second Purple Heart was earned in the incident that ended Bravo’s military career. While the building he was entering had been swept for explosives several times, a pressure plate in the floor was missed. Bravo was already well into the building when a fellow soldier entered behind him, triggering the improvised explosive device (IED) in the ceiling, bringing the roof down on top of them. Bravo sustained massive injuries, that he is lucky to have survived. He described the extensive nature of his injuries:

Basically, the whole left side of my face has been reconstructed. I can't see or hear out of my left side. Uh, I have several titanium plates in my face and skull. My inside of my left ear was completely reconstructed as well as my nose and they had to put my left eye back into the socket, which resulted in loss of vision. My spleen is removed. Lungs collapsed,
ribs broken. I have two shrapnel wounds over here [points to the area of injury] and a torn meniscus in both my knees. So that was the one that ended my deployment.

He was sent to Germany in a coma, where his parents joined him. They had been told they were coming to collect his body and if he did recover he would be mentally disabled for the rest of his life. Despite the odds, Bravo woke up with no mental disabilities.

He was met with a slight disappointment. Before his injuries, he had applied to become a member of special forces. Two months after his injuries, he received an email saying he had been accepted. He was disappointed but decided to look at it in a different light through his faith. He believes God brought him through his injuries for a purpose other than continued military service. Bravo believed his survival as a sign, “I took that as if He let me survive that, I'm done.” He channeled that belief into his recovery, learning how to walk and speak again. He also had weight and muscle mass to regain having lost 80 pounds while recovering.

Despite his injuries in 2011 and necessary recovery, Bravo was determined to attend college. It took him until 2016 to fully recover and be able to live independently. However, the unstructured lifestyle had led to an overuse of alcohol. Luckily, it didn’t take long for Bravo to realize this was not the path he wanted to take. He described his reckoning this way, “I realized, okay, I need to start being productive.” He soon met his girlfriend, now finance, and things began to change.

He let his heart help him choose the college to attend. As things got more serious with his girlfriend, the idea of attending another institution he had thought about faded. The couple toured the campus of the university they eventually selected, and after a little additional research, they decided it was the place for them. During his research, he liked the fact that the school was
designated by Military Times (2018) as military-friendly, which he felt was very helpful in his transition to college life.

He credits his VA counselor and the assistant director for veteran services at his institution for helping make his entrance into the school seamless. He acknowledged his girlfriend, as she helped keep him on track with sending in all the necessary paperwork. Having never attended another college or university, Bravo gained special admission and was required to earn a 2.00 on his first 12 hours of course work. He did not attend an orientation session.

The biggest issue he was facing during his first semester was receiving his GI Bill benefits. The estimated time of arrival for the funds had been pushed from mid-September to the beginning of October. He had received an email earlier that day stating it could now be at least mid-October before the funds arrived to cover his tuition. He placed no fault on the university for this delay, citing the VA as the problem instead.

But financial issues are not the only thing that plagued Bravo. He felt different from his traditionally-aged classmates. There was at least a 10-year age gap between himself and his fellow freshmen. Bravo remarked, “I'm almost closer to age to most of my professors than I am the students.” This fact does make it easier for him to approach professors as he is “not intimidated” by their age.

One instructor had been a frustration to Bravo. This instructor about whom he lamented, lived up to the stereotype Bravo held of the absent-minded professor. Bravo felt the instructor was “a little scatterbrained” and this created issues in the classroom. Bravo felt more comfortable talking with teachers about class issues because of their closeness in age, so he approached the “scatterbrained” instructor about an issue with an essay assignment. The problem was that the instructor changed the elements of an essay the day before it was due and
scolded the class for not meeting her expectations. He spoke to her privately and told her that if she expected quality work, she had to give “quality instructions and quality time to do it.” To his fellow students, who were not brave enough to approach the teacher, Bravo became the mediator. When his peers complained to him, and he felt it was a teaching issue and not a student issue, he talked with the instructor. This showed a level of maturity that most traditional students do not have; the ability to understand what was truly an issue about teaching and what was the case of a student not wanting to do the work.

He spoke further about relating to his younger classmates when asked about other transition issues he faced. Relating to other students is one thing, and working in groups with them has also been challenging. He described his adjustment as an issue with time management. He was accustomed to “doing things and in a timely manner” and felt his fellow classmates “dragged their feet.” This frustrated Bravo.

He felt his time in the service allowed him to view those students in a different light. He credited the service with giving him self-confidence and structure. He tried not to be too hard on other students. He reminds himself of what he was doing at their age, waiting tables, and gives his fellow students credit for going to college. He observed, “These kids are actually in college… they're doing something.” Because his time in the military allowed him to obtain real-world experience before going to college, Bravo worried that his fellow students were being coddled on campus and that the real world would not be so kind.

Bravo’s living situation made his transition easier. He could have chosen to live on campus in a residence hall, but after living in military barracks for years, he chose to live off campus. When asked if he thought he would have enjoyed living on campus, he justified his decision by saying, “Where you live can have a big impact on your performance.” He needed
somewhere comfortable to come home to and do things at his own pace. He liked being able to come home, cook himself dinner, and enjoy an adult beverage, something he would not have been allowed to do in residence halls.

Being able to talk with faculty and having his own space had given Bravo the feeling that he was near the end of his transition to college life. His five-year break between service and school also seemed to help tremendously by advancing his maturity. Perhaps as testament to his maturity, Bravo predicted that he would face challenging assignments that will cause him to examine his way of thinking. He perceived, “It's very liberal here and that's what I'm getting used to.” Bravo had already encountered assignments that challenged his way of thinking. He felt these tasks had helped him grow and had given him the ability to look at an issue from a different mindset. A fact he appreciated. He stated “there's nothing wrong with seeing both sides of an argument. I think that helps you grow as a person.” Although the assignments did not change the way he felt about certain issues it did help him see things from another perspective.

Bravo looked forward to taking different classes and had a thirst for learning new things, especially in history, in which he intended to minor. He planned on being a kinesiology/exercise science major but felt his injuries would keep him from being successful in that field. He anticipated changing his major to Psychology and becoming a counselor to help other veterans.

When he reflected on the choice to attend his university, he admitted he would tell other veterans it was a good place to attend. Bravo felt the school was very military friendly and this made his transition into college much easier.

When looking back on the course of his choice to enter the military, I asked Bravo would he change anything. I was surprised to hear his answer considering the severity of his injuries and the lasting impact they will have on his life. Bravo affirmed his service:
People ask me all the time if I regret signing up or getting injured. It sounds kind of bad when I put it this way, but I know I will be taken care of for the injuries I sustained and the resulting disabilities. A financial benefit from this is that I am able to still hold a job so I can’t really complain. Yes, I got injured, but I signed up knowing that was a possibility and I don’t have any regrets. I would do it all over again.

*Charlie*

A self-proclaimed knucklehead, Charlie came from a line of military service. His father served first in the Air Force and then the Army. Charlie’s grandfather was also in the Air Force serving as a Blackhawk pilot. Military service was a natural choice. But before joining, Charlie tried his hand at college and enrolled at his Mississippi university. His career goal to become a police detective required that he receive a bachelor’s degree. He applied to several schools, including his mother’s alma mater. He planned to attend there but the time it took for an admission decision changed his mind. He did not receive his acceptance until he was already attending orientation at the university he chose and pursued his degree there.

His knucklehead nature soon took over and the freedom of college life consumed him. Charlie summarized the outcome succinctly, “Partying and all that freedom got the best of me.” Two years in to his college career, Charlie finally reached a point of no return and decided the military was the best option for him. Though his father had served, he tried to discourage his children from signing up for service. He wanted a different life for them. Charlie’s father did not succeed as all three of his children served--Charlie and his younger brother in the Army, and Charlie’s younger sister served as a nurse in the Air Force.

The need to be grounded was not the only reason for Charlie’s joining the service. He knew he would still need to complete a degree to reach his career goals and he needed a way to
pay for the tuition because his father would be transferring his GI Bill educational benefits to Charlie’s sister. His dad felt confident that Charlie would be successful. Charlie recalled what his father said to him, “You’re fit, you run and do everything. You can handle it. It’s not that tough if you need the money that bad…If you join the service, you don’t have to worry about begging for anything.”

Even though his dad had originally discouraged Charlie from joining, he was still exceedingly proud of his oldest son. Charlie reveled in his father’s pride at attending Charlie’s Army boot camp graduation fondly. He recalls, “he didn't recognize me.” Charlie’s physical appearance had changed so much since he had left home. His father also told him that out of all of his children, Charlie was the one he worried would not find success. His father was proud to see his son had found a place to be successful, the Army. Charlie recounted his dad’s comments, “this guy's just blowing me away... he's successful here.” This pride strengthened Charlie’s relationship with his father.

Why the Army? When the time came for Charlie to join, he met with recruiters from both the Army and Air Force. He went in with a friend and the Air Force recruiter immediately dismissed Charlie based on his stocky appearance. The Air Force recruiter did not think Charlie could pass the physical tests to qualify. Charlie’s Army recruiter had a different idea and suggested they take the recruits to the track and see who was the fastest. In the end, Charlie left all the other recruits in the dust. The Air Force recruiter changed his tune and wanted Charlie to join, but Charlie knew the Army was the place for him. When asked if he was sure his answer was clear, Charlie recalled, “I’m very sure…because you had no faith in me from the beginning. So, I know you have no faith in me in the end.” Charlie and his Army recruiter are still friends to this day.
Charlie became a serviceman in January 2013 at the age of 23. He trained to serve in Satellite Communications Technologies and deployed four months after graduation. But before deploying, he married his wife. Because of her school and his service there was no honeymoon phase. Time moved quickly he recalled:

We literally got married in August. She was still going to school here [chosen Mississippi institution] getting her bachelor's in accounting. So, she didn't move to Texas until late December. I was on a plane a week later. So, we didn't get a chance to really embrace it. Missing the early phase of marriage was the major deficit of his deployment. Charlie reflected on missing “valuable newlywed time.”

Though he missed out on time with his new wife, Charlie did develop lasting friendships with his service mates. The people he served with were his favorite part of his service. The connections he made with fellow service men and women were like no other bond. They were stronger than friendships made in high school and college. The bonds with those Charlie deployed with were the strongest. He described it, “you go through a couple of firefights with them… It's a different type of trust and I want to say confidence that you find in a person…you just have a new respect for them.”

Charlie was attached to a light infantry unit and was essentially in charge of their communications. He was responsible for manning the phones and obtaining secure channels for troops to communicate. This attachment was not what he wanted, after the first three months of constantly moving around, his unit settled and he began to enjoy his service. So much so that when his four-year service contract was up, he almost stayed, thinking “this is me for life.” He had his sights set on becoming a warrant officer. However, his wife stepped in and reminded him that this was not the reason he had joined in the first place. Charlie knew he wanted to
complete his degree but had lost sight of that goal while in service. His wife “screwed the light bulb again” and reminded him that his reason for joining was to pay for school. So, Charlie completed the paperwork to be discharged from the Army.

Although Charlie could use his GI Bill benefits to attend any college he wanted, he decided to return to his original Mississippi university. His wife did not want to come back to Mississippi, but Charlie was determined to finish what he started. He recounted his past to justify his decision “I had a bad habit as a kid. I started something and I'll literally get to 10 percent that needed to be done. Just leave it.” Because of this he was determined to finish what he started at his original university. His wife agreed and he came back to the University as a readmitted student.

It was not an easy process for Charlie to return. Many things on the campus had changed and there was no program in place to help welcome him back. He characterized his transition concisely, “It sucked!” He found himself having to reacclimate to a campus he had not set foot on in years. As a readmitted student, there was no orientation process to guide him. He finally found help in the veteran services office and members of the Student Veterans of America (SVA) befriended him and helped him find his way.

He had also entered straight from military service. He was discharged on July 4, 2016 and was in summer classes the very next day. This left no time to adjust to civilian life before starting school. He would have been able to have a cooling off period had it not been for a change in leadership that delayed his discharge. This transition was difficult for Charlie. He was used to seeing the same people each day and living on a disciplined schedule. In the service, he knew his environment and how his comrades would react. At his university, his classmates were “volatile” and their moods could change with the wind. It was difficult for him to get painted
with the same brush stroke as his “volatile” classmates. Charlie had a very hard time assimilating into the student body. His time in service had given him a different outlook on life. Charlie knew that life “could end. And just like that.” Charlie felt the university gave little support in this aspect. About his transition, he lamented:

I’m just going to say the university sucks at bolstering the veteran community because of the simple fact of they think that we assimilated into the service, we can assimilate back out, but it's just like anybody that goes to jail, you know when to eat, what you're eating, where you're sleeping, when you’re sleeping. Those are the things we just don't let go because they're mostly, they’re training to the muscles at this point.

Charlie hated his first classes. In his opinion, an instructor for his summer school class excepted too much from the students for a class in an online format. However, his time in the military gave him the confidence to speak up. The online instructor was not receptive to his suggestions, but an in-class instructor listened, took Charlie’s words to heart, and made changes to his test structure to better support student learning. These conversations with instructors would not have taken place had Charlie not been more mature and willing to speak his mind. He believed his service led to this confidence.

Charlie also talked about how the teaching style of many faculty did not match up with what student veterans are trying to accomplish. According to Charlie, student veterans want just the facts. He felt student veterans just wanted the “meat and potatoes” of the course curriculum and not all the “padding” he felt instructors add to fill the semester. He furthered his illustration when he cited a friend who attends another university in a different state. He explained that the institution’s veteran programs had been around for about 10 years and feature veteran-only
classes. This allowed the instructor to customize their teaching style to ensure the student veterans were mastering the material in the ways they learned best.

Additional stress accrued to Charlie from other students. For example, veterans are usually older than their classmates, a fact that fellow students were quick to point out. Veterans also have a different perspective on things, so their comments on classroom topics can raise eyebrows. Charlie noted the differences, “We're abrasive.” He described veterans as having “dark humor.” This meant that certain comments that he made in a joking manner drew a sideways glance from his classmates. This humor had him branded as an “odd guy,” a comment he overheard other students whispering about him. Charlie did not take offense to the comment but still described classroom experiences as “rough.”

Combining these stresses with symptoms of PTSD had led some veterans to leaving school. Charlie mentioned that five of his friends had left his university to go to other veteran-friendly universities. Charlie felt the best way to combat this concern was to give veterans their own space and support. A place to be with like-minded people and discuss their issues. A place where veterans can go to decompress. Charlie compared the symptoms of PTSD to compression creating a rock. The rock can only take so much pressure before it cracks. He feels veterans face the same stresses. Charlie suggested a veterans-only area with support services available, such as counseling, as well as a space to meet with other veterans. Having that common bond of service makes other veterans easy to talk to and adds another layer of support. Charlie hopes this level of support will head off “frustrated” veterans before they make bad decision. Charlie felt that “the university does not give them the tools to do that.”

Even finding a place to live presented an issue for Charlie and his wife, whom he had to convince in the first place to return to Mississippi. They had found a nice little one-bedroom
cottage in town and had signed a lease. The landlord however, drug his feet in getting the address of the actual unit in which they would be staying. This delayed paperwork and issuing of GI Bill housing benefits and forced Charlie and his wife to stay with friends. Money ran short and Charlie worried how he would pay his car note until the housing funds could be issued. This put an extra layer of stress on an already stressful academic situation.

Support for the move was also in short supply. While Charlie’s family was verbally supportive, no one was there to physically help him and his wife prepare for the move. The only help they received was from a couple of Army friends who helped pack and load up. Charlie’s in-laws did offer to let them spend the night with them halfway through the trip.

Despite the challenges of Charlie’s transition to college, Charlie did not regret joining the military. It gave him the tools he needed to be successful. He confirmed the benefits:

Joining the military gave me three things: gave me focus, determination and drive. It gave me focus on the goals that I want to achieve. Gave me determination and not let anybody deter me from what I want to do and gave me drive to never lose focus.

Though military service gave him these tools to be successful in the civilian world, he hopes to never fully transition into civilian life. Charlie feels that if he fully assimilated back into the college life, he will lose everything he learned from his military service. He also felt no other veteran would make the full transition either. He put it this way, “It’s because you lose military bearing and when you lose military bearing, we think that what we know, we lose direction, lose our own guidance.”

**Delta**

The Navy provided Delta a way to mature and grow before being able to take college seriously. From a young age, Delta wanted to work in information technologies, but to do so a
college education was necessary. He enrolled in a local community college while in high school to earn dual enrollment credit. He enrolled in the same community college for two semesters after high school. “It didn’t go so well,” he explained. He decided the community college system was the problem and enrolled in a local technical college for computer science. This too proved to be an unsuccessful venture. Delta tried community college one more time before deciding the military would be a better option. Reflecting on these early college attempts, Delta reasoned, “I just didn’t have the right mindset.” He felt he did not have enough life experience to know how the world worked for those without degrees. The Navy gave him these experiences.

Military service skipped a generation in Delta’s family. Grandfathers from both sides of the family served, but neither parent enlisted. Delta was also the only grandchild on either side who joined the military. His parents, especially his mom, were very supportive of his choice. His mom had even approached him during his unsuccessful time in college and asked “What are you doing? I need to know what your plans are so I can help you. Have you ever looked at going into the Air Force or the Coast Guard?” Her questions caused Delta to think about his life trajectory. He knew school was not the right path for him. He knew he did not want to be a “boots on the ground” soldier and sought guidance from a friend who was currently serving. Delta’s friend advised him that while deployments would not be fun, the experiences made up for it.

Within the next few weeks, Delta talked to a Navy recruiter and learned about their programs. He felt military service was his best option to get out of the situation he was facing and that service would help him mature and become a person in society. Delta joined the Navy on April 17, 2013. He later deployed aboard the USS Bainbridge to the Indian Ocean and
Mediterranean Sea. He worked in the radio room as a server and network administrator for top secret, secret, and unclassified networks. The primary mission of his vessel was a surveillance mission, some of which was classified. His 212-day deployment allowed him to see many exotic places including, Portugal, Greece, Italy, and the small island of Mauritius. Delta also sailed through the Suez Canal twice.

He did get homesick on his deployment. But the new things he was able to see and experiences were worth the homesickness. Along with traveling to new countries, Delta loved the people he served with, crediting them as his favorite part of service. He recalled, “I loved the people I served with and the people I met through radio.” He considers his fellow service men and women his brothers and sisters.

With every high there is a low, and the low on a ship was the politics of it all. Superior officers drill into their seamen that the order of care is ship, shipmates, self. This neglect of self, led to self-diagnosed depression for Delta. The ship’s schedule did not help with the situation. Before a deployment, the sailors would be out to sea for 32 of days training, come back for a short leave, and then head back to sea for the full deployment. This did not create a good “quality of life.”

This low quality of life, along with being ready to pursue his education, caused Delta to leave the Navy. He was able to leave the service 6 months early with the Early Out for Education program. He was discharged in September and explored his options for completing a college degree. Though he was tired of the Navy life at the end of his service, he would do it all again. His time in service was an “eye-opening experience.” He mentioned again the friends he made on the ship and the connection they still share. “We still keep in touch even though it’s not every day,” he shared.
Upon leaving, Delta did have the option of going straight into the workforce, but decided education should come first. He knew he wanted to earn a degree and feared that entering the workforce immediately would distract him from that goal. He also did not feel comfortable with the idea of “juggling job and school.”

He researched schools back home, but decided he did not want to return. He looked at other states such as Colorado, Virginia, and Utah. The university he chose came to mind when thinking about a college football game he had watched with Navy friends. He did a little research and called the veteran coordinator at the school. There was an instant connection. Delta visited and knew Mississippi was the place for him.

The admission process was fairly easy for Delta. Due to his low GPA when he attended college and his time out of school he was admitted to the university as a special student. Other universities he considered would not even look at his application until he had successfully completed a semester at a community college. Delta did not want to go back to the community college. His special admission gave him all the more reason to attend in Mississippi. He signed up for orientation and headed south in January 2017.

Delta had no real complaints about orientation, but did feel there is room for improvement. He felt that much of the information covered, such as underage drinking, did not pertain to him. His age difference and life experience also made orientation “different for me[him].” While there was veteran specific programming, it was only a 30-minute meeting with the veteran staff and the only other veteran that started the same semester as Delta. He credited good communication with the veteran coordinator for his preparedness at orientation. He had already completed all of the paperwork he needed so he had time to explore the campus.
Making the transition to student was giving Delta a bit of a hard time. He was “powering through but still getting back into the mindset of ‘Oh, I’m in class.’” He felt his skills were getting stronger, and much like his dependence on his fellow service members while in the Navy, he now depended on his fellow veterans for advice.

Support for his college endeavors is not only coming from his veteran peers, but Delta’s family as well. His mother was “very supportive.” He talks to her after he gets grades back on assignments to get her feedback. She was always encouraging. She would say, “You know you’re going through this transition you know you’ll be fine.”

Delta does feel there is less support from the university. At the time of the interview, the veteran’s office was in the process of hiring a new director. This created a lack of programming and cohesiveness in the veteran student group. The only two veterans that were a mainstay in Delta’s life were the two presidents of the SVA. “It doesn’t seem like there’s a lot of things the school does for our veterans,” Delta stated. He felt having a director would have made the group more active. Delta wanted the camaraderie with fellow veterans so school would be “kinda of like how it was to serve.” He hoped the group would be able to move forward under a new director.

Delta had good interactions with teachers at his university, but has only communicated with the veteran services staff. Even then, he has depended more on the SVA presidents to help him with his paperwork. They have been his only source of support for completing necessary paperwork.

In the coming semesters, Delta hopes to improve his study skills and grades. He also gave some words of wisdom to veterans enrolling after him. “Never forget where you came from,” he asserted. His time in the service had molded him into the person he had become. He never
wanted to forget the experience he had that had opened his mind to new ideas. He felt being open to new ideas and experiences was what college was all about and he was looking forward to “what’s around the next corner.”

Echo

Echo always knew he wanted to be in the Army. His dad had served for 28 years as a Green Beret and was still a reservist when his son enlisted. In fact, the history of military service is his family was “pretty extensive.” Military service men and women in his family date back to World War II, and on his mom’s side even further. One of four children, Echo, one of his sisters, and his brother have all served in the armed forces.

Although his father pushed the importance of a college education, Echo knew college was not the place for him. “I knew I wouldn’t do my homework. I wasn’t doing my homework in high school anyway,” Echo remembered. He joined the Army in October 2008, excited to follow in his father’s footsteps. He was deployed to Asia and the Middle East serving as an infantryman. Though he was far from combat, his time in the service does have lasting effects on his life. His professional growth stagnated and he remained hypervigilant even after returning home. His time away from home was hard. “I miss[ed] home a lot,” Echo declared. He was able to maintain contact with his parents and his wife (at the time) through weekly phone calls.

Like many veterans, Echo credits the people he met as being his favorite part of serving in the Army. He called his fellow soldiers “outstanding,” and highlighted the great friendships he had with them. Though he hated working for the Department of Defense, Echo loved the people he worked with on a daily basis. He left the Army after eight years of service. He wanted to grow professionally and the Army was not giving him the development he desired. Even with the lack of growth, Echo does not regret his time in service. He had no work ethic.
before entering the service but the Army grew in him “a little bit more about personal responsibility.”

Echo also wanted to be around more educated people. Attending college became part of his plan in order to achieve that goal. Once he knew he was finished with the Army, Echo desired a position working with “more educated people.” He noted the difference in education level between enlisted soldiers, which he was, and commissioned officers, mentioning that few enlisted had earned degrees. “I can’t just go hang out with commissioned officers just to hang out with somebody’s who’s educated,” Echo stated. He wanted to be around smarter people. He used his time in the military to start the education process by taking courses through a university that has satellite campuses near military installments. Much of the coursework is online, but some contract teachers for instruction onsite as well.

Echo chose his Mississippi school in a very unique way. He did no research on where to attend, opting to let a joke at a football game choose his institution for him. He had attended a football game years earlier at his university. While there, he joked to friends that if his plans fell through he would attend the Mississippi university. He had already completed an application and sent his transcripts when his original plans did not pan out. Once he was admitted, that was it. “I’m not going to worry about it. I’m not going to apply anywhere else,” Echo remembered.

Choosing the school to attend was the easy part, but navigating the admission process proved to be much more difficult. “Oh, it’s awful!” Echo exclaimed. He found online admission requirements to be unclear. He followed the requirements listed on the webpage, but ended up a science lab short of admission. He finally called and the office explained to him his error. He had to find another course to take in order to be admitted. Echo wishes there had been more explanation of the requirements.
Once admitted, Echo was required to attend orientation. Based on the semester he decided to begin attending classes and his discharge from the Army, everything happened extremely fast. He was discharged on January 6, 2017, attended orientation January 18th through the 20th, and started classes on January 23rd! He was not impressed with the orientation program. “They put my account on hold for that?! I couldn’t register for classes as soon as I got accepted??!! For them to tell me to not go get drunk and drive?” Echo exclaimed. He hesitated, but I could tell he wanted to say more. I encouraged him to speak his mind. He complained that the class selection was limited by the time he attended orientation. Had he been allowed to sign up for classes sooner, he could have registered for all in-person classes. Instead, he ended up having to take an independent study, which he forgot he signed up for. He felt orientation was a “waste of time.” Echo did not put all of the blame for his failure in the independent study course on the university. “It’s me not knowing how to go to school,” he remarked. Echo did feel orientation would be important for freshmen students, but transfers and veteran students need an adjusted structure.

His first classes were not going well either. He had originally signed up for four classes. He had since dropped down to three and was only passing one of those. One contributing factor was Echo’s living situation. He was living and working part-time in a town an hour and a half drive from his university. This was to be remedied as he had signed a lease in the same town as his school the same day as our interview. His time management skills were also hurting his studies as well. Echo lamented, “I don’t know how to manage my time effectively with my studies.” His study time consisted of either working on a subject for a long period of time and becoming exhausted or shorter periods and forgetting to come back and complete the task. Echo found himself struggling to multitask. He does feel these issues are all self-based and did not
reflect on the institution. “It’s just me. The staff here, incredible. They’re great teachers. I haven’t had one bad one,” Echo noted.

Though he has had great staff and instructors and his family has been supported, Echo is still struggling with his transition. When asked how things were going he responded after a long pause in a defeated tone, “It’s been probably some of the hardest four months.” The difference in support systems from the military to college were apparent. He noted that that the lack of accountability at the university was a huge difference from military life. Echo also felt that in the military, if a superior saw someone struggling, they would reach out and help them. Professors do not take the same approach.

The military style of troop support may be different than that received in the classroom, but Echo feels he has more in common with his fellow, non-veteran students. Apart from age, he feels that he is struggling to keep up along with many of his traditional-aged student colleagues. Echo observed, “The struggling to keep your head above water sort of thing… I don’t feel too different.” He does feel his gap in education and injuries due to military service did give the younger students an advantage. These students came straight from high school and did not have a break in enrollment. His hearing loss and PTSD also put him at a disadvantage.

I asked Echo if he felt his PTSD was hurting him in the classroom. He confided that he had not be officially diagnosed with PTSD. The VA had simply written that he had an “Adjustment Disorder.” He was later told the doctors do that so the VA does not have to pay for his treatment for PTSD. The struggle with the symptoms has created many issues with his focus when reading assignments. Before speaking, he picked up the information sheet on my study from the table. “If you gave me this information sheet and you told me to read it. I’d know
you’re Kelley Jenkins but apart from that, just because there’s ringing in my ear, I really don’t want to read the rest,” he sighed.

Echo’s transition has been “tumultuous” for him. “I hardly know what I’m doing when it comes to this...(sigh). Being a civilian in general much less being a college student,” he revealed. He referenced an article he had read that was written by an Army colonel advocating for a reverse basic training. A program to help reintegrate service men and women back into society before they are discharged from service. He told the heartbreaking story of how he had gone six weeks without pay at his restaurant job because he did not know the right forms to complete in order to be paid.

I didn’t know I was supposed to fill out a fucking W4 and that’s why I wasn’t in their log in system. I’d never seen a W4 before. If I had, it’s been 10 years. So why would you remember filling out a form that says first name, last name, middle initial, social security number and then how many dependents you have in your house? I don’t remember that. Stuff like that, stuff I don’t know about.

Though his four months since leaving the military have been difficult, he does not feel it is his chosen university’s responsibility to train him on these things. “I think it’s the DOD,” he spat. He felt the university had nothing to do with what happened to him before he came, so why should they be responsible for making sure he transitioned.

With the spring semester almost over, Echo was already dreading the next steps he had to take. He would not be enrolling in summer classes and had to find a job that paid more than his current one. He had also registered for 15 hours of fall classes that would prove to be the make or break point for him at the institution. “I said I would do one year at the university and if it doesn’t work out I’d go back to [home state] where I’m from,” he admitted.
Echo ended the interview with some advice for future veterans entering a Mississippi institution. “I wish the veterans could come here sooner and talk to other veterans and learn paths to success,” he responded. He encouraged students to come to campus as soon as possible and find housing close to campus quickly.

**Foxtrot**

Foxtrot’s story is very different than most of the veteran’s in this study. He was a serviceman in a different time, during a different war. His story does start like that of many veterans. He did not know what he wanted to do with his life. He went through high school playing sports and heavy metal. He dreamed of moving to Los Angeles and playing in a band. He did well enough in high school to continue to play sports, but not well enough that college was on his list of things to accomplish. “I drank probably too much but I got to the point at the end of my senior year I realized I couldn’t go to college.” he recalled. He could have attended, but knew that he would have struggled, due to his poor grades. Foxtrot knew he had to do something with his life. With a strong family tradition of military service, he opted to join the Army.

He still fondly remembers his Army recruiter, who not only recruited him to the Army, but encouraged him to take college courses while enlisted. Foxtrot scored high enough on his Army Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) to have his choice of positions. In 1987, at the age of 19, he chose to be a combat medic.

Foxtrot’s service was very different than that of his Post 9/11 veteran friends. He joined in a time of peace under President Ronald Reagan. He served for 3 years with no deployments, working in hospitals on Army bases stateside and abroad. He left the Army to be a good
husband to his new wife when Desert Storm broke out. After only 2 months as a civilian, he was called back to service.

The hardest part of being called back was the fact that his wife was 6 months pregnant with their first child. The news painted a bleak picture of the fight. They were told the opposing troops were better trained and that “we were all gonna die.” Foxtrot recalled the sadness he felt. “So, I remember being on the plane and thinking “I’m never gonna see my child born.” It was, that was really hard.” Foxtrot did not die however. He proudly stated, “we (the US Army) destroyed them (laughs). Sorry. I’m proud of that.” Though he volunteered for service he was not sent overseas. Instead, he spent the last two months of service bringing life into the world, delivering babies at the base in Fort Bain, GA.

Foxtrot loved his time in the military. The Army gave him purpose and taught him so much about himself and who he could become. “I feel like I gained so much more than I could have ever received if I would have stayed home.” He stated proudly. Had it not been for his service, Foxtrot felt like he would have, “ended up working some job and probably unhappily married and uneducated.” The Army gave him confidence and a sense of self-worth. “The Army taught me that I was better than that… The Army taught me that I was something, that I was a man of substance” Foxtrot recollected.

His favorite part of serving was wearing the uniform and representing his country. A close second was the position he held as a medic. Even though he was not overseas on the front lines, he was still able to save lives. A point Foxtrot described as “tremendous.”

After leaving the service for the second time, Foxtrot settled in to be a husband and father. He had found a job in the time after his first release, and the business had held his job for him upon his return. But due to changes in job duties and a lowering of the salary, that job was
no longer a viable option. The Army helped him find new work as a medical assistant. While he enjoyed the work, after a few years, he knew he wanted to return to school. He started attending a few night classes. Doing so made him think. “I did great in the Army in school, why am I just doing this job? There’s no future here,” he recollected. He was making enough money so that he and his family were living comfortably, but it “wasn’t the same.” He decided to return to school full-time.

Rather than choosing a traditional institution to use his GI Bill benefits with, Foxtrot opted for a different kind of training. He attended mortuary college and became an embalmer and funeral director. An interesting career choice that he stumbled on accidentally. It was in the days before wide use of the internet, so Foxtrot did his college research via the Yellow Pages. He came across an ad for a mortuary college and wondered what this career entailed. He reached out to the school for more information. A career that would seem morbid to others was exactly what Foxtrot was looking for. He stated:

I like the blood and guts, you know I was a combat medic, I worked in an emergency room in a trauma center, I loved all that stuff.

He requested an application and began attending.

It proved to be a good choice for Foxtrot. At the time of the interview, he had been in the field for 24 years and was still the manager for 5 funeral homes in another state. So, what brought him to Mississippi and back to the college setting?

Foxtrot began his funeral career in his home state, but was later recruited by another company to move. He “happily accepted” and took the management of the 5 establishments he currently managed. Things began to change and Foxtrot could see things would not go his way. The owners of the company he worked for were about to sell “one of the biggest conglomerates
in the funeral world.” He feared the new owners would make staff changes. Foxtrot had “given every bit of himself” to the families he had worked with over the years. Though staying with the company would have been a good financial move, Foxtrot saw “the writing on the wall.” He decided to make a career change and head back to school.

He compiled a list of potential schools, most were in the [football conference he preferred]. Through prayer he began to narrow down the list. At the start, no Mississippi schools were on his list as an option. He recalls the day divine intervention led him to Mississippi:

I’d pray and say no this is not a fit or oh this fits or whatever. And then one day I was praying and [chosen institution] was not on my list, no Mississippi school was on my list. I didn’t even think about Mississippi and all of a sudden, I was praying and like this still small voice said hey Mississippi. And I was like Mississippi? What’s in Mississippi?

He began to research and applied to several schools in the state, only one felt like the right choice. Even though he had never actually been to the campus, or even the town in which it is located, he knew where he needed to attend. “I just knew it in my heart that’s where I needed to be.”

After submitting his application, Foxtrot did not hear anything for a long time. He began to get frustrated with no updates on the status of his application. Then one day while riding with one of his daughters, he got two notifications on his phone. The first was from the campus chapter of the SVA, welcoming him to campus. The second was the official admissions email. He was most excited that the first email came from the SVA. Receiving their welcome first was, in Foxtrot’s words, “dynamite.”
His service had been many years ago and all of his veteran education benefits had been exhausted, he would be paying his own way. He never thought about being associated with the veteran community as a student. He was excited to get this communication. The email “meant something to me as a veteran.” He had missed the camaraderie of being in service. He became active with the SVA chapter immediately, even serving as an officer.

After being admitted, Foxtrot moved his wife and youngest child to Mississippi and began attending classes. But first, he had to attend orientation. “Orientation was horrible.” Orientation leaders asked “where’s your child?” Foxtrot was a little embarrassed to admit he was the new student. He feels transfer students should not have to go through the traditional orientation. Being asked to participate in group games where fellow classmates are “all kids,” made Foxtrot “feel really out of place.” He felt dividing students into age-appropriate groups would be much more beneficial. He mentioned that veterans-only groups would have been “phenomenal.”

The family would soon be separated. “But after we got here you know, my wife she really didn’t like it.” She could not find a job and missed their home state. A job opened up in one of the funeral homes Foxtrot manages, so she took the position and, after 8 months in Mississippi, moved back to their home. Their daughter had already started school and loved her new classmates. She decided to stay with her father. Once a month, the family is reunited when either Foxtrot’s wife flies down or he and his daughter fly up so they can be together. This odd living situation has made the transition back into college a little harder for Foxtrot.

He does feel he has a lot of support from his family back home. Just the fact that his wife was willing to go through with all of this, is a testament to that fact. Foxtrot is also proud that he
has set an example for his children. None of his older children were attending college, until he started back to school.

Much like orientation, attending classes proved to be uncomfortable as well. Foxtrot was the first student to arrive to his history class. Many of his younger classmates thought he was the professor. This case of mistaken identity has followed him and has occurred every semester. The age gap has created adjustment issues for Foxtrot. He was enrolled in a number of freshmen classes in which the professor “treated us like freshmen.” Having “been around the world” he did not relate to his fellow students. “I don’t feel like I really fit in very well.” He detailed. He also feels different than his fellow veterans. “They all came right out of service,” Foxtrot mentions. He notes that his service and theirs were a “different type of environment.”

Though he feels different, Foxtrot has enjoyed his classes. He is not afraid to speak up in class and favors the “sweet spot” seating at the front of the class. He credits this to a higher level of maturity. He keeps his priorities in order and does not let the perception of being an “old weirdo” affect his drive to finish. Foxtrot feels that many times his classmates wonder what an “old man” like him is doing in their class. “I get that feeling sometimes from people, and I don’t like that, but I’m not here for them, I’m here for me,” he remarked. He was looking forward to completing his undergraduate degree and then attending law school.

He does wish the university recognized more of his credits from his mortuary school. He had earned his associate’s degree at the mortuary college. The university considered it a technical degree, and very few of his credits transferred to count towards his bachelor’s. Foxtrot felt this was unfair, “I put the time in in my studies.”

Even with his positive attitude and drive to complete his degree, Foxtrot has faced struggles in the classroom. He’s had to treat studying like a full-time job. He knows how to study, but
having been out of the classroom for so long, he was out of practice. He has been very successful, keeping his GPA above a 3.00, but does wish he would have taken advantage of the transfer class offered to help students acclimate to campus. The course might could have helped him with his least favorite assignment: writing papers. “Writing papers absolutely sucked for me,” he exclaimed.

The student life is much different from the life of a soldier for Foxtrot. In the military, he felt a sense of purpose and a unity with his fellow soldiers. He misses that feeling at his institution. “Every regime I had a purpose there and here I don’t feel that so much,” Foxtrot lamented. He feels younger students put too much loyalty in what Greek organization they are in than to the school as a whole. He illustrated it like this:

I like the unity of the military where everybody’s your brother. Everybody would lay their life down for the next guy and you had a purpose or a mission… I don’t know I just think there’s a unity; there’s a purpose in the military that you don’t always feel here.

This lack of purpose is very evident in many of his classmates, and it is frustrating to Foxtrot. It bothered him when students never attended regular class meetings and only showed up for exams. When these students do attend class, they spend most of their time playing on their phones. These same students “whine” about “doing horrible” on the exam. This makes Foxtrot crazy. “That drives me crazy, because in the military you didn’t do that. You didn’t get away with that stuff,” he sighed. He credits the older service members he worked with for helping him understand the value of life and education. In his time the military did not “coddle” its members, the way, he feels, students are “coddled” today. “You’re not really put in a position of leadership or adulthood the way you are in the military. It’s either sink or swim. If you do bad here there is tutoring, if you did bad in the military you just…sank,” he recalled.
Foxtrot’s advice to student veterans thinking about attending his university was to get involved with their chapter of the SVA. It provided a level of support and understanding that other groups on campus had not be able to afford. He feels this has helped his transition. Even though there is an age difference, members all still related to being older than traditional students and the feel of “being different than their fellow classmates.” The group gave him a place to “share those experiences.”

Even though he served at a different time and many of the current practices do not apply to him, Foxtrot had some very strong opinions about how the younger group of veterans were being treated.

I think that from hearing their stories, their experiences, that [Mississippi university] is not doing a very good job… So, they’ve been in these life and death situations most of them. And to come to a campus where it’s all about the Greek life and partying it’s a little sobering, a little different I think for those guys. And I think that, I don’t think the University does enough to make them feel like they’re important on campus. I know I don’t feel like we are.

His most frustrating moment came when the SVA asked for a designated meeting room on campus. The administration was willing to give them a meeting room, but it was next to the Muslim student group. “Are you kidding me?” Foxtrot questioned. He noted the hypervigilance most of the younger veterans still carried. Foxtrot gave examples of student veterans getting off a bus if they saw someone enter wearing a sari and sitting on the other side of the room from someone of Middle Eastern decent. The “paranoia” of service and training to “look for bombs in backpacks” are hard habits to break. The university should recognize those things. He also
noted that other groups on campus, such as for LGBTQ students and those of other religions, received support from faculty and staff, but there seemed to be a lack of support for veterans.

Because Foxtrot was forthcoming, he was a provocative veteran to interview. He was so proud of his military service. He was proud of his SVA group. It showed with every statement he made. He summed it up best when he said “It’s the proudest thing I’ve ever done in my whole life. And it has changed my life in every way.”

_Golf_

Golf did not come from a long line of military service. A few relatives had served, but not many. His service was more out of need than tradition. He grew up knowing college would be a part of his path, as becoming a lawyer would require a college education. He attended a local Mississippi community college straight out of high school, paying very little out of pocket due to scholarships. During this time his focus changed from law to athletic training and kinesiology/exercise science. He earned his associate’s degree and set his sights on furthering his education. The next obvious step was to attend a four-year college. Upon meeting with the financial aid office at a Mississippi university, he decided that he could not afford the tuition. “They talked to me about tuition, which was about four grand a semester and I chickened out,” Golf recalls. The financial aid office was ready to start his student loan process, but Golf refused. Instead of going into debt, Golf joined the military in order to fund his education.

Golf did well on the ASVAB so he qualified for both the Air Force and the Navy. He decided to become a radar technician with the Navy, joining in March 2012. He felt the Navy was a more “intelligent branch.” Since the Navy had more opportunity for travel, Golf decided to serve in this branch, hoping to “see some stuff while I'm in.”
He served in two deployments, one to the Persian Gulf, lasting two and half months and one to the coast of Africa, lasting seven and a half months. He spent his days analyzing radar data to determine if the vessels were hostile or not. His time away from home was made easier by his shipmates. He compared the experience to high school, noting that although you are surrounded by people you have to “find your niche on the ship.”

While he did not miss out on any significant family events, life did go on while he was deployed. Golf noted that while at sea, there was limited access to technology and media. “All you have is what you bring,” he noted. The news was the only media available to them and most of the time it was so depressing, Gold did not want to watch.

He did enjoy when he was assigned shore duty as it gave him a sense of a normal life. Shore duty was more like a regular job than military service. Golf liked the “illusion of freedom” it provided. He did have to “concentrate” as much as he did on the ship. He was able to work regular hours and go home at the end of the day. He knew he could be called back, but this was a much calmer existence than the 24/7 mentality of being on the ship.

Ship life meant lack of sleep. Golf described the ship as “a living being and it's constantly moving, constantly doing things and they don't equate that into your schedule.” After only two hours of sleep, a ship-wide alarm could go on and all sailors had to respond and “somewhat kinda humanly function.” Golf indicated it was hard for him to be polite at these times, “I was exhausted and I had to pretend like I cared that this siren was going off. So that was really tough.” Sailors had to be “mentally tough.” Golf had to overcome the “mental fog” that existed from lack of rest. He noted, “you're basically like a zombie, you work every day, no breaks and you just somehow do it.”
After the terms of his enlistment were up, Golf was ready to leave the service and start the next chapter of his life. “I realized that studying radars was important to the Navy, but not really important to me.” He revealed. He has no regrets in joining the service, as it has afforded him the opportunity to attend a four-year institution debt free.

Choosing the institution, he would attend was a difficult process for him, as he was deployed right before he was set to be discharged. Out at sea he had access to limited technology. He sacrificed many of his sleeping hours, opting instead to research colleges and the programs they offered. He found that the major he wanted, kinesiology/exercise science was common and found several universities for which he met the admission requirements.

Luckily, he had a fellow seaman to mentor him in his decision. His shipmate told him he would need structure and help dealing with the transition from military service to college life. Golf originally selected a school in another state, but due to “time constraints and money,” he opted to return to his home state of Mississippi.

Being at sea, made the process of admission more difficult than it would have been had Golf been a civilian. He felt admissions was a “vague” process. He had to contact the office several times. He felt the time in which he was enrolling, January, made it even more difficult. Email was his only method of communication with the admissions office of his chosen university. Golf made his communications long and detailed and begged staff to email him back. Being able to talk to a person would have been much easier, but at sea this was not possible.

Golf was admitted to his chosen Mississippi institution for the Spring 2018 semester. He separated from the military in December 2017 and started classes 30 days later. His first interaction was to attend orientation. Golf described it as a good program, but not detailed enough. “Kinda just like hit the high notes,” he explained. The program basically told students
where different offices were on campus and what services they provided. Golf had hoped it would introduce him to key points of contact, but it did not. He ended up just pulling out a map and finding places on his own.

He had received contact from the SVA chapter, but had not attended any of their functions. He indicated he “needed to” attend, but keeping up with classwork and working a part-time job prevented him from having additional time to join the group. He was fine with simply attending classes, going to work, and then going home. He was living off campus and has little interaction with his roommate. For Golf, this has been “really positive.” He was ready for a little time to himself. He stated, “Being on a ship with 90 other roommates was awful. So, it's nice to just kind of be just you for a while.”

While enjoying his living situation and a little time to himself, Golf has struggled with his classes and some faculty. Having been out of school for six years, coursework was “a lot tougher.” Golf had many conversations with his faculty and was told, “Well, you're probably in the wrong place, the wrong class. This is too hard.” Golf persevered saying, “I didn't come to school because it was easy.” Faculty support was lacking until he opened up to them about how long it had been since he had been in classes. After many visits with the faculty, they began to understand Golf’s situation and helped him master the material. With the additional help from the professor, Golf was able to successfully complete the course.

His biggest struggle has been his study habits. A workshop in time management would have been very beneficial before coming back into the college setting, he felt. Once he got on a good path in one class, he would switch his focus to more difficult material. Then he would fall behind in the first class and have to switch his focus back to it. “It's just a complete balancing act in college,” he detailed. Still other classes had to be focused on every day. Golf gave the
example, “Some classes require your complete undivided attention, like chemistry. And if I don't do it every day, I don't do well.”

He does feel supported in his struggles. His family has been emotionally supportive of his studies with phone calls of encouragement. They keep telling Golf, “You've done the military, you can do this.” He also feels that the freedom of college is a form of support as well. He likes being able to “pick his own path” instead of having it chosen for him, as was done in the military. “Just the feeling of real freedom is really nice,” he declared. Golf likes the idea of being able to change his major whenever he wanted to if he chose to do so. Comparing it to the military he said, “You will be a radar technician until the end of your days if you pick that job.”

His time in service has given him a number of tools helpful in pursuing a college degree: determination and perseverance, even in the face of bad grades. Golf noted that his classmates would not study for the first test in a class because they did not know what to expect. He, on the other hand, took it as a personal challenge to make the highest grade he could.

Now that he has completed most of his general education requirements, Golf is doing better in his core kinesiology/exercise science classes. “I've noticed that I enjoy that kind of stuff and obviously I'm going to do better because I try harder,” he mentioned. He was drawing near to the end of his degree program and looked forward to the future. He looked back on his time of transition and feels he is doing well. “I think I'm in a pretty good place,” Golf revealed. He was at the end of his undergraduate work and would have the choice of either graduate school or seeking employment. Golf noted that this was an exciting but scary time in his life, as there were so many opportunities out there that he did not even know about yet.

Even though Golf was optimistic about the future, he did worry that his military service will have a negative effect on his job prospects. He indicated that he struggled with aggression,
similar to a lot of veterans he had observed. Years of having a commanding officer “hounding” him for tasks, leaves “all this pinned up energy and you don't really know what to do” after leaving the service. Golf noted that employers wonder about the held-over habits. He indicated that he had been asked point blank by bosses, “do you have PTSD or anything like that that will hinder this job?”

When asked if there was anything the university could do to help combat the assumption that all veterans have PTSD, he said:

Not really. I feel like the military is just one of those traumatizing things that no one really gets out of without something, you know, emotional stress, physical stress. I mean it's all, it's all stress.

Golf elaborated on the way military training teaches veterans things that will be counterproductive to not only their college studies, but their health in general. He wanted to take on new tasks and give them “110% even though you've never done it.” Military training taught him “if there's a wall, just keep hitting your head against it until it breaks.” Golf felt this is the worst advice someone can be given. He has had to learn to force himself to take breaks to refocus his efforts. Otherwise, he would forgo eating and resting to solve a problem with which he was struggling.

He was also trained that going without sleep for long periods of time was a trait to be revered. College has taught him a very different mentality. “Going two days without sleep that is dumb and stupid. You're not optimal, you're not ready. You're not prepared,” he stated with firmness. It was hard for Golf to get back to a normal schedule because of that training. “You have this mindset, I'll just survive, like suffer and survive in silence… But you've been doing it
for so long and you're like, well my body hasn't given up yet, so why would I give up now?” He maintained.

Because of this high level of training that was engrained in him, Golf needed more time to adjust. The 30 days he took was not enough. Of the time off, he insisted, “it helps some but there was still a lot to work through… You have to retrain yourself.” While the military training honored those who could go without food and sleep for long periods of time, Golf felt that this is a backwards way of thinking. “That's not what life is,” he argued.

Golf has great advice for servicemen and women as they attempt to leave the military and enter higher education. He encouraged them to take it “one step at a time.” While he felt five-year plans are nice, veterans need to break it down to one-year plans or even six-month plans. Setting these shorter-term goals, “give you encouragement going forward and it's not going to make you feel like you're getting crushed under the weight of I have to do something.” Golf summed it up best when he said, “just being more kind to yourself because, it's all about you now. It's not about the units, not about the mission. It's about you.”

Hotel

Hotel always knew he wanted to serve in the military. His elementary school teacher’s son served in the Army and would come to his mom’s class when he was home on leave. Hotel was fascinated by the thought of serving in the military. Military service ran in his family on his mother’s side. At least one member of their family had served in every war with United States involvement since the revolutionary war. From seventh grade all the way through his senior year of high school, Hotel would always say he wanted to join the military when asked about his career aspirations.
Though he did well in high school, college was never on his radar. “College never interested me…What I don't like is the Gen ed[ucation] courses. I'm all about career-oriented or job-specific classes.” The cost of higher education was also an issue. Hotel’s family came from humble beginnings. He credited a WIC (Women, Infants, and Children), a program that supports lower income families, with he and his brother’s survival. Eventually, their father was able to attend vocational school and open their family business several years later. By this time, Hotel’s brother had already joined the Air Force and Hotel was almost finished with high school. Paying for college still did not seem to be in the cards.

After high school, Hotel had decided to attend a local vocational school for heating and air condition. He had paid his tuition and bought his books. Two days before classes started he started to think about all the things in the world he had not seen and done. He saw military service as a way to get out of his small town. His test scores were so high, the Navy had been recruiting him heavily. He went to visit the recruiter and signed up that day. He then went home and told his parents, “I wasn't going to school after all, I was going into the military.”

Hotel joined the Navy in 2002 right after high school graduation. He was excited to be living the dream he had wanted since he was a kid. He had never been in to comic book superheroes, but had instead seen service men and women as “real heroes are the ones you look up to.” Coming from a strict, Christian home he had been taught the importance of serving others. He felt there was no better way to serve, than by serving in the military. Hotel felt his service, “was always being part of something bigger than yourself.”

Hotel proudly served in two deployments. The first was in the Middle East serving on an oiler supply ship responsible for restocking the battle ships and aircraft carriers. Hotel served on the engineering crew dealing with fires, floods, and other onboard issues. He stated of his duties,
“You learn how serious things can be when you're out there on your own, and really quick. It makes you grow up a lot.”

The work required long hours and could be grueling at times. Even when other ships were able to take a break from service, Hotel and his crew “still had to run around and bounce between everybody and refuel, resupply and constantly.” This deployment was only supposed to last six months, but on their way home, the ship was called back. Fighting in the area had become too intense and their service was still needed. They returned to “feed the fire” for another month and a half.

The second deployment was much more enjoyable one. This time Hotel was aboard an air craft carrier, or as he called it “a floating city.” This deployment was to South America and the Caribbean and was designed to allow American sailors to dock in various ports, spend their money, and show these nations that America could be trusted. He described this deployment as a “free vacation.” He was able to visit Saint Martin and Antigua. They would spend several days in each port.

When leaving on deployment for the first time Hotel described it as a “eerie, creepy feeling when you're first pulling out because you think, it's just so hard to believe that I'm not going to be back on U.S. soil for at least six months,” he stated. Once he got into a routine, it made the days go by faster. The ship had a celebration for the half way point of the deployment. It was exciting at first, until he realized, “Shit, we're only halfway!”

Although Hotel did miss the birth of his nephew, he did not mind being away from home. He had been working and doing things on his own all through high school, so being away in the Navy did not have a huge effect on his life. Although he did feel like he missed out on cultural references such as music and movies. “You'd hear a song or see a movie and you would be
telling people about it and they're like, “Man, that came out forever ago.” And it's like, you just totally missed that whole section of civilization.”

Hotel took great pride in his time in the Navy. He recounted a story of one of his favorite memories, a trip taken with shipmates to New York. There they visited with first responders from the 9/11 terrorist attacks. They met with the firefighters from Company 11, the first department on the scene. They held a flag exchange ceremony, giving them a flag flown from the ship and receiving one that was flown at the station. They then visited the Ground Zero. He said of the visit:

To see ground zero and hear them talk about it, and you can watch it a million times on TV, but, and when we went because it was nothing but a big hole in the ground. There was still some rubble. All the surrounding buildings were still just tarped on the outside and hadn't been repaired to see the actual damage that was done right before you and then go on deployment and know that's why we do what we do. You know, I guess it's, it's a pride thing, but it makes you proud that your part of the 1% that serves at any given time. You're part of only 7% of the U.S. population that will ever serve in the military… And it's, it's the honor and pride that comes with that.

After his second deployment. Hotel planned to reenlist, but his least favorite part of the service “military BS” reared its ugly head. He was set to rotate to shore duty and was to be stationed in Charleston, South Carolina. He had been previously stationed there for training and loved the area. Shore duty would allow him normal work hours and to do his job without being on a ship. He had agreed to reenlist as long as he got these orders. The reenlistment ceremony was planned for the coming Friday. Wednesday of that week, Hotel received a set of new orders that would have him on a destroyer based out of Hawaii. Because of his training and the need
for a certain position on the destroyer, he was selected for this duty and his shore duty in Charleston had been canceled. If he reenlisted with these new orders, he would spend nine months on the ship which was relocating from its base in Hawaii to a new base in Japan, all totaled an additional three years. Hotel decided he just could not do this, he needed a break.

He used his accrued leave to go home for 42 days. During this time, he lined up a job at the steel mill and told his parents he was getting out and coming home. Once he returned to base to finish out his last nine days, he was presented with another option. His superior had pulled some strings and he could reenlist for shore duty, but not in Charleston. Hotel declined stating, “I've already told everybody I'm going home. It'll kill my parents.”

Once home, Hotel took his job in the steel mill, but quickly realized this was not for him. Though the job paid well, he felt it was “torture” being in a factory for a 12-hour shift. He decided to be “the good son” and went to work at the family business, where he remained for 10 years, never really enjoying his work. He finally realized that he did not want to stay in his hometown forever and a college education was the next step.

Hotel had worked construction during his breaks from school in high school and had enjoyed the work. He was introduced to his current boss, the owner of a construction business, by his girlfriend. They hit it off and Hotel was hired to work at the construction firm. His new boss encouraged him to pursue further education in the field.

Hotel began his college career at a local community college taking one class at a time and paying out of pocket. He was unaware at the time that the GI Bill had changed during his service. He was under the assumption that since he did not opt in to the education portion when he joined he did not have educational benefits.
When the time came to make the switch from the community college to a four-year institution, online programming was crucial to Hotel’s decision on where to attend. There was a four-year institution in his home state that offered a construction management major he wanted, but not online. Upon research, he located an online program offered by a Mississippi university. He also liked the fact that the school had received several awards for service to veterans.

The quality of the veteran program even saved Hotel a lot of money. When he contacted the veterans’ office, the staff member who answered the phone was able to answer every one of Hotel’s questions. They even explained to him the change in the GI Bill and that his tuition would be covered. No one at the community college had done that for him. He credited the staff member for being a “Godsend” to him for helping him every step of the way through enrollment.

The veteran staff member even helped with an advising issue. When Hotel could not get an answer from his advisor and could not get registered for classes, he reached out to the veterans’ office. Within 45 minutes, the department chair called and had him registered for classes and apologized for the trouble. Hotel called to thank the staff member responsible for his “incredible support.”

Hotel believes this “incredible support” is “critical” to a veteran’s success when entering the college setting—given the fact that most have never taken a college class. This inexperience in navigating the university causes veterans to miss out on programs that could be helpful, but that they know nothing about. Having a support system on campus is vital according to Hotel. He explains:

Not only can they guide you through the programs and tell you where to go and what you need to do, but they've helped me out so much. Anything from the admissions
department, how to get my transcripts, how to go about doing all this. Without them I wouldn't be where I am now. Hands down. It's, it's extremely important.

With this new-found guidance, Hotel was able to take on a heavier course load. He went from one course at a time to three classes. When that proved successful, he added a fourth class and at the time of interview, he was a full-time student and working a full-time job.

Being an online student changed the way Hotel went through the orientation process. Rather than attending an in-person orientation, he was able to complete all of his sessions online. A process he felt to be simple and easy. What has not been so easy is the balancing act of being a student and employee. “At times it can be overwhelming,” Hotel declared. He has encountered two teaching styles in his courses. Some instructors opt to open all modules for the course at the beginning of the semester, allowing the students to work through at their own pace. Others chose to have set open dates and require that students log in on certain days to watch lecture videos. Hotel prefers the self-packed version because it allowed him to better balance his work and personal life. Being able to work at his own pace, allowed him to work ahead in classes when he knew a busy time at work was coming. This gave him a “cushion” so that he did not get behind when he had to focus more on work duties.

Similar to the set routine Hotel enjoyed in the Navy, he maintained a set routine to stay on top of work, school, and fun activities. He works all day, comes home and trains with his hunting dogs, eats dinner, and does homework until bedtime. He also takes one day on the weekend to do school work. Because of his need for a consistent routine, breaks between semesters present a challenge for him. He enrolls over the summer to keep himself on track.

This schedule is supported by his family and significant other, and her children. Everyone in his life thinks his attending school is a “good thing,” but Hotel knows it is important
to also make time for those that support him. “There's things just in life or family that you have
to do and you have to make time for.” It was a balancing act to give attention to every aspect of
his life. Hotel feels so much support from those around him, “they'll step up and help you out
because they know you're trying to help yourself and help everybody else,” he states.

Hotel has also had a great deal of support from instructors and fellow classmates, many
of whom are non-traditional students, doing the same balancing act as him. Instructors have
been willing to work with him when work obligations prevented him from taking an exam at the
scheduled time. Hotel has also been respectful of the instructor’s time and worked ahead so he
can take the exam early rather than later.

There have been classmates that are of traditional age, and there is a noticeable difference
in their maturity level when it comes to school. Hotel feels maturity level and age play a big
role. Hotel highlighted one big difference from his traditional aged counterparts. He noted,
“We're not here on mom and daddy's dime. If we don't do good enough, then we have to pay
money back.” This fact makes it more crucial for him to be successful. Hotel’s GI Bill benefits
give him three and a half years to finish his degree. If he does not, the rest will have to be paid
for out of pocket. He feels this drive to complete helps non-traditional students to focus more on
assignments and complain less about it being “not fair” or “too hard.”

Another important form of support is coming from Hotel’s boss, who encouraged Hotel
to pursue an education in the first place. Many of the courses in Hotel’s program require hands-
on labs, something that is hard to do in an online setting. The hands-on portion is scheduled for
summer school and all students report to the main campus in order to receive their performance
verifications. Hotel’s boss has worked with him for time off so that he can go and complete this
portion of his education. “It could be difficult, but luckily where I'm at and my job, it's not a big issue. We can make it work. Really I've been blessed and I'm really lucky.”

Another factor that Hotel feels has made him successful is the longer period between military service and enrolling in college. While he wishes he would have started back to school sooner, the longer gap between service and school gave him time to transition back to civilian life before taking on the role of a student.

There's no way that I could have gone straight into school straight out of the military because, that transition, I mean, it's a major transition. You go from, your day to day life and what you do is so important to feeling lost and like you don't have any purpose anymore. I'm trying to readjust to the civilian world and what you can and can't do…You know, people out of the military tend to be a lot more mature, in some aspects, but in some aspects you’re kind of lagging.

Hotel is most looking forward to graduating and being able to relocate somewhere closer to the ocean he fell in love with in the Navy. He does have advice for veterans following him to higher education. He encourages them to not be afraid to talk to other veterans and ask for help. The times may be difficult, but “you just put one foot in front of the other.” Hotel feels if a veteran wants the education badly enough, they will be able to achieve it. He encourages, “If I can do it, there's no reason that anybody else can't do it. You’ve got to have that drive and determination.”

India’s military service was filled with personal hardship, but it also provided a way for her to help others. The middle of seven children, born to veteran parents, India originally wanted to be a teacher but that dream faded because of a school project. She was asked to interview
three people in the field in which she wanted to work. When she told the teachers and coaches she spoke with she really was interested in helping others and making real change, they told her “This isn’t for you.” With a bit of research, she discovered the profession of social worker and set her sights on that.

The education profession as well as military service, you might say, ran in her family. Her grandfather immigrated from Mexico and joined the Army in order to obtain US citizenship. He served in World War II, and when discharged, used his GI Bill to attend college. Eventually, he would earn a master’s degree and go on to become a principal. He became known for implementing programs such as the crosswalk system and keeping the library open during the summer to positively reinforce the new Head Start program for minorities.

Education was always important in her family. “College was always encouraged by my parents, especially my dad,” India remembered. He would tell her and her sister that they could not rely on a man to take care of them, they needed to be able to support themselves. In order to do that, they would have to attend college. India saw college as a “necessity for development and well roundedness.”

India’s service came in to play later than many veterans. After finishing high school, she was expected to attend her dream school in Kansas on an athletic scholarship. Her parents had been very strict on being successful in her academics and her mother always pushed her to excel in athletics. “My mom was very hard. Very, “You're grounded if you don't score this many points.” And she was pushing me to do better, but it did the opposite for me.” Instead of attending her dream college she opted to move in with her boyfriend and work her own way through school. In the end, she failed. She smiled and added, “But that's okay.”
Being away from the structure of her parents’ home did not prove to be successful for India. She was close to receiving her associate’s degree but had run out of money. She had lost her employment and had no job that would lead to a fulfilling career. She was forced to move back to her parent’s home. One morning she had a thought. “I woke up on my mom’s couch. And I remember thinking, this is not how I wanted my life to turn out... What can I do to be proud of myself?” India recalled. She discussed joining the military with her parents. After making sure this is what his daughter really wanted, he gave their blessing. Within three months, she was out of her parents’ house and in the military.

In 2009, at 25 years old, India joined the Navy. It would be 2012 before her first deployment, and during that time she had become pregnant and given birth to her son. She was sent to Japan where she was a project crew member and leader renovating the USO building in Yokosuka. Tragedy struck halfway through this deployment. “About halfway in between, my brother died by suicide. He was a year older than me. So, I got sent home and took two weeks of emergency leave to bury him,” she remembered. Because of her service there was not time to grieve. The military told her to find someone to keep her son and get back on duty. She sent him to live with his father and grandmother.

India was sent back to post in Japan and was put in charge of the project she had been working on before leaving. Being sent back so soon after her brother’s death kept her just busy enough to not be consumed with grief or overwhelmed with worry for her little boy. Of this hard time, she stated, “It was the most successful deployment I ever had because, I started back in college and started taking classes again, to stay busy.”

India returned to the states for 12 months and was able to remain in her home port. She was then deployed again to Rota, Spain. This deployment would have her battalion building new
structures from scratch. Her son would not be able to go to his father’s this time. India’s ex was dealing with alcoholism and would not be a suitable guardian for her son. He would instead, live with India’s mother and father, who were also caring for India’s niece. All were still grief stricken from the death of their father and son. Because of this hardship, she tried to remain in home port to care for her son. Although 150 people were being allowed to stay in home port, India was told by her commander that others in worse situations than she was deploying. She had no choice, she would have to leave her son. She was only gone two weeks when her mother had to call the Red Cross to try and bring her home. Caring for two children while still grieving had proved to be too much for India’s mother and father.

India was able to return home to get her son out of this situation. She had been home two weeks, but had been unsuccessful in finding a safe place for him to stay. Her Master Chief was not happy with her progress in complying with her Family Care Plan. “My master chief at the time sent me a page 13 before I even finished my emergency leave.” This document basically meant India had 30 days to comply or get out of the military. “I was panicked.” She recalled. She reached out to military friends on Facebook. With their help and a little bit of research, she found an instruction stating that since she was going through court proceedings, she actually had 180 to comply rather than 30.

She was very disappointed with her Master Chief, also a female but with no children. “I was mad. I wasn’t happy with the fact that my command Master Chief did not bother to review the details of my situation, or even think to discuss these options with me or my Company Chief.” Had she just taken the Master Chief at her word, she would have left the Navy without knowing she had other rights. India took full advantage of her 180 days. She waited 179 days before turning in her family care plan.
She was able to remain in home port, earning letters of appreciation while there. She loved the feeling of purpose her service gave her. “You know, feeling really good. Like You're the one who did that. You feel like you are extra special or you really have a calling, a reason, a purpose,” she smiled. She also liked the fact that the uniform made choosing what to wear each day much simpler.

But that feeling of purpose was not enough for her to be willing to deploy again. India had intended to make the Navy her career, but when her battalion was called up for deployment again, she had to change her plans. She did not have anyone in her life she trusted with the care of her son. She was forced to leave the military. She spoke about her decision, “I would have really liked to make a career. And I could have done it, you know, I think I would have been good. But his safety, his life was more important than mine.” She was discharged from the Navy in December 2014.

Though she loved her time in the service, India does feel like her time was bittersweet. She needed the money for college the GI Bill would provide, but she missed some major events in her family.

I missed a lot I felt like. I missed my nieces growing up. I missed saying goodbye to my brother… My Mom's lost her own mom and brother during my five-year enlistment too. And when I lost my brother it was a 14-hour flight…In the military, you don't deal with that problem. It's mission first, you know, you deal with feelings later, so it's like, I was battling that. So, it was very like I said bittersweet for lack of a better term.

Once out, India wasted no time in starting school. She was discharged in December and started classes in January. “That month was the longest month ever. It felt like,” she reminisced. Her choice of school was determined by her “knight in shining armor.” Six months before her
discharge she met a “wonderful, sweet, person who changed my life.” They soon married. Her husband is still currently serving in the Navy and he was stationed in Mississippi.

While the admission process was easy, the amount of credits the school would accept was very disappointing to India. She had finished her associate’s degree while in service. The whole time the Navy representative told her the courses would transfer. When she made the change to her Mississippi university, only half the credits were accepted. “It was very disappointing to see that I had an associate degree in human services, which is tier one of social work,” India lamented. Her first three semesters she was forced to repeat courses she had already taken. Though the courses were a great GPA boost, it also used a year of her GI Bill benefits. At the time of the interview, India was finishing her last year of graduate school and had taken out loans to complete her studies.

For many veterans, orientation is a terrible experience, but for India it solidified her choice to become a social worker. Her meeting with her social work advisor changed everything.

I just remember thinking this advisor is really sweet because she, like when I got there I had my kids with me. She had like crayons and very kid friendly and I thought, who are you? You're so good with kids? You must have kids. She didn't at the time either. She was a social work advisor. I just remember thinking like, you really, you know how to help people and thought this is where I want to be.

Starting those first few classes made India feel uncomfortable. While she was used to being older than many of her fellow sailors, having enlisted later than most, the age gap in the classroom was a different story. She recalls, “I felt out of place, way out of place. Everyone was
younger.” Once she got into her major there were more non-traditional students, but her general education classes were made up of a much younger group.

With her family still states away and her husband deployed, India found her way of life as a wife, mother, and student much different than her military service. She missed the support. She just had to say the word and her fellow sailors would jump to help her. She remarked, “You know, now it's hard for me to find a ride just to pick up my car… It made everything harder.”

Balancing being a student and a wife and mother without a support system was also hard. India would try to study at home but found it hard to neglect chores for homework. If her son became ill she would have to stop what she was doing to care for him. "It was like there was no time for me, but I had more time than I did before. It was a weird feeling,” she recalled. She did find help volunteering at the Navy Marine Corps Relief Society. She said gratefully, “I think that was my saving grace because they pay for the daycare while you're volunteering. So, I could study when I didn't have a case and my kid is getting cared for.”

The social support was not the only area in which India had to adjust. Her financial situation also placed strain on her life. “I was making like $3,000 a month or something in the military. From that to nothing, I mean I got a $1200 stipend when I was in school, but…”

India felt the military did not prepare her for the emotions she would encounter when leaving the service.

It was a hard time for me. I think I'm just coming out of it that transition was extremely mentally hard, emotionally hard. I didn't anticipate that. You know, when you go through TAPS, that transition program, they teach you the job interview, to transition your skills. But they don't go over the emotional part of it and the isolating part of it, the
potential depression part of it. When you're around 500 people a day, at minimum in the military there's like 535 in a battalion. You're constantly connected.”

She found herself bombarding her husband when he came home, just to have another adult to talk too. But he came home tired and not wanting to talk, because he had “already had his 1200 conversations.” India knew she was not okay, but her social work program “truly healed me.”

She is close to graduation and is looking forward and feels her time in the service has made her a better student because it exposed her to different languages and cultures. She noted, “I think diversity makes us smarter.” India believes the diversity she encountered in the Navy will make her an even better social worker. She hopes the experience will make her more marketable when seeking employment.

She encouraged other female veterans who are thinking of entering college to build their social support system first. India feels it is also important to build it with people who understand the military and military service. “I still am struggling with the, whole social support. It's hard to share,” she sighed. She felt that unless someone has experience with the military, a close relative, friend, or a former service member themselves, they will not “understand the cultures and customs.” This makes it hard for them to relate to the issues a veteran faces. India noted, “empathy only can go so far and it's very important. Sometimes you just need to go be with those who know what you’re going through.”

India also feels that idle hands are a bad thing for a soldier returning from service. They may not need to start school right away, but they need something to do. She speaks of the month between getting out and classes beginning. “I think I drove everybody in my family nuts during that month,” she laughed. She described the time as “limbo” where she just sat around waiting for school to start. During this limbo period, India encouraged veterans to seek a support group.
She pointed out, “You know, it's a loss. It's grieving even if you're looking forward to it. Getting out of the military was a loss, I was grieving. I didn't know that at the time.”

**Juliet**

The Army ended up being Juliet’s saving grace. She grew up in a small town in Mississippi and always wanted to be a social worker. The problem was she just did not know how to get there. “I hated school,” she remembered. She just wanted to be a social worker, she did not want to have to attend college to get there.

She attended community college right after high school, but like other students, did not take it seriously. “I played,” she noted. She did not have the discipline needed to be successful in college. Facing discipline for a behavioral issue, Juliet decided to follow in her twin sister’s footsteps and join the military. “I started running into some behavior issues and I was like “If I don't, go ahead and do something, I'm going to be in jail, dead somewhere,” Juliet confided. Juliet felt she had to “join the military ASAP.” And join ASAP she did, choosing the Army because they could get her in six months sooner than the Air Force.

Juliet not only loved her military service, she thrived in the structured environment. She entered the Army in November 2012 and never looked back. “From there my whole life changed. I found structure, discipline. I fell in love with it. It was my way of life,” she declared happily. She became a supply specialist, but due to a back injury, was not deployed. She instead carried out her time of service on bases in New York and Texas. She loved everything about serving in the military. Juliet loved everything about her service even waking up early, making her bed, and wearing the uniform.

She wanted to make the Army her life. So much so, she did not return home for the first year and a half. After that she would go home periodically, but was always ready to go back to
her duty station. She did not miss anything from home. “Everything was still here and is still here today.” Unfortunately, the injury to her back would keep her from being a lifer in the Army. The way her superiors dealt with the symptoms of her injury proved to be the only thing she did not like about her service.

We were shamed for going to get help and being a weak soldier. While I was injured, I was told that I was making it up. I was sent to behavioral health to get reviewed. What it all boiled down to is they ended up finding out that I did have a cyst on my S1 [sacral base] and the stuff that I was experiencing was not made up. I feel like we are getting somewhere within the military service identifying that people, suffer from PTSD things like that. Anxiety, because of the military, I do feel like we've gotten better, but when I was going through it was hard to just tell someone that I was hurting or that mentally I felt like I did, but I did go get help.

Juliet did face struggles once leaving the military in November 2016 and was even homeless for a time. She realized that in order to reach her dream of becoming a social worker, she would have to attend college. Being from Mississippi, there was only one decision for her. She knew she already wanted to attend one of the universities in this state. With a little research, she found their social work program was ranked high in the nation.

Gaining admission to her dream institution was a litter harder than she had hoped. “It was hard,” Juliet stated. At one point, she ended up with two different student ID numbers. She felt the military did not educate her well enough on how to get into college. Luckily, her sister had left the service a year before she did and was already attending the same university. Juliet’s sister encouraged her to visit the certifying official’s office. Juliet recalls of that meeting, “After coming and speaking with somebody who was real, easy after that.”
She entered the university in January 2016. The first few classes for Juliet were hard. She struggled with her new-found freedom. Gone were the set times to sleep, eat, and go to the gym. She missed the structure. She spoke of how the freedom of schedule still affects her, “To this day I still tell my professor's office hours are between this time, but can I have an appointment? Because I feel like if I have an appointment then I should be there.”

The absence of structure is not the only changes Juliet has gone through since leaving the Army. Present at the interview, was her beautiful five-month-old baby girl. With the baby’s arrival came a new set of difficulties for Juliet. On top of the anxiety issues she was facing, postpartum depression was now a part of her life. The injury to her back and carpel tunnel in her hands from her military service have also had an impact on her transition. She has adjusted well to using the services in place for students with disabilities and does not mind sharing her story.

I will always have back issues. Most college students, when they walk they go up the stairs. I can't do that. I have to find another way. Sometimes people ask why do you have to do that? You don't have to explain. With me, I'm nice and like you know, I have this issue going on. People don't understand, like when you're young you don't look like nothing's wrong with you but it is. I had one guy come up to me and say “You're not disabled.” And I'm like, look, I served, I served and for you to be able to come up and say that. It's like just because you don't see physical issues, that does not mean they don't have disabilities.

Juliet wears her disabilities as a badge of honor. I’m a star. That I don't look at it as anything negative,” she confessed. She sees her disabilities as an advantage because it allows her to encourage others to seek help for their disabilities and to not be ashamed. Juliet loved being an “advocate” for others and helping them find campus resources to support them.
Juliet has also faced trouble relating to her traditional aged classmates. They are coming from two different places in their lives and two different understandings. She recalled, “At first it was hard transitioning just to college students trying to figure out the conversations they have, you don’t get.” She felt she did not relate to anything the traditionally-aged students were discussing. She also divulged that discussions with fellow veterans revealed many of them felt as if they did not fit in.

Fellow veterans have been very instrumental in Juliet’s transition. She has become very active in the campus chapter of SVA, serving as the president. Though she still keeps in touch with and gets support from family members still in the service. The veterans’ office has become her core support group. “Family, this, this facility here is my family,” she smiled.

The veteran services office was able to provide her with a list of services around campus to assist her with any issue she was having, something her orientation session was not able to provide. “It was just so brief.” She feels a veteran-only session would be much more beneficial. The veteran’s services office was able to highlight more beneficial resources, such as the writing center, speech center. Juliet now works in the veteran’s office and is able to share her knowledge with others in need.

Juliet was a month away from graduation. Her time in the SVA has made her an advocate for student veterans. She plans to continue the advocacy after graduation and work with veterans. “I want to work with veterans. I want to be a social worker for veterans,” Juliet highlighted. She encourages those that follow after her to take some time before entering college, but don’t just sit and do nothing. “Definitely find something to do. Cause usually what I find, if you take time off you usually find yourself getting into stuff that you don't really need to be into, she stressed.” She also stressed to take advantage of the exit training the military gives.
Most importantly she stressed the importance of her SVA involvement. She felt it had made the difference for her.

**Kilo**

Kilo is not your typical veteran, because he is not a veteran...yet. He is still serving on active duty. At the time of the interview, he had been serving in the Navy for 10 years. He was in his last year of service and his last year of his Masters of Business Administration (MBA).

Kilo had always wanted to be a pilot, just more on the commercial level. He grew up in the Northwestern United States with only a few family members that had served in the military. College was expected in his community, and a four-year institution was the gold standard. Kilo came from an upper middle-class family who had saved for his college education. He did try to earn high enough grades in high school to also qualify for scholarships. His goal was to earn a bachelor’s degree in four years. “it took me a little more than four years, but not too much more,” he chuckled.

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 took place while Kilo was in high school. Like many, he wanted to fight for our county. A trusted teacher, who was also a Vietnam veteran, helped him make his decision based in facts rather than emotions. He recalled the encounter:

He said, “Well, what would you do if you if this didn't happen yesterday?” I talked to him on 9/12, I think. And, um, I said, “Well, I was going to go to college next year.” He goes, “Well, Kilo, you're making an emotional decision. Why don't you still go to college and after college if you want to join the military, join.

Kilo did just as he planned. He applied to a few colleges after high school, and ended up attending the first one to offer him acceptance. He completed a bachelor’s in aviation management and flight operations in December 2007, but the military still appealed to him.
With the council of a veteran uncle who had served for 30 years in the Navy, he selected it over other branches. His love for the ocean and the opportunity to be a pilot solidified the decision and in October 2008 he signed on the dotted line.

His service has included two deployments. The first to a base in Japan, flying surveillance and reconnaissance missions for seven months. The next was seven-month deployment was to the Persian Gulf. The mission again, was to fly out and look for vessels that could pose a threat. None were combat missions, but the data collect supported forces that were in combat areas. The next assignment brought Kilo closer to Mississippi and a branch campus of one of the universities in this state. While home base was in one spot, the workups to prepare aircraft carriers for missions required that Kilo be away from home for two to seven weeks.

The time away from home was something not only Kilo, but also his family had to be prepared for. For the first six years of service, he was a single dad with “less than primary custody” of his son. Kilo spent a lot of time with him when he was home and used Skype to talk to him while deployed. Being away became harder when Kilo married. This added a wife, a stepdaughter, and eventually another son to the mix. He missed most of his wife’s pregnancy and was only able to be home for the baby’s birth and two weeks before having to leave again. He just counts his absence as “part of the job.”

Missing family time is not the only thing Kilo missed. Popular culture references were hard to follow, and so was a set calendar. He chuckles, “Birthdays for example, to me, don't mean the same as they would to someone who has always celebrated their birthday on their birthday.” Kilo is used to celebrating birthdays and holidays either a few months early or late. His family does not stick to a set calendar for those events. This way Kilo does not feel like he misses out on the special times.
While having an alternate calendar keeps Kilo connected to his family and the outside world, he enjoys being connected to his fellow sailors. Though he jokes that his favorite part of service is the uniforms, the reason he enjoys his time is the people with whom he serves. “You're hanging out with the same 10 people for seven months, they, they kind of become family,” he noted. Kilo indicated that even though he does not talk to everyone he has served with, if they reached out to him, he and other service members would “be there for each other.”

Though he loves his shipmates and the relationships they share, Kilo is ready to transition back to civilian life. “I'm tired of moving around the country,” he remarked. He spoke of the milestones they are expected to hit. He was growing tired of chasing those milestones. That is why he is ready to transition from the military.

While stationed close to Mississippi, Kilo decided to further his education and pursue his MBA. The application process went smoothly. The only slight annoyance was the GMAT. Kilo paid $400 to prepare for and take the entrance exam. Once he began attending he found another student for whom the exam had been waived. “So, I was a little aggravated. Hey, I spent 400 bucks for what, you know, when this guy's test was waived,” he lamented. His score gained him admittance and began attending in fall 2014. He was located close to one of the branch campuses of one of the state’s universities and began his degree in person.

Location was not the only consideration when choosing the institution for graduate school. Cost also factored into the equation. Unlike most veterans, Kilo is electing to defer his GI Bill benefits to his children. Since he was still serving on active duty, he was able to use the tuition assistance program through the Navy. They cover $250 per credit hour taken, but the remainder is up to Kilo to pay. The Mississippi institution was selected because it was “very competitive in price” when looking at the overall cost of the degree.
Though Kilo feels the cost of degree is a great value for the education he is getting, he does feel there is a flaw in the system when it comes to military students: the rising cost of tuition. Kilo did not want to take out any loans, but also knew he would need longer than the standard two years to complete the program. He was able to use Navy tuition assistance to cover $750 per class. At the beginning of his studies, this meant he paid $400 out of pocket. Now, at the end of his program, he was paying over $600 out of pocket per course. Kilo reached out to the university’s Bursar office to see if they would consider locking in tuition for military students. Of course, they declined. Though he understood tuition rates were set by the governing board, he wished the state would consider this as an extra incentive for veterans.

Starting his degree at a brick and mortar location allowed Kilo to go through the on-campus orientation process. It was a simple orientation. The small nature of the branch made the process easier. He was able to get his student ID, buy his books, and meet with his advisor. He was impressed with his advisor. She answered every question Kilo had even if he thought it was a “dumb question,” she “treated [it] like a serious question”

Using tuition assistance to cover his costs makes Kilo less dependent on the veteran services office. Most of the paperwork he does himself online through a Navy-run website. He submits his grades after each term and his schedule for the next to his superiors. They have always supported his requests.

Due to his military service, Kilo’s MBA has taken about 5 years to complete. His service has also forced him to move from being an in-class student to solely online when he had to move duty stations. He has had to take several leaves of absence from school. When he is deployed on an aircraft carrier, internet service was not guaranteed.
Even in the graduate school setting, working with other students can prove to be difficult. Like many veterans, Kilo has had trouble relating to the traditionally-aged students. “It was tough to work with the students that are just finished their bachelor’s,” he noted. He revealed the traditional students did not want to work during “normal hours.” He said, annoyed, “They wanted to work at things at 10 to midnight.” Kilo also felt that the younger students were more likely to complain if they did not feel like you were pulling their weight. Even if it had been agreed upon who was doing what on the project. They would even go to the teacher and complain anonymously.

Kilo preferred to work with older students who understood the real world better. He felt those that were older and had been in the civilian work force for several years made much better teammates. He also felt work experience should be a requirement for the MBA program. “Why are you getting an MBA without experience? It doesn't, it doesn't make sense on paper, right?” he commented. Faculty on the other hand, treated him no different than any other student.

Kilo also feels his communication methods are different than that of the average student, and that can interfere with his success in his assignments. He believes, “We speak in bullet format.” This way of speaking causes issues when writing papers. He indicated, “If the professor says, “Hey, I need you to fill out, 20 pages” we'll struggle because we'll just try to answer the questions.

Similar to other non-traditional students, Kilo has had to find the balance between school work and home life that allows him to be successful in classes, but also spend time with his family. That balancing act was sometimes hard to manage. If the options were given, he would choose to work alone rather than in groups in order to maintain this balance more effectively. He recalled a time when he and his wife were still dating. He was working with a group and the
meeting time was during a weekend he had his son. He hated having to ask his girlfriend to watch his son so he could meet with his group. “If there is an option to work solo or in a group, I would choose to work solo to manage my calendar better… And even if it was double the work, working individually, it works out better for me,” he indicated. He has even opted to stretch his degree out by taking one class at a time, rather than two, in order to maintain the equilibrium.

Along with balancing home and school. Kilo has had to balance school and service. He has made a clear distinction between the two. Although he has seen peers use time at work to do homework. Kilo makes it a point “to separate the two.”

Moving to the online format has allowed Kilo to continue his education and military service simultaneously, but it has put him at a disadvantage to being in the classroom. While he can use the teacher as a resource, being online prevents Kilo from forming study partners in class. “You just have a name online and you don't want to be weird and start blindly messaging people,” he chuckles. Kilo did end up messaging, but chose who he messaged carefully. Two of the three have worked with him to understand course topics. This process is much harder than just tapping someone on the shoulder and asking if they want to review the lecture. Though he “put myself in that disadvantage,” the opportunity to study from a distance is a great opportunity.

Kilo encourages other service members to take the same path he walked and try to complete a degree while still on active duty. “Maybe you can get the degree done while you still have a paycheck,” he encourages. That way your college graduation can be before you leave the service. But for those wanting to wait and use their GI Bill, he also has good advice. “Plan early, start early; study for the GMAT or entrance exams early,” he urges. He also wants veterans to manage their expectations. They should ask questions before beginning school so
they have fewer surprises along the way, such as the rise in tuition he encountered. Because he was still on active duty, Kilo has not had the financial struggle other veterans face.

Through all of the struggles, moves, and lost time with family, Kilo would not change the path he has taken. It has given him the opportunity to serve his country and be an example to his children.

**Lima**

Lima was no stranger to being away from home when he entered the Navy. Born in Alabama, but raised in Mississippi, he grew up in a religious home. When finishing high school, he had no idea what he wanted to do. Rather than waste money on college trying to figure things out, he decided to go into the missionary field. He served for a year living in Honduras. When he returned home, he still did not know what he wanted to do with his life. He used the ability to pay for school as a reason for joining to his parents. The truth was he did not see a future in his home town. Lima “didn't want to fall into the same rut” as many of his friends. Joining the military was the quickest way to get out of town. And join he did in March 2008 at the age of 21.

Military service was not a huge tradition in Lima’s family. Both grandfathers had served; one in the Navy. Lima narrowed his choice down to Navy or Army. He had developed a love for different languages while in Honduras. The Navy would give him more opportunity to use that love, so Lima settled on the Navy.

Lima was originally going to only do a four year-contract, but when the job he wanted required a six-year commitment, he decided being a linguist was worth the extra two years. His concentration was in Mandarin Chinese. Though he requested to be deployed to the Middle
East, the Navy felt he was more valuable being stationed stateside, working for the National Security Agency (NSA).

Luckily, he was stationed in one of the most beautiful places on earth, Hawaii. “It was amazing,” Lima gushed. But many others stationed there did not feel the same. They felt hemmed in by the island, but Lima loved the experience. He felt the reason his outlook differed from others was that he spent his free time “enjoying what the island had to offer.” He enjoyed going to the beach, golfing, and spending time with friends when he was not working.

Those friends and the relationships he made with them are the most memorable thing Lima brought back from his time in the Navy. The friendships he developed in the military Lima considers to be some of the closest.

Even though we live on opposite sides of the country now, there are people that I can pick up the phone and call. One of them even he lives in Washington now and last October I got married and he flew all the way to Mississippi to be my best man… the relationships and bonds that are created with the people around me were definitely the best thing.

Having this close-knit friend group was a great support system while living in Hawaii. The expense of flying back home kept Lima from returning home often. Lima was able to get off work his first Christmas after arriving in Hawaii. So, he decided to fly home. He told his parents then this would be the only time he could make the trip. It was just too much of an expense to do it again.

Though he did miss the birth of nieces and nephews, he does not feel like he missed too much while away. He was, after all, used to being away. His year in Honduras right after high school had prepared him for this. He remarked, “I love my family, we're close, but I've never
had any trouble living in a different location.” Lima indicated that he never really experienced homesickness.

Being comfortable living away from family made the fact that he returned to the area after his time in the service surprising. “It actually struck me as odd that when I got out of the Navy I returned back to the same area that I lived. I never expected to do that,” Lima recalled.

Though Lima enjoyed his time in the Navy, when his contract was up, he was done, just as he had planned. Once his six years was up, he left the Navy. He had told his recruiter that he would move on with his life after his contract and he did. He does miss a few things about service, but does not regret his decision because “I absolutely think it was the right decision for me,” he stated.

Even after leaving the service, college was not on the top of Lima’s to-do list. “Funny enough, even then it didn't fit [into my plans],” he remembered. The plans Lima did have, did not come to fruition. It took over a year for college to enter his radar.

When college finally came up, he selected a school in Mississippi for 3 reasons: 1) The quality of the engineering program, 2) he was from the area, 3) and probably most importantly, his girlfriend (now his wife) lived there. The application process was simple and he was accepted a few weeks later. He received his acceptance email while on a road trip visiting Navy friends, which proved to be an asset to using his GI Bill benefits. His friend had just started school recently, so she was able to walk Lima through the VA application process. He saved his application number so as soon as he got to school he had all the paperwork the veteran services office asked for.

Lima was “very impressed” with the staff in the veteran services office on his campus. He had decided summer (June or July) that he wanted to start classes in August. The office was
very efficient and was able to certify his benefits so nothing was delayed. “The certifying
officials there were still able to get me certified and got my book money on time, got my housing
allowance on time, tuition paid on time. And uh, there wasn't really any delay getting into that,”
Lima noted.

The orientation process was no help in streamlining the certification process. With many
of the activities targeting traditional transfer students, Lima felt like his time could have been
used more effectively. “A lot of it felt like a waste of time for me,” he revealed. He felt that,
even as a transfer, he was older than the other attendees. Most of the information was more
useful to that group. Lima “didn't see the point in doing any of it.” He simply wanted to make
his schedule and get started on his classes. While the veteran services staff was set up at the
student union, where orientation was taking place, it was never mentioned. Lima ended up using
Google to locate the office and hand deliver his paperwork.

The paperwork was the easy part, he now had to attend classes. He began as an electrical
engineering major but later switched to civil in order to focus on the “environmental side of
ing工程,” a concept he became fascinated with while living in Hawaii. One of the biggest
challenges Lima has faced is working with his traditionally-aged classmates.

Going to school in your late twenties, early thirties, sitting in class with people 17, 18,
19-years old is definitely a transition having to relate to them…One of my favorite stories
to tell is the first day of class I walk into my English Comp I and greet the instructor by
his first name and all the kids look at me like I'm crazy. And then I tell them I went to
high school with that guy. So, it was a whole different experience.

Lima found it hard learning how to relate and interact with traditionally-aged students.
The first few years of his career, he “did not have the best attitude about it.” Lima felt the
younger students were “immature kids.” Most of which did not care about their studies and were “wasting their parent’s money.” At the time of the interview, he felt he had been “exposed to it long enough” and had “gotten better” at working with younger students.

Though they may frustrate him at times, Lima has been able to learn from his younger classmates. He finds their political and sociological perspectives interesting. Lima likes to challenge fellow students on why they feel the way they do, but also challenges himself to understand what brought them to this way of thinking. He notes, “You can ask my wife. I'm really bad about being able to put myself in other people's shoes and see things through their eyes.” His interactions with other students have helped him to “understand different perspectives.”

Lima’s situation as a non-traditional student has afforded him a different campus living experience as well. As an older student, he was not required to live in on-campus housing. For the first time ever, he was living by himself. Even though he moved out when he was 18, Lima had always had roommates. His living situation has been a double-edged sword when it comes to his adjustment to school. Although it made him more comfortable with having to follow the rules of the residence halls, it did not allow him to “get incorporated in the student body.”

His living situation changed, as he recently got married. This also created a new support for Lima, particularly as it relates to finances. Not having the steady paycheck, the military provided, has become an area of stress for Lima and now his wife. His GI Bill covers most things but “there are gaps in it.” Lima sometimes has trouble filling in those gaps. Lima was fortunate enough to receive veteran scholarships as well, but has to stay on top of his family’s finances. “My wife is currently working and helping me get through this degree so that way the financial burden isn't as heavy on me,” Lima remarked.
Additional financial support, and mental and emotional support has come from his parents and sister. Lima added, “They have been great.” His parents have been very supportive and try to keep up with how things are going in his life. Though he was embarrassed to ask, Lima did have to also ask his parents for financial support. His dad was happy to help. Lima noted this was a “unique” occurrence for his dad.

He was really happy to be able to do that because growing up we were lower to middle income at best. And since then, since all of his kids have moved out, he's been able to go to law school, become an attorney, and now he has more money to invest into his children's lives. So, I think he was happy to do that.

Lima has also had time to be with his sister, who due to family obligations, had not finished her degree. She has now returned to college and enrolled in a calculus class, after Lima. He was able to help her study and enjoyed being able to support his older sister.

One program essential to Lima’s success has been the campus chapter of the SVA. He never planned to get involved with the organization, but he needed the relationships with other veterans more than he realized.

Because of my service, not getting deployments, not being on ships and subs, not being out in the real military, the real Navy, when I got out, it was difficult for me to take ownership of that veteran title. And coming to [Mississippi university] and connecting with other veterans has really helped me take on that identity.

Lima has become very involved in SVA; even became an officer. This leadership position has given him the opportunity to “connect” with younger students that are leaders of their organizations. This has helped Lima become “intertwined with the student body.” He feels participation in SVA is “crucial” for student veterans. “I think that's the reason I was interested
in and so willing to invest in it. Because of the difference I saw that it made for me. And I think you can provide that same difference for other veterans,” he believed.

Lima does get frustrated when other veterans do not want to participate. Though he understands the “We've done our time in service. We don't always want to relate and associate with other military members” mentality, he feels the program is a great benefit to veterans. It “bridges the gap between the university and those non-traditional students who don't relate to the university,” he affirmed.

The SVA has helped Lima successfully transition to the university and may be called upon for further support in the coming semesters. Each veteran’s GI Bill only covers a certain length of time for them to complete their degree, and for Lima, time is running out. At the time of the interview, he was in the process of applying for a STEM extension as part of the Forever GI Bill. If this extension does not come through for him, Lima’s financial struggles will get worse. His concern for the rest of his time was balance. Being able to find the number of hours he can work while still attending classes will be Lima’s biggest challenge while completing the last bit of his degree.

Lima’s advice for veterans entering the college life is to get involved with their chapter of the SVA. He feels the group has “a lot to offer.” It gives student veterans who are having trouble relating to others, a group of similarly-aged people with similar experiences. These relationships help with adjusting to a new area and provides a social network of support for new students. This support group has been essential to Lima’s success. They support each other in times of need and celebrate the goods times, such as graduation. Lima closed with, “Whether it's for good times or bad times, it helps to have people around you and have a support network.”
Mike

Mike was a trooper during his interview. Even though he was not feeling well, he insisted that we continue, because he said he would do it at this time, and he was determined to follow through. Determined is probably the best way to describe him. The son of El Salvadorian immigrants, who fled to American seeking a better life, Mike was determined to be successful.

Growing up he wanted to be a preacher like his father, a teacher, or a writer. College was always part of his plans. Growing up in a town with a low socioeconomic standard of living, there were not a lot of opportunities to get a good job. A college degree would open career options to him that would normally not be available. The problem was how to pay for it. The military would provide Mike an opportunity to be able to afford college. So, in 2017, one month after high school graduation, Mike joined the Army.

In his five years of service, he was deployed twice. Both times to Iraq. The first deployment had him stationed in an outpost south of Bagdad, performing intelligence analysis. This was his first time away from home so he had a difficult time adjusting to this new lifestyle. The second deployment had him serving as a guard in four-hour shifts with eight-hour breaks in between. The “laid back” nature of this deployment allowed Mike time to reflect, which for Mike was not a good thing.

It was this time to reflect that led Mike to leave the Army after five years of service. Once he returned from his second deployment, he was faced with a third, 10-month deployment to Afghanistan. “I did not want to deploy anymore,” he remembered. So, in 2012, he was discharged from service. Though sometimes it was hard, Mike does not regret his time in the
Army because it led him to quite possibly, his biggest supporter, his wife who was and still is, serving in the Air Force. The two now share two children.

Even though he thought he was ready to leave the service, Mike had a hard time becoming a civilian again. Immediately after getting out Mike had doubts that he had made the right decision. He became very scared and anxious. His original intentions were to begin work, but when that opportunity fell through he turned his eyes toward education. Mike wasted no time. He was discharged in July 2012 and stated attending a local community college the next month.

Mike’s original plan was to attend a local university, but he had missed their enrollment deadline. Attending college did not help with Mike’s anxieties. Attending a community college proved to be a better path for Mike. “I quickly found out that I being away from anything academic from five years and then going back to school was very, is a very large gap between where I was and where I needed to be,” Mike recalled. The community college setting helped bridge that gap with smaller classes and more one-on-one time with professors.

The time away from education quickly became apparent for Mike as evident by the scores on his subject area placement exams. The community college normally waives placement exams for veterans, but Mike opted to take them anyway. He scored very well in English and writing, but his science and math scores showed that he required remediation. Math was so low, Mike needed three remedial courses before taking college algebra.

Though student services were available and easy to access, they did not provide all of the support Mike needed to be successful in his first year of college. He was dealing with personal issues at the time. He and his girlfriend at the time (now, wife) had broken up. During his second semester he was struggling to keep up with his school work. This resulted in a mental
breakdown. Unable to find support on campus, Mike went to those he knew could help, the people with whom he had served. His girlfriend reached out to check on him and they eventually got back together. She would prove to be the support he needed and, it was because of her, Mike ended up at a Mississippi institution.

When Mike and his wife initially got back together, she was stationed in Germany. However, her new orders had stationed her close to a branch campus of one of the Mississippi universities in this study. He started by attending a Mississippi community college for a year and a half before transferring to a four-year institution.

The admissions process went well, but he still was not sure about his major. So, he entered as undecided. He was soon told he had to choose a major. Meeting with his advisor led him to choose the path to one of his childhood careers, teaching. Mike chose English as his major. His advisor asked him if he eventually wanted to teach. When he said yes, she gave him the option of alternate route or getting both an English and education degree. Mike opted for the second path. He completed all of his English requirements first, so if he decided not to teach, he did not have to do the education classes. He was in his student teaching at the time of the interview.

Orientation was a good experience for Mike. This was the third institution Mike had attended since leaving the Army. This orientation was more personalized than the others had been. The program at the community college was so fast-paced that all of the questions Mike had did not get answered. At his Mississippi university, “they took their time to make sure everything was answered.”

Mike did start out using his GI Bill benefits to cover his college costs. The schools made this process simple for him as well. The veteran services office helped him know all the
paperwork he had to submit and kept him on top of his deadlines. Mike said of the staff member he worked with, “She was just really great about following up, what I needed by when, the deadlines. She's a really good.”

The school made it easy for Mike to receive his benefits, but they are not in charge of how long the benefits last. With some of his funds going to the remedial classes he needed at the community college to prepare him for upper-level courses, Mike had exhausted all of his benefits the semester before the interview. He was now paying for school out of pocket.

He credits his family with the support and motivation he needed to complete his degree. The birth of his son set things into motion.

Although it might sound cliché, but having my first son really kind of set things into perspective and I was kind of just going through the motions, not having a real plan and once he was born, I knew that I had to just finish college. I had to really choose a career that I would enjoy doing and go for something that I wanted.

His oldest son may have put everything into perspective, but his wife has been the engine that has kept him going. Mike could not help but smile when he talked about her support, “Honestly, my wife is the reason why I'm graduating on time.” She has made sure Mike has everything he needs to be successful. From packing his lunch to laying out clothes for him to wear each day, she has made sure he is ready to go every day. Even in the stressful time of student teaching, Mike feels he is so lucky to have her as his “partner” through it all.

Mike and his wife also have to do it on their own. When they first started out, they were in his hometown. They even lived with his parents for a time. Mike’s brother, who had previously attended college, was able to help him when he was struggling. But the move to her new duty station left them with no family nearby for additional support. “I'm very stressed out
once I moved,” he confessed. It was now a struggle to find child care that they can trust. Their families do come to visit and help out around the house and with the kids as much as they can, but are still six hours away.

Mike was able to find support through his fellow students. The military had provided a group to depend on and the SVA and other student organizations gave him that group on campus. Mike notes that seeing the same group of people day in and day out forced bonds of friendship on soldiers. Entering college, making friends was much more difficult. Joining the English honor society and the SVA helped Mike make the new friends he needed for support.

These groups gave Mike a connection on campus that traditionally-aged students could not provide. Because he attended a branch campus of his university he was surrounded by more non-traditional students. At his community colleges, he had a different experience. He was much older than most of his classmates. This age gap made it “harder to kind of connect with students that were like five, six years younger than me.”

Mike is looking forward to finishing his degree and starting his teaching career, but he will have to do it in a new state. “We always knew that she could get orders and it just so happens that she got orders for this summer to move to Virginia, likely. And so, I knew that I had to finish no matter what,” he stated emphatically. This new location will provide a better school system for their children to attend, but not a system Mike is familiar with when it comes to finding a job. When doing his observation hours, every school Mike entered in Mississippi told him to come back and apply when he graduated. By moving to Virginia, Mike is losing all of the networking attending a Mississippi university gave him. His degree does allow for licensing in Virginia, and he does not know what the job market will be like.
Mike is so close to finishing this part of his path, but does wish he would have done some things differently. One thing he wishes he would have done was take more time off between military service and attending college.

Looking back, I wish I could have had that semester off to really kind of re-collect myself. But at the same time, I just felt this very large pressure of I'm out of the service and now I, it was like this very big pressure to continue doing something.

His advice to future student veterans is to have a plan when you leave the military. Mike warned that even though a soldier is getting out, it may not be okay. They have to stay on top of the needed paperwork and not “throw caution to the wind.”

November

November’s student life is actually her second career. Her first was serving 20 years in the Air Force. A career that came out of a desire to leave home and get away from the small town in Mississippi she was raised in. She had a full scholarship to a university close to home, but gave it up to join the Air Force, against her single mother’s wishes.

November followed in the footsteps of her aunt and joined the Air Force in September 1993. She was proud to serve her country as part of a female military tradition in her family. Her aunt and female cousin all served in the same branch of service.

November was only deployed once to Karshi-Khanabad or as the military refers to it, K2. This deployment consisted of watching the locals work. Other times she was stationed at bases in the states. The time away from home was hard initially, but it got easier as the years went by. She made a point to see her family once a year, but mostly enjoyed traveling the country doing her job. Her once skeptical mother came along for the ride. “My mom, you know, wherever I was, she was there too,” November chuckled.
All of this traveling made November a well-rounded individual and she does not feel she missed out on anything in civilian life while away. When she returns to her home town and talks to residents there, she feels like she is different from them. “They were still small-minded, racist,” she laments. Being in the military allowed her to be around different types of people and cultures, something she would not have had the opportunity to do had she stayed home. She loved the camaraderie with her fellow service members and would have loved to stay in service longer, but health issue forced her retirement.

As she got older, it was hard for her to keep her weight down. She began to fail her physical tests. November was also plagued by mental illness. “Then I was diagnosed with having bipolar and I don't really think my commanders really understood what I was going through,” she recalled. November began to experience depression, and insomnia. This made her tired during her shifts. Her commanders saw this as being lazy. Even though she was performing well, even winning the NCO of the year award, she was forced to leave the Air Force. She retired from her first career in September 2013.

After leaving the military, November was diagnosed with polycystic ovaries, which caused the weight gain. This was tested for while November was still enlisted, but she was told she was negative. When the VA hospital did the same test, it came back positive. This made it clear to November, retirement was the right decision.

College was not the first thing that came to mind after leaving the military. She tried to find a job, but was unsuccessful. She started attending cosmetology school, but it was not for her. Her health dealt her another blow when she was diagnosed with cancer in January 2014. She recovered and was cancer free by 2015. During her recovery, she found what her next path would be. “I went to a peer support training in Jackson. And from that point I said, “you know
what? I said I want to be a social worker,” November remembered fondly. She decided to apply at her mother’s alma mater for the social work program. He mother is also a social worker.

She knew what she wanted to study and where she wanted to attend. So, in 2016 she applied to her chosen university, but the admissions process put November in unfamiliar territory. She recalled, “For the first time ever, a school rejected me.” November’s transcripts from courses she had taken in the military were holding her back. Those grades fell on different ends of the spectrum, either she did well or she failed. This led to GPA below a 2.00. November was able to file an appeal and explain that she was taking classes while working shift work in the military. The university made an exception and November has maintained at least a 3.70 GPA every semester. “I think they made a good choice,” she joked.

November began attending a branch campus of one of the Mississippi universities in this study in August 2016. This had her further away from the veteran services office on the main campus. This presented some issues when filing her paperwork to have her tuition covered by the GI Bill. The VA counselor she had been working with had transferred to Texas, so the office in Jackson, Mississippi was handling her case. This meant she had to make a few trips to Jackson. Of this time November stated, “It was a little rough. But, it worked out.”

At the time of the interview she was working with the office to cover a master’s in social work (MSW) after she graduates. She completed all of the necessary paperwork, but is having to appeal to higher powers in order to get the degree covered. The reason she needs to appeal is that since the state of Mississippi only requires a bachelor’s of social work to practice, the type of benefits she receives will not cover the masters. November was asked to submit job descriptions she was interested in that required an MSW. She had done this, but feels her
counselor must have “ignored all of those” because she was still being told the degree would not be covered. November was determined though, she had already filed an appeal to a Mississippi senator and one with the White House.

She was both nervous and excited taking her first classes. “I hadn't sat in a classroom in over 20 years at that point; I was eager to learn,” she reminisced. The idea of taking notes and tests did have her a little worried. She sought help from the students with disabilities office and they were able to help her be successful. Her living situation has also helped her be successful. She entered the university as a freshman, but was not required to live on campus. Being able to be on her own has been a help. She gets to come home every day and study with no distractions.

While she has the support of her family, there are still aspects of college life November struggles with. One is time management. “My time management is not what it used to be,” November smiled. She indicated that while she was on the main campus, she would be meeting with the advisor to consider dropping out of the program. Trying to keep up with the activities of the honors group and her course work was proving too much of a strain.

Even after being out of the service for over five years, she struggles to separate herself from that lifestyle. November stated, “I'm trying to get to know regular life again.” She is still trying not to be “so military.” She does have traits carried over from her time in the service that are a bit of a hinderance to her successful interactions with faculty and fellow students. She fumed, “People always telling me to watch my tone and it irritates the crap out of me.” She feels those that tell her this need to recognize the life she came from and accept her for who she is.

November also struggles with the lack of respect her younger classmates have for professors and the classroom as a whole. She has to force herself to “mind her own business” and not scold her classmates. November gets frustrated when students show up late to class and
talk while the professor is talking. The NCO in her wants to correct them, but she has to remind herself she does not wear that hat anymore.

It’s not the first time she has worked with younger people. She supervised older teenagers in the Air Force, but the students are different. Even the young Air Force recruits “were controlled.” They did as they were told and when they asked questions they were “businesslike.” November expected this behavior in the classroom but was shocked at the lack of respect younger students had for professors. “It’s just different,” she noted.

One of the main differences November has noted is the lack of loyalty in the classroom. This is a stark contrast from military service. “There's no loyalty in school, you know, amongst the classmates and stuff. And I don't trust them the way I would have trusted the people that I knew in the military,” she confided. The lack of trust can make it hard to work with her fellow students.

Though her time between service and school was needed for recovery and discovery of what she truly wanted in life, November feels a break between service and school is necessary for anyone.

Think about it. You've been working more than a 40 hour a week for x amount of years or whatever. You're getting used to a different set of people and you need that time. You need that time to get acclimated, for you to go from that right into school. You haven't had time to take your NCO hat off. You’re not going to fit in because these are just point-blank civilians…You're looking around, seeing those same people talking while the professors talking and you're going to want to tell them what to do and stuff like that. But that's not your lane anymore. So, everybody needs a cooling off.
She does feel that the transition for female service women is different from that of men. Men are quicker to act on things without thinking than women, she observed. “I think that it's mostly guys who are able to just hop back in and just make stuff happen or whatever. But women we’re more emotional and we want to kind of take our time on stuff I guess,” November compared. She confessed her transition from an African American, female service member to a civilian student had been hard.

And I think that's why I’m always being told about my tone, without understanding that I grew up in a male-dominated career field where I was often the only woman in the shop. And then the only minority woman in the shop, the only minority woman that was in charge of all of the younger white guys and stuff like that. So that was the big challenge. And then having to transition, not be that person anymore. It was very hard.

Oscar

“School for me was like a necessary evil,” Oscar stated. This has been Oscar’s motivation to complete his degree as quickly as possible. Although he was born in Texas, he was raised in Tennessee and attended college there for a year straight out of high school. School was never at the top of his list. “I hate school,” Oscar affirmed. But he always knew he wanted to serve in the military.

Oscar’s desire to serve began around the sixth grade. He and his best friend attended a junior lifeguard program at their local YMCA. The thought of helping someone in trouble appealed to Oscar. It especially spoke to him after 9/11. He remembered hearing about friends’ older brothers joining. He felt like it was the “right thing to do.” He felt as someone who was able to serve he should step up and “protect what we hold dear.” Oscar had continued his want to help others by pursuing nursing as his major.
After an unsuccessful year in college, he dropped out and joined the Navy in June 2010. His original contract was to train to become a Navy Seal, but due to a broken leg in training, he served aboard a ship for “a few tours around the Pacific.” None of his deployments took him to Afghanistan or Iraq. “By the time I got in, everything was pretty much winding down on the ship,” Oscar recalled. His initial duties were on the flight deck, releasing and landing aircraft. The end of his tour found him on kitchen duty. He was not a fan, “worst nine days of my life.”

Being away from home was never a problem for Oscar. Even though he was raised in the same town, he only spent two or three years at each school he attended. He also made the change from public to private school. Oscar compared these changes to joining the Navy, “I was kind of used to that, not having a steady environment.” When he moved to California he did miss his family, but it was “not a big deal” as he had always planned to leave his home town.

He did miss out on seeing his younger brother grow up. When Oscar left for the Navy his brother was 12 years old, when he returned he was a man of 20. This fact was upsetting. He stated, “I think it's really unfortunate because a lot of ways we're very similar, but my parents were getting older and he didn't have the guidance that I think I probably could have given him.”

After his time on the ship, he was stationed in California, in a position he loved: weapons trainer. Oscar taught new recruits how to use everything “from pistols up to grenade launchers that we mounted on vehicles.” This was his job for the last three years of his service. He was eventually told he would be forced to take a desk job and assume more leadership roles.

Since the Navy would not let him stay in the job he loved and his term was up, Oscar left the Navy after six years of service. But he did not leave without a plan. He was interested in the medical field and wanted to become a nurse. The only problem was to become a nurse, you have
to have a college degree. “If I wasn't going into nursing, I probably wouldn't have gone to school,” he groused. In order to take the licensing exam, he would have to have a degree.

His choice of school was easy to make because of his family situation. Married at the time of his discharge, Oscar’s wife, also a Navy service member, was stationed close to Mississippi. The Mississippi university he chose fit well into his plans. It was the most convenient and offered a nursing program.

His admissions process went fairly smoothly. The only issue he faced was that of in-state residency. Though his permanent residency would be in Mississippi with his wife, he was still in California during the application process. His California address caused him to be charged out-of-state tuition for the first few semesters. The ACT score, that Oscar earned in high school was still good and the credits from his previous university were able to be transferred. Before he could begin classes, he had to go through orientation. “Complete waste of time!” Oscar moaned about the process. It only gave you the physical location of things on campus, but not college life. Oscar felt that was “the more important part.”

Once in his classes, Oscar did miss the support of his fellow sailors. They all had the same mindset and were able to support each other. Being on a branch campus, Oscar also did not have access to the SVA. “Our veterans, like Student Veterans Association had just crumbled right before I started and it never came back,” he noted of the chapter on his campus.

Knowing the importance of having a group of likeminded classmates, Oscar attempted to form his own version of the SVA. “I tried to kind of institute a very organic veteran mentorship program at the nursing school because there's only like five of us, so it's super easy,” he said. As the student veteran nursing students that entered the program after his year were taking their pre-reqs, the older students helped them know what to look for and not miss any admission
deadlines. “I think veterans are going to do that naturally,” Oscar noted. Though it is not a formal organization, it has helped Oscar that he had a support group.

Oscar had been smart when exiting the service. Even though his last day was April 1, 2016, his accrued leave allowed him to start classes summer 2016. This meant he was in classes for two months while still receiving military pay. Unfortunately, losing his steady pay was not the only change he faced. Oscar also faced changes in his personal life when he and his wife divorced eight months after he started school. He had gone from living in San Diego with steady military pay and being married to living in Mississippi, divorced and a student in a very short amount of time.

Even during these stressful times, Oscar did not lose focus. He came in and “crushed” his first two semesters, earning straight A’s. “I had a goal, I was not going to let anything hold me back,” he said proudly. Pressure to complete his degree during the 36 months his GI Bill would cover kept him motivated and on track. Because of the housing allowance the GI Bill provides while veterans are enrolled in classes, Oscar “needed to go year-round to keep my bills paid.” He took 20 hours his first three semesters and did two years’ worth of work in one calendar year. This allowed him to move into his two years of nursing school a year early. These courses cannot be fast tracked the way Oscar’s pre-requisites were.

With his family six hours away, they were not in a position to provide the support Oscar needed. He really does not “get involved” with his family as he feels they “add extra stress in my life.” Some relief did come when Oscar met his current girlfriend. She has been able to help him in the gap times when the GI Bill housing allowance is not available because classes are not in session. The couple had been together for 18 months at the time of the interview and she had moved in with Oscar. They split the rent so he is not solely responsible. Her financial support
during long Christmas and summer breaks have been helpful to Oscar. “She's been a huge amount of support for me,” Oscar smiled.

Although he has excelled in his coursework, his class time was not free from issues. Many times, the faculty themselves were a point of frustration. During a literature class in 2016, Oscar had a situation that really bothered him.

I had an English teacher stand up in class for like 20, 30 minutes talking about why Hillary should get elected and Trump should be put in jail. And nobody was receiving his message and we were there for a lit class. I stood up in class and said, “Hey man, this is a political propaganda class. Then I'm going to leave because I'm paying for an English class.”

He has had a few other such encounters. Oscar felt frustrated at teachers who had an “inflated sense of ego.” He believed they were in the classroom for their own purposes, rather than to serve the student. This did not sit well with Oscar.

This struggle with faculty stemmed from a lack of trust. Trust is engrained in every service member. They are trained to trust the man or woman next to them will always have their back. This level of trust, in Oscar’s opinion, does not exist in academia. He reasoned, “I don't trust any of my teachers. And a lot of that is because they don't demonstrate good leadership skills.” He felt faculty made “emotionally-based decisions” which was taboo in the military.

Despite his distrust of most faculty, there is one-person Oscar not only trusts, but also looks up to, the director of his nursing program. “She's been awesome,” he said admiringly. This particular faculty had a way of knowing when Oscar was “not doing okay.” At his nursing school orientation, he had worked all night at a hotel front desk and was about to leave for the funeral of a friend who had committed suicide. She spotted his distress immediately and told
Oscar “Hey, you don't need to be here. This is what you need to know. Why don't you go get some rest and get ready to fly out and we'll see you next week?” This made a huge impression on Oscar. She became the first person he felt like he could depend upon at school. Oscar said, “I'm thankful that the college of nursing hired her because she's one of the few that I feel like I can trust.”

Other than his fellow veteran nursing students, Oscar does not trust his classmates either. His military service does not always allow him to see eye-to-eye with his traditionally-aged contemporaries. He has no problem correcting other students when he feels what they are saying is out of line. “I don't sugarcoat anything,” he chortled. He tries not to get involved in these conversations, but sometimes he has no choice if what they are saying is “completely unrealistic.”

With the support of his girlfriend and his director, Oscar was three months from graduation at the time of the interview. He was looking forward to completing his degree and heading into the workforce. Oscar feels his time in the Navy has made him a better applicant. He got a top spot in interview pools because of his military service. He feels his time in the Navy has set him up for success. Not only has it covered his education with the GI Bill but service has also given Oscar decision-making skills, an ability to deal with stress well, and prioritizations skills. Because of this knowledge, Oscar has no regrets from his time in service.

Analytic Themes

After a review of the interview data, several themes emerged. These themes dealt with everything from financial struggles to social issues. The participants also noted the types of support they had in place during their transition. The five themes that emerged were (a) Trouble
Relating to other Students, (b) Lasting Effects of Military Service, (c) Financial Struggles, (d) Types of Support, and (e) Institutional Interaction.

The first theme, Trouble Relating to other Students, stems from camaraderie, the bond built through military service. When discussing what they enjoyed most about service or what they missed most, thirteen of the fifteen participants indicated that they missed the people. These friendships run deeper than most relationships the participants had experienced and last even after service had ended. This deep connection with fellow service men and women has led to a lack of trust in fellow students, which leads to difficulty relating to other students.

Relating to other students was a problem noted by all fifteen participants. Most of the participants enter college as freshmen, after a significant break in education due to military service. The age gap between participants and fellow classmates created a different set of priorities for each group. Maturity level differences also played a big part in student veterans feeling alienated from their fellow classmates.

Because of their military training and code of conduct during service, fourteen of the fifteen participants indicated some sort of Lasting Effects of Military Service. Many are positive characteristics such as drive, determination, and focus; others cause issues in their day to day lives including lack of study skills, hypervigilance, and the need for a sense of purpose.

Though all but one of the participants were currently using some form of military benefits to cover college expenses, Financial Struggle was an issue for twelve of the participants. This is exaggerated by the fact that many of the participants also have families. Being over the age of 21 and non-traditional freshmen, allows all of these students to live off campus. This creates a host of other expenses that most of their fellow classmates do not encounter. Rent, groceries, and child care all become important and are the sole responsibility of the student veteran.
With all of the different situations, student veterans need some sort of Support in their lives. All participants indicated they had some form of family support. Family support included significant others, cousins, and parents. They also sought help from friends and their campus chapter of the Student Veterans of America.

The final theme involves the student veterans’ Institution Interaction. All participants touched on some form of interaction with the institution’s faculty, staff, and orientation programs. Several also commented on the effects of certain policies and procedures of the institution and how they influenced their transition.

**Theme I: Trouble Relating to Other Students**

All study participants indicated that they had trouble relating to their classmates on some level. Age played a key role but lack of trust was also a driving factor. The following section will describe how participants felt about relating to traditionally-aged students.

*Camaraderie*

When describing their transition experience, most participants indicated that camaraderie was a huge part of their military service. Military service involves men and women leaving home, family, and friends to undergo intense training. Hotel recounted the story of his 48-hour “Battle Stations” graduation. During this time, recruits are deprived of sleep and food and have to carry out simulations of actual battle situations. One such simulation was “Man Overboard,” forcing them to jump, fully clothed, into a pool to rescue a fellow sailor. Once retrieved, the sailors then ran two miles in their wet clothes. All of this was during the month of January! Base on this illustration, it is easy to see how strong bonds are formed with fellow service members. The level of trust is seldom developed matched in civilian life.
Charlie felt these friendships could not be compared to high school or college friends. He illustrated, “you go through a couple of firefights with them. You understand to what extent they're willing to, to do what they won't do for you and it makes a difference.” After being in battle, Charlie knew the “true character” of those he served with and developed respect for them.

During times of training and deployments, service members were cut off from their friends and family at home, eliminating them as a source of support. They are then forced to depend on their fellow service members, creating a new family. Hotel explains, “I have friends from the military that are more family to me than my family here…I love my family here, but it's just, you can't really explain it.” This family is expected to lay down their life for one another should the occasion arise.

Bonds forged in these situations are not easily broken. Participants indicated that even after leaving the service, they still remain close with those with whom they served. Kilo noted, “I don't talk to these guys all that often and the guys I deployed with as a crew, but if they needed something, they reached out, we'd be there for each other. We'd have that kind of connection.” Lima pointed out that his best friend is from military service and came across the country in order to serve as the best man in his wedding. His words describe the different level of intensity of these friendships. He spoke of making friends on his university campus but that it would not be the same as his military friends. He stated, “I've made several great friends here in [university town] and wherever I go work, I'm sure I'll meet new people and enjoy those as well. But I think it was a different style of relationship and bond that forms.”

These strong bonds are based on mutual trust, respect, and loyalty. They are formed during times of stress and many times life and death situations. These elements will not be duplicated on a university campus and make the development of camaraderie with fellow
students difficult. The high standard set by the camaraderie of military service left participants wary of their classmates. November stated, “There's no loyalty in school, you know, amongst the classmates and stuff. And, you know, I don't trust them the way I would have trusted the people that I knew in the military.” Foxtrot echoed November’s feelings, “I don’t know I just think there’s a unity; there’s a purpose in the military that you don’t always feel here.” This lack of trust and feeling of unity with their fellow classmates stems from student veteran’s struggle to understand and relate to their classmates.

*Age Gap and Maturity*

The most notable differences participants saw between themselves and their fellow classmates was age and maturity level. Ten participants entered their current institution as a freshman with little to no college credit hours. This had them attending classes with students who had just graduated high school. The typical freshman is 17 or 18 years old. The youngest participant was 24 years old, making them seven years older than the younger freshmen. The oldest participant, November, was 47 when she entered college. A full 30 years older than her freshmen classmates! Though a seven-year age gap does not seem like a large amount, when comparing life experiences, the difference added up in the minds of student veterans.

With this age gap, came a gap in maturity. The veteran participants felt they had more life experience, not only because they had been alive longer, but because they had seen more of the world through their military service. Delta noted, “I’ve seen…been on deployment. I’ve been to all these different countries and yet these kids are just coming out of high school.” All participants referred to traditionally-aged students as “kids,” further distinguishing themselves as more mature. Table 2 provides notable quoted from participants.
### Table 2

*Participant Quotes on Age and Maturity Quotes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSEUDONYM</th>
<th>COMMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BRAVO</td>
<td>I am 27, so I kind of have almost a 10-year gap on a lot of the freshmen. Then I’m almost closer to age to most of my professors and I am the students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHARLIE</td>
<td>So, you walk in a room, you can be like, he's the old guy and that's what happens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DELTA</td>
<td>I guess it was different for me because like I am almost 24 so it was like being with like 18-year old’s, it was like a it was like Oh, I’ve had like a little bit more life experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECHO</td>
<td>Also, I think there’s a lot of maturity that’s different as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOXTROT</td>
<td>And kids started filing in and couple of them said are you the professor? And I’ve had that every semester just about somebody thinks I’m the professor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDIA</td>
<td>There was a few older because this campus is nontraditional, so there was a few like my age, maybe one older. There was still quite a bit, especially once I got to the social work, in the social work program. Then it was like my age maybe more mixed. But in these Spanish classes and computers, they were so young, they look young. Like because they were right out of high school. I felt very out of place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JULIET</td>
<td>I wouldn't think I was 25, I'd be 26 and I'm older, most kids in college are what 17, 18 years old?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My favorite illustration came from Lima,

One of my favorite stories to tell is the first day of class I walk into my English comp one and greet the instructor by his first name and all the kids look at me like I'm crazy. And
then I tell them I went to high school with that guy. So, it was a whole different experience.

Despite the age and maturity differences, Lima did feel that working with traditional-aged students was important. Through participating as an officer of SVA, Lima has been able to work with leaders of other student organizations. He enjoyed challenging other students on why they believe the way they do about certain issues. He in turn challenged himself to understand what brought them to this way of thinking. His interactions with younger students have allowed Lima to, “put myself in other people's shoes and see things through their eyes.”

Different Priorities

This gap in age and difference in maturity leads to a different set of priorities. Being nontraditional, many of the participants not only had to worry about themselves, but also had families to consider. Eight participants are either married or have a significant other and six have children. None of the participants lived in on-campus housing. This gave them a sense of independence they took pride in having this refuge and used it to distinguish themselves from traditional students. Charlie stated, “I can support myself…I’ve always wanted my house to myself. It's a lot to it. I enjoy it.”

Charlie mentioned his VA benefits. While these are an excellent way for student veterans to have their tuition paid for and receive a housing allowance. It also limits the amount of time student veterans have to complete their degree. Oscar noted the pressure to finish in a timely manner, “I knew that because the GI bill only has, you know, 36 months of benefit. I needed to go year-round to keep my bills paid and I also needed to graduate before that timeline hit.” This pressure to complete their degree weighed on six of the participants’ minds. This
created a different set of priorities in the classroom for the student veterans. Table 3 shows comments from participants regarding their need to finish before their benefits ran out.

Table 3

*Participant Quotes of Their Push to Finish Their Degree*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSEUDONYM</th>
<th>COMMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HOTEL</td>
<td>...we're not here on mom and daddy's dime. You know, we're here and if we don't do good enough, then we have to pay money back. So, it makes it, it makes it more important for us to get through. And also, you know, you're limited. I believe it's three years, full-time, tuition. And so, you need to get the best bang for your buck so you have less that you have to pay for, you know, when it, when, or if it runs out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JULIET</td>
<td>Full-time, summer, everything. I took this summer off because I was pregnant. But other than that, my standards were completely, different from other people. If it wasn’t a 3.0 or higher, I feel like I wasn’t performing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIMA</td>
<td>The bigger challenges that I'm looking at are trying to cram the last bit of hours I have into completing my degree so as to not go over. One challenge that I'm at right now is how to go about getting the new STEM extension that's related to the Forever GI Bill. This semester I am running out of benefits.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This push to finish in a timely manner because of GI Bill benefits, created a different set of priorities in the classroom as well. Where many traditional students are looking for the full college experience, student veterans focused upon attending their classes and finishing their degree. “The generation that are around, is focused on partying and what extracurricular activity they can get into and that's not what I was coming here for,” Juliet stated. When working in
groups with traditional students, participants noted their classmates tend to procrastinate on assignments. Bravo stated, “I'm used to doing things and in timely manner type of thing and sometimes it turns into they just dragged their feet which gets frustrating.” Hotel tells a story of a group made of student veterans and traditional students. The non-traditional students, several of whom were student veterans, wanted to divvy the work up and start as soon as the project was assigned. The younger students wanted to put the project off until closer to the due date. Hotel was having none of it.

I don't care what you got going on, we're divvying it up! Everybody gets their part. It needs to be turned in by this time together. And that's what you see. I guess it's more of a, more of a drive and, and taking stuff more seriously to get it accomplished.

Feeling of Alienation

The factors of age differences, different maturity levels, and different priorities create a feeling of alienation for student veterans. These students are coming from an environment where everyone has the same mission and a standard operating procedure for achieving that mission. Switching to the university setting where everyone has a different agenda and ways of achieving their goals left several participants with no sense of belonging. Charlie summed it up best:

It's like trying to put that last puzzle piece to something. And you're like, where does this go? You don't know where it goes and it's how we feel. I mean, now I'm not the only veteran that’s like that. A lot of come up and have express that to me. They like, “Hey, you know, I just don't feel like I belong here.”

Summary

Military service creates an unmatched camaraderie that student veterans miss when they enter a university setting. Student veterans struggle to form similar bonds with their
traditionally-aged classmates and suffer from a lack of trust. Difference in age and maturity levels also caused student veterans to have a hard time relating to fellow students. Traditional students also hold a different set of priorities than student veterans, further dividing the two populations.

**Theme II: Lasting Effects of Military Service**

Military training and the lifestyle service men and women lead leaves lasting effects on the veterans’ lives. Many of the effects are positive and make the participants better students. Others are a hinderance and can cause the student veteran additional stress.

*Positive Effects*

None of the service members in this study regretted their military service. In their minds, the positive effects their service had on their lives outweigh the negative. Figure 6 presents a word cloud created from interview sections where discussion of positive effects of service occurred.
Three of the larger words in the cloud are different, determination, and drive. I will examine each.

_Different_

The study participants felt their time in the military had made them different from other students. First, it had exposed them to different experiences. They traveled the world and were exposed to different kinds of people and cultures. This gave them a better understanding of how the world works. The difference in maturity discussed in the previous section came from these experiences. These experiences can give a different perspective on course material and add to the diversity of the class. Table 4 features quotes from the participants about the effects of military service that make them different.
Table 4

*Participant Quotes on Effects of Military Service*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSEUDONYM</th>
<th>QUOTE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHARLIE</td>
<td>Gives you a different look on life. It really does. It matures you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DELTA</td>
<td>It was an eye-opening experience for me. It made me realize “hey like there’s more out there.” ... The Navy helped mold me to who I am today.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOXTROT</td>
<td>The Army taught me that I was something, that I was a man of substance and that was something they taught me. It taught me who I was, I didn’t know until then. I think that that has played a very important role in understanding the value of life, the value of education that maybe other students don’t feel, because they didn’t have that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOTEL</td>
<td>It makes you more understanding of, of different cultures and different types of people and different points of views.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDIA</td>
<td>I got a lot more exposure to diversity and um, just different ways of thinking and just seeing how different societies are in different cultures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIMA</td>
<td>I think it's just given me a, again, a different perspective kind of on what's important and what's not.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perhaps the most poignant quote about how military service makes student veterans different from their traditionally-aged student peers came from Oscar:

I came into school not trying to learn about myself, not trying to learn about who I need to be and I feel like a lot of people use college for that. I already knew all those things. I just needed to learn the specific things for the trade that I'm going into.

*Drive*

Military service created a drive to be successful in participants, a self-motivation that they felt other students do not possess. The student veterans set the goal of completing their
chosen degree and were going to do their best in the classroom. This created a sense of focus on their coursework. They became frustrated when their classmates did not demonstrate a similar focus. Foxtrot, one of the oldest participants, was particularly frustrated with student behaviors. He did not approve of students who never came to class and only showed up on test days. When they do show up they play on their phones. These same students then “whine” about their grades. Others echoed his sentiment in Table 5.

Table 5

Participant Quotes on Their Feelings Toward Other Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSEUDONYM</th>
<th>QUOTE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HOTEL</td>
<td>the people that are older and the people that are veterans that come into these programs, uh, you know, they don't, they don't whine or complain. Like, you see a lot of the other students do about stuff. Not Fair, it's too hard or, um, you know, the slacking off and not doing assignments and not taking stuff serious.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIMA</td>
<td>I felt like there were a lot of immature kids who didn't really care what they were doing were wasting their money or their parent’s money. And, um, it was frustrating to see them go through that process when I was there, very focused with a goal and trying to do my best to get that goal accomplished.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOVEMBER</td>
<td>My main thing is trying to mind my own business and stay out of other peoples’ [business]. And what I mean by that is when I see the younger kids come in that are always late to class and talking while the professors talking and stuff, I've literally had to learn how to shut my mouth because I'm not that NCO [Non-Commissioned Officer] anymore, you know?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The issue is not only with undergraduates. Kilo is pursuing his MBA and faced issues as well but he took it in stride. These students had just completed their bachelor’s and “wouldn't
want to reach out to you during normal hours.” Kilo indicated. They would only want to hold meetings from 10pm to midnight. If they did not feel a member of the group was pulling their weight, even if duties had been previously agreed upon, they would complain to the teacher. Kilo did not let it bother him; to him this behavior was a “minute negative” in his university career.

Although younger students had different priorities and different motivations, they did reach out to student veterans for one thing, their leadership abilities. Seven of the fifteen participants noted that they were not afraid to speak up in class and ask questions. Several times the student veterans relayed stories of questioning the instructor’s authority, while still respecting their position as the head of the class.

This self-confidence and assertiveness attracted other students to discuss their concerns with instructors with student veterans because other students knew the student veteran would be more likely to speak up. Charlie told a story of a time he approached a professor about too much material being covered on a test. Charlie suggested to the professor that the test be split into two sections taken over two days. This would prevent burnout and the likelihood that something would be overlooked when studying, making the students more successful on the exam. The instructor agreed. The instructor thanked Charlie for his willingness to speak up.

The student veterans are also not afraid to challenge their classmates on their views and beliefs. Juliet commented that she was “verbal in class about some particular politics.” Some of her classmates did not share her view, but she was not afraid to share it and present them with a different perspective. She noted, “I think completely different from a normal college student.”

This difference in viewpoints helps the other students grow, but Lima points out it helps the veterans as well. It has been interesting to him to hear his fellow students’ political and sociological perspectives. He liked to challenge them on why they feel this way but also share
his view based on his military experience. Lima also believed that hearing other views challenged him to think about why he believed the way he did. He stated:

> Trying to understand different perspectives. You can ask my wife. I'm really bad about being able to put myself in other people's shoes and see things through their eyes. And I think this is an experience has really helped me with that.

**Determination**

Determination goes hand in hand with drive. The veterans have the drive to pursue and complete their degree and the determination not to give up or lose focus. Golf commented of his military service, “I think it's increased my determination a lot more and my ability to kind of persevere, especially when grades are really bad.” Mike faced several hardships when entering college, including a mental breakdown. He credits his time in the service with keeping him on the right track. “I would say that I was able to, to kind of have a tenacity to not, not give up,” he stated. Charlie acknowledged, “I would have never took 18 hours as a civilian. I take 18 hours now with success.” He indicated he would have never been able to attend school year-round and be successful had he not developed “drive, determination, and focus” during his military service.

**Negative Effects**

Although none of the participants regretted their time in the armed forces, they did not come away completely unscathed. Some of the negative effects of military service will remain with these veterans for the rest of their lives in the form of physical injuries. However other lasting effects include mental health issues, lingering habits, need for accountability, and poor study skills.
Physical Injuries

Because of the inherent danger of serving in the military, physical injuries are expected. Six of the fifteen participants noted physical limitations due to injuries sustained during service. The chart below, Table 6, indicates the injuries participants indicated.

Table 6

Participants Physical Injuries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTICIPANT</th>
<th>INJURY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BRAVO</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHARLIE</td>
<td>Back and knee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECHO</td>
<td>Hearing loss/ringing in ears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JULIET</td>
<td>Carpel tunnel and back (diagnosed at the end of service)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOVEMBER</td>
<td>Polycystic ovaries (undiagnosed while in service)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSCAR</td>
<td>Leg, ankle, and shoulder</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bravo was the most severely injured during his time of service. First, he sustained a TBI when a rocket struck the vehicle in which he was traveling. The second set of injuries, almost took his life. An undiscovered IED caused the roof of the building he was patrolling to collapse on top of him. His injuries were extensive including reconstruction of the left side of his face, leading to hearing and sight loss, removal of his spleen, a collapsed lung, broken ribs, shrapnel wounds, and torn meniscus in both knees. The lasting effects of his injuries caused him to change his major from the physically demanding exercise sciences/kinesiology to psychology.

Juliet’s injuries have caused her to have to depend on the disability’s office on her campus. She uses a scribe to help with note taking and has to use handicapped parking and elevators to get around campus. Due to the late diagnosis of her back injury while in the service, she has a hard time with stairs and walking long distances. She has a harder time dealing with other students who cannot see her disabilities. She has been told “You’re not disabled.” Even
though she does not have to, Juliet explains that not all disabilities are visible. She also pointed out that her injuries came from service, defending that person’s right to speak to her in that manner.

*Mental Health Issues*

Though physical injury is expected with military service, there are injuries that cannot be seen. Nine of the fifteen participants indicated that they struggle with some form of mental health issues. The effects of these issues can make the transition to higher education harder. Oscar suffered from insomnia for two years, all while pursuing his nursing degree. Mike had a full-blown mental breakdown during his second semester of college. Juliet battled severe anxiety and did not feel comfortable reaching out for help. Having recently had a baby, Juliet was also suffering from postpartum depression.

Charlie told a story of how his co-workers feared the day he lost his temper because of his PTSD. Charlie assured them this would not be an issue, he knew himself well enough to remove himself from certain situations. He tried not to put himself in situations that would trigger him to “spin out of control.”

Echo indicated his hearing loss along with PTSD and hypervigilance prevent him from being able to concentrate. The VA labeled him as having “adjustment disorder,” but he feels he is suffering with PTSD and hypervigilance.

Golf could not label the mental state being in the service, but felt like no one gets out unscathed. “I feel like the military is just one of those traumatizing things that no one really gets out of without something, you know, emotional stress, physical stress. I mean it's all, it's all stress,” he noted.
India found herself unprepared to be back in the civilian world. She indicated she went through the program the military provides to transition service members back into civilian life, but it focused on skills only. It did not prepare her for the emotional transition. “They don't go over the emotional part of it and the isolating part of it, the potential depression part of it… Getting out of the military was a loss, I was grieving. I didn't know that at the time,” she recalled. She credits her social work program of study with bringing her to a good place.

Lack of Accountability/Structure

Twelve of the fifteen participants also indicated they struggled with the lack of accountability. The military has a set hierarchy with a defined chain of command. Service members know who they will be receiving orders from and to whom they can delegate. They also know their fellow soldiers have the same mission, are all working toward the same goal, and will hold each other accountable if they are not pulling their weight toward meeting that goal.

University life offers much more freedom. There is no one forcing you to go to class. Students have different priorities and act autonomously. Alpha stated, “No one's making sure that you're where you're supposed to be at. No one's making sure like you have all the essentials that you need, you know, so yeah, I mean, I mean it's, it's good and bad.” Table 7 lists other quotes on the struggle with lack of accountability.

Table 7

Participant Quotes on Lack of Accountability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSEUDONYM</th>
<th>QUOTE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BRAVO</td>
<td>Here, there's really no accountability. You either do your work or you don't.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DELTA</td>
<td>You’re in charge of everything like it’s up to me on when I want to study. It’s up to me to actually dedicate that time to studying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOXTROT</td>
<td>Every regime I had a purpose there and here I don’t feel that so much.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDIA</td>
<td>Every regime I had a purpose there and here I don’t feel that so much.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JULIET</td>
<td>They don't care if you get or if you don't. Military? you gonna get if you don't get they gonna make sure you do before you get out.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This difference in accountability seems to put student veterans on a level playing field with their younger counterparts. Kilo noted that in class it did not matter that he had 10 years of leadership experience, he was on equal ground with classmates with zero work experience. These students did not know what it was to report to a commander or boss and be held accountable for their work, or lack thereof.

*Lack of Study Skills*

One area that student veterans do not feel they are on the same playing field is study skills. Eight of the fifteen indicated some deficiency in their study skills. Time out of school seemed to be the biggest issue for student veterans. Foxtrot had not been a full-time student in 24 years. He indicated, “It’s not that I didn’t know how to study, it’s just that it had been so long since I had been in, you know, acting as student.”

Time out of the classroom also led to students having to go back for remedial work. Mike ran into an instance where he could have been placed in classes for which he was not academically prepared. His community college was willing to let him skip the placement exam and start in college algebra. Mike knew he was not ready for that level of math work, so he asked to take the exam. This proved to be the right move as he needed three remedial classes before he was ready for college algebra.

Golf was put in a similar situation with his trigonometry class. After several classes his instructor asked to see Golf after class. The instructor asked when he had last taken a math class. After hearing that it had been several years the instructor told Golf, “You’re in the wrong place.”
Golf let the instructor know he did not come to school for it to be easy. He worked with his faculty to explain his time out due to service and was eventually successful in the course.

Time management is also an issue. The military provided a set schedule of how and when to carry out tasks. College gives set class times, but it is up to the student to set their study schedule. Juliet, who thrived in the highly structured setting of the Army, had a very hard time adjusting to the freedom of college. She could not believe she did not have a set time to eat and work out. She even asks her professors for an appointment, even though they have drop-in office hours. “I feel like if I have an appointment then I should be there,” she reasoned.

Echo struggled with his study habits. “I don’t know how to manage my time effectively with my studies,” he lamented. He had a hard time finding the balance of multiple subjects. Echo shared that he would either spend hours working on one subject to finish the assignment in one sitting or working on it for a shorter time but forgetting to complete it. “I’m used to working on one thing at a time not multiple,” he griped.

Another skill that had atrophied while in the service was composing academic papers. Foxtrot had no trouble attending classes, reading for class, and studying, but writing papers was not his choice assignment. “Writing papers absolutely sucked for me and I still suck at it,” he bemoaned. Even though he hated the task, because of his chosen fields of study, papers were a huge part of his life.

Summary

Military training and service leaves a lasting effect on the lives and habits of student veterans. These effects can be both positive and negative. Positive aspects include veterans’ differences in experiences and world view that give them an alternate perspective than their younger classmates. Their drive and determination are also positive byproducts of their service.
There are negative effects left over from service as well. These include physical injuries and limitations as well as mental health struggles. Student veterans also struggled with a lack of accountability and study skills.

**Theme III: Financial Struggle**

Eleven of the fifteen participants indicated they experienced financial struggle. Adjusting to civilian and student life means no steady pay from the military. Though most were receiving GI Bill benefits, many times they are not enough. Foxtrot was a special case to the financial issue. His situation will be discussed separately.

**Adjusting to Civilian and Student Life**

Being in the military meant receiving a steady pay check every two weeks. Once participants left service, this steady pay stopped. Upon entering college, further strain is placed on student veterans as they are independent and live in off-campus housing. Oscar noted the quickness of his financial transition. In a span of eight months, he was living in California, married, and on enlisted pay to living in Mississippi, divorced, and in school living on GI Bill benefits.

Six of the participants: Charlie, Delta, Echo, Foxtrot, Golf, and Hotel, had either part-time or full-time jobs to supplement their GI Bill or to pay for school outright.

All of the participants were financially independent and did not depend on their parents for full financial support. Lima’s wife was currently working to support their household while he went to school. However, he told a story of a time when it was not enough and they needed additional financial support. Though he was embarrassed, Lima reached out to his dad for additional funds. His father was happy to help. Like Lima, Charlie, Foxtrot, India, Mike, and Oscar also had significant others that were working to cover day to day expenses.
GI Bill

While the GI Bill covers tuition and gives a stipend for living expenses, four participants indicated that there were issues with the system. For starters, there are gaps between the amount the stipend covers and what is needed. For example, when a student veteran is not enrolled in classes, such as breaks between semesters (such as Christmas break), they do not receive the housing allowance. Oscar indicated this was a significant struggle for him. Oscar also feels that there is a flaw in how the GI Bill is designed. “I think the GI Bill is really designed for somebody to go and do four years of service and get out and not have anything but maybe a car. Well, I was married, I had a whole house full of crap and a dog. I wasn't going to go live in a dorm,” he noted.

Lima pointed out that even when receiving the housing allowance, it may not be enough to cover living expenses. While he appreciated his GI Bill, he mentioned “there are gaps in it and sometimes it's difficult to fill those gaps and, and meet the financial needs that I have.” Luckily, his wife was able to work to fill in these gaps. He also received several veteran-specific scholarships to help cover additional expenses.

Juliet even faced homelessness due to the gap between her last check from the military and her first housing allowance payment. When leaving the service her last check was held and she had not started school to receive her housing allowance. “I had nowhere to go. I had no money,” she recalled.

Not only does the GI Bill not cover all expenses, but it also is slow to hit student’s accounts. For example, fall classes begin in mid to late August, but GI Bill benefits do not disperse until mid-October. This creates another gap where student veterans are receiving late tuition payment notices and account holds. The lack of funds can keep students from purchasing
books and course materials and the account holds can prevent students from making needed changes to their schedule.

These slow payments are not limited to tuition benefits, but housing allowance as well. Charlie told a story of when he first moved to his college town and was delayed in moving in to his new apartment. He and his wife were living with friends until they could afford to put a deposit on their apartment. They had saved up enough to get through a few months of rent and car payment, but housing allowance was slow to come in. Charlie recalled, “My money's slow, like I saved up enough but if this keeps going, I'm going to be broke and out of choices.”

As mentioned previously, GI Bill benefits cover tuition for 36 months. Once they are exhausted, the student veteran is then responsible for all tuition and their own housing. Due to various reasons several participants were close to or had already run out of GI Bill benefits. Foxtrot had used all of his benefits towards his associate’s degree. India had many courses that did not transfer from her previous institution that had to be retaken. Lima had changed his major and was one semester away from using all of his benefits with a year left on his degree. Mike had to take remedial classes. All of these situations caused the participants to then have to pay out of pocket to complete their degree. This adds additional financial strain and stress to their lives.

Special Case

Foxtrot offered a unique case in the area of financial struggle. He was one of the older participants and had exhausted his GI Bill benefits on his first degree in mortuary college. He had then worked for 24 years in the funeral home industry. At the time of the interview, he had returned to college in order to make a career change. He had done so by moving from his home state with his family. They were living off savings and going through them at a quick pace. His
wife was unable to find work in Mississippi, so she returned to their home state to work in one of the funeral homes he still managed. Their youngest daughter remained in Mississippi with her dad.

Despite his wife working and Foxtrot still receiving pay for his work in the funeral homes, being out of state forced him to take a severe pay cut. Out-of-state tuition was double the price in-state students were paying. On top of that, Foxtrot was not informed he qualified for veteran scholarships to cover that portion until a year in to his studies. He was responsible for all of this tuition and fees, living expenses, and taking care of his daughter. Because of these added expenses, he had to take a part-time job at a local grocery store. Though his situation was different from the younger student veterans interviewed or his veteran peers at his university, he still suffered the same financial struggles.

Summary

Though each of the participant’s situations was different, eleven suffered the same struggle with finances. Adjusting to civilian life without the steady pay of the military, while simultaneously adjusting to the expenses of college life proved to be a challenge. Delays in payment with the GI Bill itself also presented the student veterans with unique challenges. Though Foxtrot had a very unique situation, he still faced financial struggles, similar to those experienced by his fellow student veterans.

Theme IV: Types of Support

Student veterans face struggles with their transition to college life. Problems relating to other students, negative effects of military service, and financial struggles all create stress in their lives. Who do they go to for help? This study showed that student veterans depended on two groups for support: family and fellow student veterans/Student Veterans of America.
Family

Because family tends to be a common area of support for college students, participants were asked specifically how much support they received from their family. Support came in three types: emotional, financial, and physical. For the purposes of this study, emotional support was encouragement to not only pursue a college degree, but also to be successful in that pursuit. Emotional support also included an understanding that student veterans may not always be available because of school work. Financial support includes providing the student veteran with money or working with them to cover financial obligations. Physical support is actually being present in the student veteran’s life to help with tasks.

Emotional Support

Every participant in the student indicated that they had some form of emotional support. Table 8 shows the source of each participants emotional support.

Table 8

Participant’s Source of Emotional Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSEUDONYM</th>
<th>SOURCE OF EMOTIONAL SUPPORT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALPHA</td>
<td>Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRAVO</td>
<td>Parents &amp; girlfriend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHARLIE</td>
<td>Parents &amp; wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DELTA</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECHO</td>
<td>Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOXTROT</td>
<td>Wife and children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOLF</td>
<td>Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOTEL</td>
<td>Parents, girlfriend, and her children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDIA</td>
<td>Parents &amp; husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JULIET</td>
<td>Sister &amp; cousins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KILO</td>
<td>Wife and children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIMA</td>
<td>Parents, sister, &amp; wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIKE</td>
<td>Parents &amp; wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOVEMBER</td>
<td>Mother &amp; sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSCAR</td>
<td>girlfriend</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Support is mostly coming from parents and significant others. Delta is grateful for his mom’s encouraging him to study. She is “very supportive” of his attending school. She checks in with him after he gets test grades back and encourages him. She told him, “You know you’re going through this transition you know you’ll be fine.”

Hotel touched on the understanding emotional support that comes from family. Being an online student and holding down a full-time job, he does most of his studying at night and on weekends. He does his best to balance work, school, and time with his family. Hotel said of his family, “Seems to be that, they'll step up and help you out because they know you're trying to help yourself and help everybody else.”

Oscar had a different take on emotional support from family. He chose to avoid contact with his family to prevent extra stress. “They help when they can on things that they can, but mostly they add stress in my life, so I don't really get involved,” he remarked. He credits this separation with the changes he went through while serving in the military. He depends more on his girlfriend for emotional support.

**Financial Support**

The need for financial support comes directly from Theme III. The need for this support caused Foxtrot’s wife to have to leave Mississippi and return to their home state to work. He mentioned, “There’s just no industry here, there’s just no really good jobs. unfortunately.”

Lima has needed both the support of his parents and his wife to cover the financial gap the GI Bill left. Oscar also depends on his girlfriend’s financial support to get through the lean times between semesters. The two moved in together so they can split the rent and she can help with bills during the long school breaks when housing allowance is not disbursed. “She's been a huge amount of support for me,” Oscar said.
Though eleven participants mentioned financial struggles, only Foxtrot, Lima, and Oscar directly mentioned financial support. Others, like Charlie, India, and Mike, have significant others who are working so it can be assumed that they provide some financial relief as well. The other participants did not indicate that are receiving financial support.

*Physical Support*

While few participants indicated they are receiving financial support from family, even fewer indicated that they are receiving physical support. Only Bravo, Charlie, Juliet, Lima, and Mike, indicated that they had a family member that was “there for them” during their transition:

- Bravo’s girlfriend helped him decide on a college and complete the admissions process. She was attending the same school.
- Charlie’s wife was the one who pointed out to him he was suffering from injuries and that it was time to leave the military and go back to school. She also did not want to return to Mississippi, but to support her husband, she did.
- Juliet’s twin sister left the military for school a year before her. She was able to assist her sister in getting set up at college.
- Lima’s sister is also a student, so they are able to support each other through the college process. Lima’s wife also helps keep him on track to completing his degree.
- Mike had a sweet quote about the support his wife has given him towards completing his degree. Honestly, my wife is the reason why I'm graduating on time because she has been so great about making sure I take lunch or having my clothes ready or reminding about deadlines. So, I'm really thankful to have a life, well we take it as a partnership with everything.
Without the emotional, financial, and physical support of their families, the transition experience of student veterans would be much more difficult.

_Fellow Student Veterans/Student Veterans of America_

Of the fifteen participants, only two indicated that they received support from non-veteran students: Mike through the English Honors Society and Lima through working with other student groups on campus as a leader in his SVA chapter. Eight participants mentioned fellow veterans as a source of support for them.

Bravo and Oscar were not active in their SVA but had created their own veteran support system. Bravo was in a class on his campus that orients students to college life. His section was restricted to veteran students only. Oscar attended on a remote campus separate from the main campus where the chapter was located. He created his own veteran support system by seeking out veterans further along in the program and using them as mentors. He then returned the favor and mentored veterans starting the program after him.

The other six were very active in SVA. Charlie, Foxtrot, Juliet, and Lima all served as officers. All eight indicated that SVA was a vital source of support for them. Members provided tips and procedures on how to navigate the paperwork needed to receive GI Bill benefits. The group also gave new student veterans a chance to be with others who understood where they were coming from and the struggles they were facing. Most importantly, it gave them the camaraderie they missed from service. Despite being older than his fellow student veterans, Foxtrot still felt the camaraderie of being a veteran:

Being part of that organization has made it a lot easier for me because even though a lot of those guys are much younger than I am they still have the same feelings about being older, being different than their fellow classmates.
While several came from very active SVA chapters, one group wished they could have more veterans participate. Foxtrot noted that although there were almost 200 veterans on their campus only 10 were extremely active in the SVA. Delta wished for more participants to create an environment more closely resembling the service atmosphere. “I loved the guys I served with, I’d love to have that relationship with the people here.”

**Summary**

During a difficult time of transition, the student veterans in this study looked to two groups for support: family and other student veterans/SVA. Family provided emotional, financial, and physical support. Fellow student veterans helped navigate the paperwork of the GI Bill and provide a sense of camaraderie.

**Theme IV: Institution Interaction**

In order to answer my research question of how effective is the institution at supporting veterans in their transition, participants were asked specifically about the admissions process and orientation. They were also asked how the first semester went and what hurdles they had faced. These questions resulted in the participants addressing their interactions with the institution in four areas: (a) faculty, (b) staff, (c) orientation, and (d) policies, processes, and programs.

**Faculty**

Interaction with faculty was brought up by seven participants when asked how things are going and what hurdles they had faced. Interaction with faculty had both positive and negative aspects.

Positives included support with course work. Delta and Golf both struggled with their math courses, but thanks to supportive faculty were able to pass the course. “They work with you and they want to help you. I’m grateful for it and you can’t be afraid to ask questions and
you just kind of got to do it,” Delta indicated. Charlie also noted a professor’s willingness to restructure an exam after he pointed out it was too much material to test on in one sitting.

Hotel, an online student, pointed out that his instructors were very understanding of his need to maintain work-life-school balance. When work events fall at the same time as an online exam, Hotel has had to reach out to his professors and reschedule. They have always been willing to let him take the exam early so he can meet the obligation for his job.

Hotel did have one negative aspect when dealing with faculty. The way some structure their online class can make it hard to find the needed balance. Courses structured the same as the in-class version, with modules opening at set intervals made it difficult for Hotel. He preferred courses where all modules were open from the first day of class. This allowed him to work ahead during slower times at work and be able to slack off on school work during more hectic times.

Bravo and Charlie struggled with faculty who, they felt, expected too much from the students. Bravo had an instructor change the directions for an essay two days before it was due, and scold the class for following the original instructions. He did not feel this was fair, so he pulled aside and told her “Look, if you want quality work, you got to give us quality instructions and quality time to do it.”

Charlie also had concerns with the expectations of faculty, citing an online faculty member who treated a summer class as if it was in class and during a full term. He felt the assignments the instructor was expecting “were not possible given the setting.” He approached the faculty and pointed out that this was a four-week course rather than a full semester. She commented that students could accomplish it because “this was your only focus.” She did not consider that some students, Charlie included, were taking multiple summer classes.
Oscar was very vocal about his dislike for certain faculty. During an English literature class, the instructor gave a 30-minute lecture on the Clinton versus Trump election and the instructor’s views on who should win. Oscar was angry at this as he had attended a literature class not a “political propaganda class.” He felt faculty bullied their students because they were in a position of power. He also did not care for faculty who used their position to push their political views.

Bravo felt the same and had some assignments he did not agree with, but is using his discomfort as an opportunity to grow. He commented, “It's very liberal here and that's what I'm getting used to is especially certain assignments.” Bravo felt he was able to be the “bigger person” and use the difference in views to grow as a person. He had learned how to advocate for topics he normally would not have advocated for, simply because that was his assignment.

Staff

Twelve of the participants talked about interaction with staff. Specifically, the office of admissions, advising, financial aid, and student disabilities were all referenced. All mentions of admission’s staff were positive and all felt the process of admissions was smooth. Admission’s staff was even willing to accept pictures of certain documents from Bravo because they knew he was not close to the university. Foxtrot and India both indicated that they received excellent academic advising. Foxtrot and Oscar both had trouble with being billed as out-of-state students, which they should not have been because of their veteran status. Financial aid took care of both easily. Juliet praised the assistance she received from the disabilities office with help taking notes and getting around campus.

Nine of these students spent time discussing their interactions with their veteran services offices. These interactions included being recruited to the institution by the coordinator of the
office. Three participants revealed that their communication with the coordinator was the reason they chose their institution.

This office helped coordinate all of the student’s admissions process. The office also is responsible for certifying enrollment to the VA for GI Bill benefits purposes, a process that they had simplified. The certifying officials were also good to follow up with student veterans to make sure they had turned in everything they needed. Juliet stated the office put her in contact with on-campus services that have helped her be a better student such as the speech center and the writing center. Hotel referenced the time he was having trouble getting advised and the veteran services office was able to help him complete the process.

There were two minor mentions of issues with advisors (Bravo and Hotel), but all other staff interactions were positive. Participants viewed staff at the three Mississippi research sites as welcoming to student veterans.

*Orientation*

Orientation signals the beginning of college students’ transition. For this reason, it was specifically asked about in this study. Four of the participants were not required to attend an orientation. The other eleven had mixed reviews of the process. Five of the participants had positive or neutral views of orientation. Positive feedback came from Golf who attended an in-person orientation and found it to be helpful in locating key offices on campus. Hotel is an online student and his orientation was also online, a positive for his situation. Mike had come from several community colleges where he felt rushed through orientation. He felt the four-year Mississippi university he chose took time to answer all of his questions and help him know exactly what he needed.
Delta and Kilo had neutral reactions to orientation. Both attended in person. Delta was able to just tune out the information he did not need and focus on what was important to him. Overall, he felt the program is worth attending. Kilo attended a satellite campus so his orientation was simply getting his ID, meeting with an advisor, and registering for classes.

The other six participants had very strong negative feedback for orientation. Echo hated the program and felt it was a waste of time “They put my account on hold for that?!,” he roared. Foxtrot, who was older than the average transfer student also hated having to attend orientation. He felt out of place and uncomfortable, and so did his wife. The orientation leaders kept asking where their student was and they felt silly explaining that he was the student. Lima and Oscar also called orientation a “waste of time.”

All of the students who viewed their orientation experience negatively agreed on one thing: There needs to be a more focused program for veterans and transfer students. As Juliet stated that she wanted a “less hectic” orientation that told her why she had to complete all of this paperwork. This would make a smoother transition for veterans who “we already have anxieties of being around people and the first day of school.” The others in this group would have been grateful for this. They just wanted to come in and register for classes and get their IDs. They wanted to focus on only what was absolutely necessary for them to start class, the other programming was geared toward traditionally-aged students.

Policies, Processes, and Programs

Eleven of the fifteen participants indicated interactions with policies, processes and programs that affected their transition.
Policies

The most noted policy that veterans had a problem with was the acceptance of credit. Whether it be from military courses and experience or a community college, Charlie, Foxtrot, and India had the most trouble with limitations of policies related to transfer of credit. Charlie had taken 24 hours of military course work, for which he received zero credit hours at his university. Foxtrot received a mortuary science associate’s degree, and very few credits were accepted towards his bachelor’s. India had completed an associate’s degree as well, but much most of her work did not transfer, forcing her to retake classes. They felt the transfer credit policy treated them unfairly. They had earned credit and life experience that, they felt, should have given them more credit towards a degree.

This could help with another issue Charlie, Foxtrot, and Hotel mentioned: concerns with general education courses. While these courses may be needed for traditional students, the veterans struggled with finding the need for these courses. They felt their life experience better qualified them for their major courses than the general education requirements.

Processes

The admissions process was noted with both positive and negative comments. Four participants felt that the fact that their university had a special process to admit students who had not been in school for several years. This allowed them to come in on a probationary basis and work to make a 2.00 GPA on their first semester. They liked this because it gave them a chance to get started at a four-year school without having to go to community college first. Delta noted that this form of admission made his decision to attend his Mississippi university. Had he returned to his home state, he would have had to start at a community college and transfer to a
four-year school. Since he did not want to go back to community college, and he could be admitted to the Mississippi university, he came to Mississippi instead.

On the negative side of admissions policy is lack of access to communication during the admissions process. Many of the participants were seeking admissions while still deployed. This created a barrier to them receiving information regarding requirements and just being able to obtain general information from an actual representative. Golf had to depend on email only communication to ask questions about his admission. Being at sea did not allow for phone conversations, so he had to be sure to make his messages detailed.

Had communication been easier, Echo might not have had the problems he did with the credits needed for admission. When he applied, he did not realize that he was missing a science lab. Had he been able to talk to someone sooner, he would not have needed to take an extra class to be admitted.

*Programs*

The one program that was consistently mentioned as being helpful to veteran transition was the Student Veterans of America (SVA). Six of the participants were very active in their chapters. The remainder spoke of how they wished for support. They either were on a remote campus and could not participate or just did not take the time to participate. Those who were active indicated this program was vital to their successful transition.

Those who participated in SVA mentioned that veteran-only spaces were a great addition. Participants who had them on their campus noted how nice it was to have a space to go and talk with other veterans. It gave them not only a resource to navigate campus and transition, but that feeling of camaraderie they missed from their time in service.
Summary

During their time of transition into the university setting, participants noted their interaction with the institution. Some areas were discussed purposefully and others originated organically. Student veterans discussed interactions with faculty, staff, orientation, and the policies, processes, and programs of their Mississippi universities.

Summary of Analytic Themes

Based on the evaluation of interview transcripts from fifteen student veteran participants, five analytic themes were discovered: (a) Trouble Relating to other Students, (b) Lasting Effects of Military Service, (c) Financial Struggles, (d) Types of Support, and (e) Institutional Interaction. This section delved into each theme. The research showed that student veterans miss the camaraderie that had with their fellow service members and do not trust their fellow students. Military training and service stayed with the veteran and left both positive and negative effects on their lives. Though most of their educational expenses are covered by the GI Bill many student veterans struggle with finances. The veterans depend on family and friends for different kinds of support. The veterans had both positive and negative interactions with their institution, in several areas. The next chapter will discuss the implications of these findings. In addition, it will discuss directions for future research, policy, and practice—or however you label them.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to tell the transition stories of student veterans and discover how their selected Mississippi university supported them through this time. This study also hoped to uncover ways the institutions can better support veterans in transition. A phenomenological approach was used as well as viewing the data from a social constructivist perspective. Data was first collected through a preliminary study with six participants using semi-structured interviews. The transcripts were reviewed and guided the literature review and further data collection. The research sites were expanded to two additional Mississippi universities and nine other participants interviewed. Data analysis revealed five analytical themes.

The remainder of this chapter will relate the analytic themes back to the theoretical framework, Schlossberg’s Transition Theory, illustrate how this study fills the gap in veteran research, discuss suggestions for additional institution support for student veterans, and provide opportunities for further research.

Themes Through the Lens of Schlossberg

Schlossberg’s Transition Theory gives an excellent lens through which to view the transition experience of student veterans. The first step is to using Schlossberg’s is to determine if the person perceives the situation as a transition. All participants saw this as a major transition in their lives. Since all chose to attend college this was an anticipated transition. The impact of
transition to college was different for each participant. This change was personal to each student and its impact changed their day to day lives. The veterans were used to regimented military life and now faced a lack of structure in college.

**Situation**

As discussed in chapter 2, the Situation aspect of Schlossberg’s theory has several factors to consider.

*Trigger*

The trigger for each veteran was their decision to transition from the military and into college life. The gap between service and enrollment varied for each participant and ranged from no gap at all (Oscar was on terminal leave and still considered in the military when he started school) to a few years (November was out of the service for three years before enrolling in college). This decision to enroll created a change in status for each participant. Depending on the participant there were multiple status changes. Some were changing from not only service member to student, but the change to civilian and veteran as well. Others who had been out of service for a time were going from veteran civilian to the status of student.

The fact that each participant initiated the trigger by deciding to enroll in college can be seen as an asset. This transition was entered into under their own volition and not an unanticipated transition. The fact that they chose this path led to their drive and determination outlined in theme two.

*Timing*

While the veterans chose when to come back to school, and therefore set their own timing of the transition. Going to college is traditionally expected to occur upon graduation of high
school. For most of the participants, the timing of their enrollment was delayed because of their service. This created both assets and liabilities for the students.

Assets include the maturity that comes with age and time in the service. The effect of personal growth and exposure to different cultures also made them better students and gave them more drive and determination to complete their degree.

The liabilities in the timing of their transition were well illustrated in theme one. These older students have different priorities than younger students and therefore have a hard time relating to and making friends with traditionally-aged student peers. This leads to a feeling of alienation on campus. Theme two also addressed the liability of lack of study skills. Had the veterans entered college right after high school, these skills would not have suffered.

**Control**

While the decision to enter this transition was the participants to make, other factors that attribute to how easily the transition progresses make them feel like they are not in control of their situation. Lasting negative effects of service are highlighted in theme two. Physical injuries, mental health issues, lack of accountability/structure, and lack of study skills are perceived to be out of the student veterans’ control. The financial issues, theme three, this populations faces is also seen as being out of their control. Since participants felt these factors were out of their control they will act as liabilities toward transition. How the student responds to these factors will determine how well they cope with their transition.

**Role Change**

The transition experienced created a huge role change for the student veterans. At this point, they are losing the role of service member and are adjusting to being a civilian again and the financial struggle that comes with that as shown in theme three. They are also assuming the
role of student in an environment where they do not relate to their fellow students. Both aspects can be seen as liabilities. Luckily there are incumbents in this role, the veterans that have made the transition before them. For those that take advantage, there is guidance from fellow student veterans, the SVA, and veteran services staff. Having guidance from someone who has undergone the same role change is an asset.

**Duration**

Participants viewed this transition as temporary. Degree programs have a set amount of course work to be completed, so it gave an end date for each student veteran. As mentioned in theme one, students using GI Bill benefits had a push to finish their degree before they had exhausted their benefits. Though the transition to student was painful for many, it was easier to accept knowing the situation was short term. Having an end in sight is an asset to transition.

**Previous experience with a similar transition**

Many of the participants had attended some college prior to enrolling at their chosen Mississippi university. In most cases, they were not successful. Though that situation was not looked on favorably, the student veterans were much more successful in their present attempt. They attributed this to their drive, determination, and differences they gained through military service. Although they viewed their first transition to college as being unsuccessful, they felt this time would be different because of their maturity and need to complete in a timely manner. This push to complete and overcome unsuccessful attempts at college is an asset in their transition.

**Concurrent stress**

As discussed in chapter two, one transition can lead to others. The participants’ transition to the role of college student caused transitions in other areas. Theme three pointed out financial
struggle. Going from consistent, military pay to GI Bill benefits only was a drastic change and form of stress. None of the participants were in their hometown for college. They had all moved to Mississippi and were learning their new town. Several participants also had families to support. This adds another dynamic to their stress level and another liability during transition to college.

Assessment

Even if the participants saw the transition as difficult, they viewed it as a positive transition. Obtaining their degree would allow them to move on to a new career ostensibly in a higher paying position. Several had joined the military in order to pay for college in the first place, so this was the transition they had been working towards for some time and their long-term motivation acts as an asset during transition.

Situation Summary

The participants had triggered the transition to student on their own by choosing to enroll in college. The timing of enrollment after service varied by participant, but all were older than traditionally-aged students and therefore had trouble relating to them. Several aspects of the transition felt out of the veteran’s control as they went through the role change from soldier/veteran to student. The change will have a set end date as all progress toward graduation. Wanting to overcome past experience in college added to several participants’ determination to complete their degree. All were enduring forms of concurrent stress but still viewed the transition as positive.

Self

As mentioned in chapter two, it can be hard to get a clear picture of self. Schlossberg does acknowledge certain characteristics that are significant during transition.
Personal and demographic characteristics

Socioeconomic status

Only two participants, Charlie and Kilo, indicated that their family had the means to send them to a four-year college right out of high school. Other participants depended on community college and/or joined the military to pay for their four-year degree. Many saw the ability to earn a bachelor’s as a way to better themselves. While their initial status kept them from attending college and was a liability, their GI Bill benefits and drive to have a better life through education is an asset.

At the time of the interviews, almost all participants indicated they were struggling financially. Leaving the steady pay of the military changed the participants’ socioeconomic status. Their current struggle is a liability.

Gender

With only three female participants, there is not enough data to form a definitive conclusion when it comes to gender differences in veteran transition. The following discussion are observations from this study.

Based on my experience in conducting these interviews, it seemed the female participants were more open to talking with me about their emotional struggles than the male participants. They also indicated that they had no problem taking advantage of disability services provided from the school. None of the male participants indicated they were using these services. This ability to ask for help was an asset for the female participants and the reverse for male participants.

Age and Stage of Life
As stated previously, study participants were chronologically older than their fellow students. Based on the discussion of this part of self in chapter two, these participants had a higher psychological age as well. Because of their service, they were better able to adjust to societal pressures and the tasks assigned to them. The participants were annoyed with younger students’ focus on social events rather than class assignments. They also responded more positively to workload. Greater psychological maturity is an asset for student veterans.

The veterans were behind in their social age, the extent to which an individual participates in roles assigned by society. By society’s standards, these veterans should have already finished school and be in the workforce. Their service delayed their enrollment and therefore create a liability. In the eyes of their fellow students, they are “weird” and behind in their life course.

Finally, functional age. This is the ability to function as expected of someone in your age bracket. Again, the participants are in a different stage of life than non-veteran students. Others their age have entered the workforce or graduate programs. Though society may see this as a liability, the veterans saw it as an asset. Because they were older, they worked harder and were more determined to complete their degree in a timely manner.

State of Health

As stated in theme two, the negative effects of military service include physical injuries and mental health issues. While this was indicated as being present, only a few noted that their conditions interfered with their ability to be a student. In their case, their health would be a liability for them. Participants mostly saw their state of health as positive and not hindering them from degree completion.

Ethnicity
Ethnicity did not seem to have an impact on transition in this study. The ethnicity breakdown was 53.3% (8) white, 26.6% (4) Hispanic, 13.3% (2) black, and 6.7% (1) multiple ethnicities. I did not ask questions related to ethnicity and transition. Further research would be needed to determine if ethnicity plays more of a role in student veteran transition.

Psychological Resources

These resources are what people draw on to help withstand threats. Individuals going through transition can call on psychological resources such as ego development, outlook, commitment to values, and spirituality and resilience. These resources can provide assets in transition times.

Ego Development

Ego development is a huge asset for student veterans. As defined in chapter two, ego development is when individuals in the same situation behave differently based on their frame of reference and level of maturity. The participants felt they were much more self-sufficient than other students and could think more critically. The veterans were not afraid to question the instructions of faculty and voice their opinion on assignments. This was an asset to their transition.

Outlook – Optimism and Self-Efficacy

Almost all participants seemed to have an optimistic outlook on their situation. Even though they had faced hardships and difficult situations, they felt good about their situation and how they were progressing in school. The only exception was Echo. He was the only participant that, in my opinion, was not in a good place at the time of interview. His tone was very negative and he had a different demeanor than the others. For the other participants, their optimistic outlook will serve as an asset.
As stated in chapter 2, self-efficacy is a person’s belief that they can have control over their own behaviors, their motivations, and other environmental aspects. It hinges on the person’s belief that they can execute the correct behaviors needed to cope with differing situations (Schlossberg et al., 1995). The participants in this study had high self-efficacy when it comes to their behaviors and motivations. In theme two, they described how they were different from their fellow students. Their differences, drive, and determination were assets to their transition and in helping them cope with this transition.

Also, in theme two the participants noted how they struggled with the lack of accountability and structure college life offered. In this area their self-efficacy was low as they felt they had less control of the situation, leading to a liability to transition.

Commitment to Values

From the seven life goals Fiske and Chiriboga (1990) developed, participants mentioned four: 1) Achievement and Work, 2) Good Personal Relations, 3) Social Service, and 4) Personal Growth. A value for achievement and work was evident in their pursuit of higher education. Their education would increase their competence in their chosen field and allow them to be successful in their future endeavors. The opportunities a degree would provide created a great sense of motivation for the student veterans. This motivation was an asset in their transition.

Perhaps most evident was their value of good personal relations. The love of the camaraderie military service provided led to very strong relationships with fellow service members. This in turn lead to a lack of belonging once entering college, as they were unable to form those meaningful relationships with other students—outside of the military setting. Theme one illustrates their commitment to this value and the absence of it in their college experience. Not having a strong bond with many on their campus created a liability for the participants.
The United States military is a voluntary force, all participants demonstrated their value for social service by joining their respective branches of service. Those that participated in their chapter of the SVA also continued to value service. All that were active in the group spoke of being able to help fellow veterans and how important that was to them. Others, like India and November, were not active in SVA but had chosen the helping profession of social work as their major. This value for helping others is an asset to not only the transition of these veterans but of those they will help.

The study participants also valued personal growth. They all wanted to better themselves with a degree. It meant a lot to them to be better educated. They also liked the challenge of it. Military service had been challenging and they looked at college as simply the next challenge to overcome. Many also felt they had undergone personal growth while in the military. This made them better equipped to handle college life when compared to their traditional aged counterparts. With the differences in maturity and priorities in theme one and the positive effects of military service discussed in theme two, the student veterans often became frustrated with the behavior of other students. The values of each group were different and therefore their behaviors were different. This aspect of self is a double-edged sword for the participants. While they are more mature and have school as a priority, an asset, their frustration and alienation from other students could hinder a successful transition.

Spirituality and Resilience

Though several participants mentioned their spirituality, it was not in reference to their transition experience. The participants did present a high level of resilience. Overcoming personal struggles such as physical injuries and mental health issues had made them more resilient in their pursuit of a college degree. They looked at attending college as a challenge.
Even if they hit a barrier, they took pride in overcoming that hinderance and advancing towards their goal, an asset to their transition.

**Self Summary**

All people face change differently. The student veterans in this study had commonalities in the areas of ego development, outlook, commitments, values, spirituality, and resilience. Understanding the commonalities specific to student veterans will help professionals in higher education be better able to assist them during their transition.

**Support**

During a difficult time of transition, some form of support is useful in helping ease the pain of the changes. Types of support, functions of support, and measures of social support were all aspects that Schlossberg discussed. The results of this student will be mapped to these areas.

**Types of Support**

Theme four is a direct correlation to this factor of Schlossberg theory. According to Goodman (2006), the types of support are classified by their source and there are four: 1) intimate relationships, 2) family units, 3) friend networks, and 4) communities.

When one refers to an intimate relationship, the idea of a significant other comes to mind. While many of the participants did have significant others in their lives, they had also formed intimate relationships with some of the people with whom they served. During their service all aspects of life where shared and in combat situations service members were responsible for each other’s lives. This type of bond is not easily broken. Many participants referenced battle buddies that would show up at the drop of a hat if they were needed for support. This type of relationship is important for veterans.
While these relationships are important, the participants did depend on the intimate relationships of significant others currently in their lives. These relationships provided emotional, physical, and financial support during the transition to college.

Family units in the context of this study include the intimate relationships with significant others as well as the support of children, parents, siblings and extended family such as cousins. While all groups were good sources of emotional support, fewer parents, siblings, and extended family lived close enough to provide financial and physical support.

None of the participants were attending college in their hometowns and almost all had separated from the military and the friend group they had established. The inability to relate to fellow students made it hard for student veterans to make new friends on campus. They were able to form friendships with fellow student veterans, but few participants listed friends as a form of support.

The main community group student veterans saw as a form of support was their chapter of the SVA. While many participants did not take part in SVA activities, the ones that did indicate this was their main source of support when navigating the world of higher education. Staff in the veteran services offices were also a form of support. Several participants were vocal about the lack of support they felt their university provided to student veterans. These participants found belonging in the student veteran community but not the university community as a whole.

*Functions of Support*

According to Caplan, (as cited in Schlossberg et al., 1995), support is supposed to help someone in transition assemble their resources as well as control emotional liabilities, apportion tasks, and provide additional supplies of funds, tools, and materials. The ideas of affect,
affirmation, and aid, presented by Kahn and Antonucci, (as cited in Goodman et al., 2006) were also mentioned in chapter two. Based on the findings of this study, student veterans’ support system included family and fellow student veterans/SVA. They received affect and affirmation mostly from their family support and aid from both family (financial especially) and fellow vets. Both groups also provided positive and negative feedback.

Measurement of Social Support

Using Kahn’s (as cited in Goodman et al., 2006) model for measuring social support Figure 7 was developed to illustrate participant social support convoy based on theme four.

Figure 7

Convoy of Social Support Adapted for Student Veterans
The participants first level of unwavering support is their partner/significant other, their close family (parents and children), and friends from military service. These areas of support will remain no matter the current role of the student veteran. The second ring includes their extended family (cousins) student veteran friends and their SVA affiliation. The relationships developed with SVA members and fellow veterans will be a bit stronger because of the relation to service and are more likely to be maintained after leaving school. These forms of support are more likely to change when the participant no longer has the role of student. The final rings made up of distant family, neighbors (acquaintances made while in school), and veteran support staff. Once the veteran is no longer a student these forms of support will likely disappear.

Having student veterans complete Kahn’s measurement of social support will be a resource for helping veterans in transition. By knowing where they are receiving the most and least amount of support, one can help fill in the gaps.

Support Summary

The participants in this study had support mainly from intimate relationships and family. There was some community support from SVA. These groups provided the function of support as defined by Caplan, (as cited in Schlossberg et al., 1995) and Kahn and Antonucci, (as cited in Goodman et al., 2006). Using Kahn’s Convoy of Social Support (Goodman et al., 2006) to map student veterans social support is a good way to know where additional social support is needed.

Strategies

All of the participants employed a number of coping strategies to help through their transition to college. Some used methods outlined by Pearlin and Schooler (1978) and tried to modify the uncomfortable situations by negotiating with faculty about the requirements of
assignments, being optimistic about their situation, and being self-reliant on their maturity and
determination to complete their degree.

The coping strategies employed are not as important as how the individual sees the
situation according to Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and Pearling and Schooler (1978). The
participants saw this transition as a positive as it meant they were entering a new phase of their
lives. Many entered the military just to pay for their education. In their minds, a college
education was required to reach their ultimate career goals. This fact allowed them to have a
positive outlook on their situation even if the transition was a hard one. This positive outlook
along with their strong ego development, self-efficacy, and strong values made transition easier
to cope with for participants.

Strategizes Summary

Most of the participants seemed to cope effectively with this transition. Their strong
psychological resources discussed earlier made their ability to cope easier. They were able to
use different strategies to make their transition to college easier.

This Study’s Place in Relevant Literature

Through my review of relevant literature, I identified five themes: (a) veteran life is
misunderstood (Burnett & Segoria, 2009, Rumann & Hamrick, 2010, & Williams-Klotz &
Gansemmer-Topt, 2017), (b) training is needed for faculty and staff regarding the needs of student
veterans (Burnett & Segoria, 2009, Kirchner, 2015, Falkey, 2016, & Lange, Sears, &Osborne,
2016), (c) training needed to include symptoms of PTSD, TBI, and other service-related
Osborne, 2016), (d) military training made student veterans more motivated, (Rumann &
Hamrick, 2010, Kirchner, 2015, Blaauw-Hara, 2016, & Williams-Klotz & Gansemer-Topt,
and (e) veterans had issues relating to other students. (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009, Burnett & Segoria, 2009, Kirchner, 2015, & Williams-Klotz & Gansemer-Topt, 2017).

The themes I identified in my study directly match numbers four and five from the literature review. In the Implications for Higher Education section that follows, I will address training needed for faculty and staff. The first theme in the literature review, veteran life is misunderstood, is not directly addressed but I feel is encompassed in theme one from my study and the discussion of camaraderie. Though several of my participants had service-related injuries, training for others to understand them was not addressed. Based on this, I feel my study aligned well with past research and added to the knowledge base of understanding veterans in transition.

As highlighted in chapter two, there were only four studies that I located that used Schlossberg’s Transition Theory to examine student veteran transition. Three of these studies only used Schlossberg’s as a model into which they plugged knowledge gained from other sources. Only Wheeler (2012), conducted a study where he actually asked student veterans about their transition. Wheeler’s (2012) data was then mapped back to Schlossberg’s Theory. His study was conducted at the community college level and further research at the university level was called for. This study attempted to fill this gap in research by follow a similar process. Student veterans were asked to tell their transition story and the themes were mapped back to Schlossberg’s theoretical framework. While this study is a start, more research is needed using Schlossberg’s theory to help explain veteran’s student transition.

Implications for Higher Education

In the fourth theme of my research study, several areas of improvement for institutions to address were discussed. This theme helps answer my second research question: how effectively
does the university support veterans in transition? Although all three schools in this study are labeled as veteran friendly, (Military Times, 2019), this study demonstrates that Mississippi universities are not effective in supporting veterans making the transition from the military to a four-year institution. Admissions, orientation, training for faculty and staff, and on campus support were all noted as areas needing improvement. An overview of the implications is provided in Table 9, a full description follows.

Table 9

*Implications for Higher Education Summary*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area for Improvement</th>
<th>Suggestions</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| Admissions                 | • Keep admission requirements clear on website  
                             • Designate a staff member to serve veteran applicants  
                             • Utilize online chat technology  
                             • Communicate academic credit applied from other areas early in the acceptance process  
                             • Review polices on credit awarded for military occupations and training |
| Orientation                | • Create alternate sessions for older students  
                             • Provide only information that will apply to this audience  
                             • Open alternate sessions to all non-traditional students  
                             • Add sessions for veteran families |
On Campus Support

- University provide support for the SVA
- Provide workshops and support groups for veterans in transition and their dependents
- Assist with internship and job placement
- Develop work study/student worker program.

It Starts with Admissions

While most participants had an easy time getting admitted to their chosen university, some had trouble sending and receiving information while deployed. My participates report that many times service men and women have limited access to the internet. Institutions need to leverage what little time they have in front of a protentional student veteran via their websites. Information on admission requirements and procedures need to be as clear as possible in order to prevent confusion.

One possible way to foster a good relationship between veterans and admissions would be to designate one staff member for veteran applications. When an applicant indicates that they are a veteran on their application for admissions, they are routed to one person who will handle their admission process all the way through. This person could be cross trained in other areas such as financial aid and be able to assist the student in multiple areas. Cost of employees is always a factor; this staff member could also work with other student applications if the number of veteran applicants is not too taxing.

Another helpful feature would be to employ the use of chat technology. Many companies have a chat feature that allows site users to speak directly with an agent via a chat link on the home page. This would allow potential students to ask admission questions at any time of day; allowing for almost instant answers without having to compose all questions in a long email and then wait days or even weeks for a response. This would allow not only service members to
make better decisions about what institution they will attend, but also it may assist other non-traditional students gain answers to questions more readily.

Once a student has applied and their application has been reviewed, it is also important for the university to communicate the academic credit will be given for past college work and/or military credit and experience, if any. This will let the potential student know what they are coming in with and what they have left towards completing a degree.

Institutions should also review their policies on awarding credit for military occupations and trainings. Mississippi is working towards this with the military police and criminal justice programs across the state. Institutions are working with the military to obtain transcripts of training courses in order to evaluate if course credit can be awarded, (Chandler, 2019). Charlie and India both noted that that losing credit hours was disheartening in their transition.

Orientation

Almost half of the participants had very negative views of the orientation process, primarily because of the difference in age and perspective from even traditional transfer students. An alternate kind of orientation would be a great option for student veterans. They are looking for the bare bone’s information needed to get them started in classes. Student veterans are looking to get their ID and build their schedule and receive only the most important information to get started. They are not keen on playing icebreaker games with younger students.

Alternate programs could run concurrently with regular sessions but have an opt-in option for older students to be able to select an alternate path where they are placed into student groups with other attendees of the same age. Certain materials, such as alcohol use in residence halls could be skipped as these students are of age and will live off campus. More focus can be placed on need to know information such as where key offices are located on campus.
It is important that these sections of orientation not be limited to veterans only. These students have a hard time relating to other students. If they are allowed to segregate themselves from them completely, they will never feel like they belong on campus. These alternate sessions would be available to all non-traditional students. This allows more mature students to get only the information that is pertinent to them and be more comfortable in a group of people their own age. It would help provide opportunity for social integration with other students more similar in age and perspective.

Another aspect that would enhance a student veteran’s orientation experience would be to include their support network. This study found that student veterans drew most of their support from their family. Sessions specific to support those that support student veterans would be an added layer of assets for veterans in transition. Giving veteran family members resources to better support their student could make a big difference.

*Training for Faculty and Staff*

In order to fully support our veterans in transition to the student veteran role, faculty and staff need to understand where these students have been, what they have done, and their unique characteristics. Training on the needs of student veterans should be highly recommended for all faculty and staff. At the very least, training should be mandatory for all academic advisors in order to understand the paperwork that will need to be completed each semester in order for student veterans to receive their GI Bill.

The veteran population may be larger in some areas than others. Departments could work with the veteran support office to determine how many veterans they would be serving. This would allow them to train staff according to the students they would serve. This would
allow those that work with lots of veterans to have the training they need, but not require training for those who would not work with any student veterans.

It is important for faculty and staff to learn about veteran issues not from a text book or a pamphlet. Hearing it directly from a student veteran would drive home the need for additional support. Members of the SVA could be used to conduct the trainings. This will give faculty and staff a direct account of what it is like to be a student veteran. If the student is in financial need a stipend could be set up to compensate them for their time.

While this research is by no means exhaustive, it is a start to understanding the assets and liabilities student veterans possess in the 4S’s of Schlossberg. In the future, this study, combined with further research, could lead to the development of additional training methods for faculty and staff. By arming faculty and staff on this knowledge, they will be better equipped to serve the student veteran population.

On Campus Support

Students need a great deal of support during this time of transition. Based on the findings of this study, students received most of their support from family and fellow student veterans as well as the SVA. The students who participated in SVA felt it gave them a great level of support not only in navigating GI Bill paperwork but also as a sounding board of like-minded people for support in personal issues. One area that was lacking in support was the university community.

With SVA being a major source of support for student veterans, it is important for university to support their campus chapter of SVA. Based on Goodman et al.’s (2006) suggestions for support, additional support groups and workshops for this specific type of transition would also be very helpful for the student veterans. It would also be helpful to bring in family members and dependents that are using service member benefits through transfer of
entitlement. This would give veterans a way to connect with traditional students who have a better idea of what a veteran goes through. It would also be crucial for on-campus counselors to be trained in the needs of student veterans.

On campus support could also come in the form of financial support. Eleven of the fifteen participants struggled with finances. One idea would be for universities to work with local businesses to help veterans find paid internships or part time jobs to offset some of their expenses. Another option would be to find work study positions for student veterans. The VA does offer a veteran work study program, but the student can only work in offices serving veterans (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2019). While this does allow to earn money, it does not allow them to integrate into the general student population. If the universities could add a program that would coordinate work study and student worker positions outside of their office for those in need this would be another level of financial support.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

Although this study filled in a gap in the research involving student veteran transition, further research is needed to better understand this population. In my opinion, four areas need to be further explored: 1) transition for female student veterans, 2) effects of spirituality in transition, 3) cooling off period, and 4) further development of a veteran transition model.

*Transition for female student veterans*

The first need in research involves female student veterans. While I was able to recruit three female veterans in my study, two more than all the studies I found, this is not enough to make any assumptions about female student veteran transition. Schlossberg discusses gender in the self section of the 4S’s. The fact that males and females handle transition differently needs to be further explored with the student veteran population. Further research needs to be conducted
with female student veterans in order to address their specific transition needs as well as determine what additional support mechanisms they require.

*Spirituality*

Spirituality is another aspect discussed by Schlossberg in the self S of the 4S’s. While several of my participants mentioned aspects of their spirituality, it was not discussed further. Spirituality is a huge part of society. While I was not directly looking for this aspect in my literature review, there were no studies directly addressing spirituality in transition for student veterans. Research exploring the effects of spirituality on student veteran transition would be very interesting and could uncover another way to support this population.

*Cooling off period*

This phenomenon presented itself during my preliminary study. It seemed odd to me that many student veterans chose to enter school within days of being discharged from the military. Moving from the military lifestyle to that of a civilian seemed to be hard enough, so it was hard for me to understand why a veteran would want to undergo the stress of becoming a student simultaneously. I dubbed the time taken to adjust to civilian life before entering college the “cooling off period.” How do they wait longer if they don’t have money to wait? Could there be a campus program that takes veterans into work-study, as a transition for example.

As I conducted more interviews, the time between service discharge and entering college ranged from entering school before being formally discharged from the military to several years after. The differences in the cooling off period and its effects on transition did not present as a major theme in this study, however I do feel it could play a role in a veteran’s transition. For example, Hotel took several years off between service and college and wished he would have started classes sooner. India on the other hand only took two months off and said it was the
longest two months of her life. Further research needs to be conducted to determine if the cooling off period is significant in student veteran transition and if so, determine what the ideal amount of time needed to make transition go more smoothly.

Further development of a veteran transition model

As I worked through applying my research findings to Schlossberg’s Transition Theory, and after a discussion with my dissertation chair, we realized that a version of Schlossberg specific to student veterans would be helpful. Further studies would need to be conducted to verify my findings and see if what I found applies in other geographical locations and different types of institutions. If similar themes emerge in other studies, materials could be developed to assist higher education professional in understanding the transition of student veterans.

Summary

This qualitative research study has explored the transition story of student veterans at public institutions in the state of Mississippi. A phenomenological approach was used in order to gain insight into the student veterans’ lived experiences. The study attempted to address the following research questions: 1) How do student veterans describe their transition experience? 2) How effectively do public universities support veterans in their transition experience? 3) How might public universities improve support services for veterans? The resulting themes were then applied to Schlossberg’s Transition Theory in order to have lens through which to view the transition of a student veteran.

Data was collected from fifteen participants through a semi-structured interview. These interviews were transcribed and the data reviewed. Through this review five themes were identified: 1) Trouble Relating to other Students, 2) Lasting Effects of Military Service, 3)
Financial Struggles, 4) Types of Support, and 5) Institutional Interaction. These themes echoed themes discovered through the literature review and mapped into Schlossberg’s Theory.

As a result of these themes, and their mapping to Schlossberg’s Theory suggestions were made to higher education institutions that also echoed suggestions made in previous research studies. These suggestions address higher education administrators as well as faculty and staff. Suggestions for further research were also given. I can hope that this research is helpful to administrators in my state of Mississippi in order to make us the best there is at supporting this amazing population. They willingly gave up a portion of their lives to protect our nation, the least we can do is support them in their efforts in higher education. God Bless the men and women of our armed forces.
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Appendix
Appendix A: Recruiting Email

Hello,
My name is Kelley Jenkins and I am a Doctoral student at the University of Mississippi. I am interested in describing the transition experience of student veterans at a public institution in Mississippi. In order to complete this study, I am asking for participants in an hour-long interview. The interview questions will focus on how you adjusted to college and civilian life after your service. Audio recordings will be made of the interview in order to hear your transition experience story. If you are interested in helping me with this project, please contact me at kdjames@olemiss.edu and I will explain the project to you and will address any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,
Kelley Jenkins
Appendix B: Study Information Sheet

INFORMATION SHEET

Title: Transition Stories of Student Veterans

Investigator
Kelley J. Jenkins, M.A.
Department of Leadership & Counselor Education, School of Education
The University of Mississippi
(662) 816-1435
kdjames@olemiss.edu

Advisor
Dr. Amy Wells-Dolan, PhD.
Department of Leadership & Counselor Education, School of Education
137 Guyton
The University of Mississippi
(662) 915-5710

☐ By checking this box, I certify that I am 18 years of age or older.

Description
I am interested in describing the transition experience of student veterans at a public institution in Mississippi. In order to complete this study, we are asking you to participate in an hour-long interview. The interview questions will focus on how you adjusted to college and civilian life after your service. Audio recordings will be made of the interview in order to hear your transition experience story. I will explain the project to you and will address any questions or concerns.

Cost and Payments
The interview will take approximately an hour to conduct. Other than your time, there are no additional costs for your participation in this study.

Risks and Benefits
If your transition to the college setting was problematic, the questions may be difficult to answer. The information gained from your participation can provide a better understanding of the issues veterans face when transitioning to college, and allow for better decision making in working with student veterans.

Confidentiality
Your name will not appear in any notes related to this study. Only your age, gender, and branch and years of service will be used in the narrative. To further prevent you from being identified, you will be given a pseudonym and will be referred to as such throughout the study. By using these precautions, I do not believe you will be able to be identified from any of the data I may reveal.

Right to Withdraw
You do not have to volunteer for this study, and there is no penalty if you refuse. If you start the study and decide that you do not want to finish, just tell the experimenter. Whether or not you
participate or withdraw will not affect your current or future relationship with the School of Education, or with the University, and it will not cause you to lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

**IRB Approval**
This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482 or irb@olemiss.edu.

**Statement of Consent**
I have read and understand the above information. By completing the survey/interview I consent to participate in the study.
Appendix C: Interview Protocol Version 1

Interview Questions
1. Describe where you grew up?
2. As a child what were your career aspirations?
3. To what extent did your family have a military tradition?
4. What made you want to join?
   a. When did you join?
   b. In what branch did you serve?
   c. Why did you choose that branch over others?
   d. Tell me about any deployments?
      i. How difficult was it for you to be away from home?
      ii. What do you feel you missed while away?
5. What was your favorite part about serving in the military?
   a. Least favorite?
6. Why did you leave the service?
   a. What changes have you gone through since leaving?
   b. How did college fit into your plan after leaving?
7. Tell me about the process you went through to gather information about the schools you were considering attending.
8. Why did you choose this institution?
9. Tell me about your interactions with faculty/staff at the institution leading up to your admission?
10. What was orientation like for you?
11. Describe any hurdles you have faced with the institution?
    a. Admission process?
    b. Orientation?
    c. First classes?
    d. Living on campus commuting
    e. Family
12. How was your first couple of years here?
    a. What did you have the most trouble with during this time?
    b. How is college life different from military life?
    c. How has being a serviceman/woman made you different from other students?
13. Describe where you feel you are in your transition from military life to college life?
14. Looking ahead what are some challenges you anticipate?
    a. What are you looking forward to?
Appendix D: Interview Protocol Version 2

Interview Questions

1. As a child, what were your career aspirations?
2. Describe how college fit into your plans growing up?
   a. Why was a college education important/not important?
   b. What college did you want to attend and why?
3. To what extent did your family have a military tradition?
4. What made you want to join?
   a. When did you join?
   b. In what branch did you serve?
   c. Why did you choose that branch over others?
   d. Tell me about any deployments?
      i. How difficult was it for you to be away from home?
      ii. What do you feel you missed while away?
5. What was your favorite part about serving in the military?
   a. Least favorite?
6. Why did you leave the service?
   a. What changes have you gone through since leaving?
   b. Do you regret joining the military? Why or why not?
   c. How did college fit into your plan after leaving?
7. How did you determine what school you would attend?
8. Describe your admissions process?
9. What was orientation like for you?
10. Describe how you felt taking your first classes in college?
11. Tell me how your living situation effected your adjustment to college?
12. To what extent has your family played a role in your transition to college life?
13. How was your first couple of years here?
   a. What did you have the most trouble with during this time?
   b. How is college life different from military life?
   c. How has being a serviceman/woman made you different from other students?
14. Describe where you feel you are in your transition from military life to college life?
15. Looking ahead what are some challenges you anticipate?
   a. What are you looking forward to?
Appendix E: Interview Protocol Version 3

Interview Questions

1. How old are you?
2. What ethnicity do you identify as?
3. What gender do you identify as?
4. As a child, what were your career aspirations?
5. Describe how college fit into your plans growing up?
   a. Why was a college education important/not important?
   b. What college did you want to attend and why?
6. To what extent did your family have a military tradition?
7. What made you want to join?
   a. When did you join?
   b. In what branch did you serve?
   c. Why did you choose that branch over others?
   d. Tell me about any deployments?
      i. How difficult was it for you to be away from home?
      ii. What do you feel you missed while away?
8. What was your favorite part about serving in the military?
   a. Least favorite?
9. Why did you leave the service?
   a. What changes have you gone through since leaving?
   b. Do you regret joining the military? Why or why not?
   c. How did college fit into your plan after leaving?
10. How did you determine what school you would attend?
11. Describe your admissions process?
12. What was orientation like for you?
13. Describe how you felt taking your first classes in college?
14. Tell me how your living situation effected your adjustment to college?
15. To what extent has your family played a role in your transition to college life?
16. How was your first couple of years here?
   a. What did you have the most trouble with during this time?
   b. How is college life different from military life?
   c. How has being a serviceman/woman made you different from other students?
17. Describe where you feel you are in your transition from military life to college life?
18. Looking ahead what are some challenges you anticipate?
   a. What are you looking forward to?
Appendix F: Recruiting Handout

STUDENT VETERANS WANTED!

- Are you a veteran of any branch of service?
- Are you separated from the military?
- Did you enroll in a 4-year institution after leaving service?

If you answered yes to all three, I would love to talk to you!

Thank you for your service!

CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION

Researcher
Kelley J. Jenkins
(662) 816-1433
kdjames@olemiss.edu
WHAT AM I TRYING TO DO?

I am interested in describing the transition experience of student veterans at a public institution in Mississippi. In order to complete this study, we are asking you to participate in an hour-long interview. The interview questions will focus on how you adjusted to college and civilian life after your service. Audio recordings will be made of the interview in order to hear your transition experience story. I will explain the project to you and will address any questions or concerns.

About the Researcher

Kelley has worked in higher education administration for 12 years. Though not a veteran herself, she has worked with veterans during her career and has developed a passion for helping them be successful. When not working or studying, she lives with her husband and four year old daughter.

• Only costs an hour of your time.
• Can be in person or through Skype.
• Your data is confidential.

THIS STUDY IS IRB APPROVED

The researcher has gone through special training and approvals to ensure you are safe in your participation.

Protocol # 175-028

WITHDRAW AT ANY TIME

Participation is strictly voluntary. If you elect to start but do not want to finish the study it will not adversely affect you in any way.
VITA

Kelley J. Jenkins

Work Experience

Assistant to the Dean
Oct. 2013 - Present
University of Mississippi School of Applied Sciences, Oxford, MS
- In my current position, I supervise five full time staff members on Desoto, Tupelo, and Oxford campuses. Our office is responsible for a number of processes including change of major/minor/emphasis requests, requests to transfer credit, request for course substitutions and most importantly letters of intent to graduate. Our office is responsible for verifying that all students have completed their needed course requirements and certifying them as graduates to the Registrar’s Office.
- Our office is also responsible for planning and carrying out our yearly commencement ceremony. This involves working with several offices including University Events, Police, and the Registrar’s Office.
- I also serve as the secretary for our Curriculum Committee. I keep detailed records of all proposed changes. Once approved, I am responsible for entering these changes into the Academic Council Workflow system and tracking them through the process. This involves working heavily with our academic department’s faculty and chairs.
- Working one-on-one with students is also a big part of my job. When student request to be enrolled in more than the allowed hours for a given term, they must meet with me for approval. Students who are requesting to withdraw after the deadline must also meet with me for approval.
- This position also coordinators advising for all new student orientations session as well as regular advising periods. This involves meeting with new students and their families as well as making sure all degrees have adequate staffing to cover their student advising load.
- I am also responsible for creating, recruiting for, and managing our Student Ambassador Team. This team writes letters to admitted students and meet with students at on-campus recruiting events.
- I also coordinate with Admissions to set our recruiting schedule and staff each event.

Assistant Registrar
Assistance Duties Added
April 2009-Oct. 2013
February 2012
University of Mississippi Registrar’s Office, Oxford, MS
- This is a supervisory position in which three employees reported to me. Once my additional duties were added this number increased to seven full time employees and three student employees. The areas I supervised included transfer equivalency, transcripts, document imaging, certification, and veteran student benefits. I was responsible for assigning tasks to each employee and assuring that the assignments were completed in a timely manner. My duties also included approving each employee’s time sheet and granting any requests for leave time. As a supervisor, I was also responsible for training new employees. In my tenure, I have trained five individuals in their new positions.
- In addition to my supervisory duties, I was also in charge of the process of transfer equivalency. I oversaw the process of adding new courses and agreements to the SAP system. Once a course has been identified as being new, I added it to the SAP system. Once a month, I ran a report of new subjects that did not have an Ole Miss equivalent assigned to them. I looked at each of these courses, determined which department should make a decision on how it will equate, added it to the correct report, and sent each department the report of courses needing agreements in their area. Once the determinations were made, the departments inform me and I added the agreement to the system.
- With my additional duties, I also took on the processing of residency applications. When current students became eligible to receive residency for tuition purposes, they submitted their application and supporting documents to me. Once a student had met all requirements, I was responsible for making the changes in the system and notifying Financial Aid and the Bursar’s Office. If a student did not meet the requirements,
their application was denied. If they wish to appeal, all documentation came to me and I forwarded it to our appeals committee. These decisions involved consulting the University’s legal counsel.

- I also oversaw the Registrar Office’s side of transfer orientation. This process began approximately two weeks before each session. Once a student signed up for orientation, their name was added to a list. My staff was responsible for downloading this list and ensuring that each student’s equivalency was completed before they attend orientation. On the day of orientation, I was present at check-in in order to meet with any student who did not sign up for the orientation and instruct them in what to do next.

**Transfer Credit Assistant**

*July 2007-April 2009*

**University of Mississippi Registrar’s Office, Oxford, MS**

- In this position, I had the task of maintaining the records of all students who have transfer credit from other institutions. This involves not only students who have completed an Associate’s Degree, but also current University of Mississippi students who attend summer classes elsewhere. These courses must be added to the student’s electronic file and run through the process called equivalency.
- Under certain circumstances, communications must be made with other departments to ensure the credit being transferred is acceptable. This requires a good working relationship with faculty and staff in other areas of campus.
- I also had the task of communicating with the Office of Information Technologies. When courses that have never been previously transferred to the University of Mississippi were received, I contacted IT and requested that the new courses be added to our system. I also kept accurate records so that when these courses were ready to be added, they were entered into the correct file.

**Senior Records Clerk**

*July 2006-July 2007*

**University of Mississippi Registrar’s Office, Oxford, MS**

- In this position, I was in charge of maintaining and correcting the records of all students attending the University of Mississippi. This included but is not limited to: entering change of grade cards, executing forgiveness policy requests, running transfer equivalency on transfer work, entering study abroad grades, and general up keep of transcripts.
- I was also in charge of handling the checking of all records of new students through a process called mark-off. In this process, each new student’s name was marked off on a master list when their folder was received in the Registrar’s Office.

**Admissions Specialist**

*May 2006-July 2006*

**University of Mississippi Registrar’s Office, Oxford, MS**

- I was responsible for entering all transfer students’ past course work into the SAP system. This position was on a temporary basis.

**Spirit Coordinator Student Aid**

*Jan. 2006- May 2006*

**University of Mississippi Athletics, Oxford, MS**

- This position was on an intern basis. In this area I assisted the Spirit Coordinator in daily activities such as answering phones, filing, and record keeping.
- I also kept accurate files of all cheerleading and Rebelette (dance team) prospects.
- The task of entering contact information for dance and cheer clinic participants was under my care as well as keeping track of the receipts for clinic fees and deposing the funds to the proper accounts.

**Sports Marketing Intern**

*Nov. 2005-May 2006*

**Rebel Sports Marketing, Oxford, MS**

- In the internship I assisted in the execution of marketing promotions during Ole Miss Basketball, Baseball, and Softball games. These promotions included firing t-shirts from the prize cannon, throwing t-shirts to the crowd, finding and assisting contestants in several competitions, as well as handing out pizzas to the fans of the game.

**Professional Memberships**

- **National Academic Advising Association (NACADA)**
  *Nov. 2015-Present*
- **American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACROA)**
  *Jan. 2010-Oct. 2013*
Mississippi Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (MACROA) April 2010-Oct. 2013

Professional Writing & Presentations
- School of Applied Sciences Student Guide to Degree Audit April 2016
- School of Applied Sciences Adviser’s Guide to Degree Audit Sep. 2014
- MACROA Presenter April 2011
  “A Day at Disney Customer Service from the Back Lot” July 2011
- Registrar & Admissions In-Service Presenter
  “A Day at Disney Customer Service from the Back Lot” Dec. 2010
- Training Manual for Transfer Credit Assistant June 2010
- Frequently Asked Question for Transfer Students
  Flyer for incoming transfer Students April 2008
- Training Manual for Senior Records Clerk

Teaching Experience
- Instructor EDHE 101 Spring 2011 & Spring 2010
  Academic Skills for College
- Instructor EDHE 105 Fall 2010 & Fall 2017
  The Freshmen Year Experience
- Instructor of Record EDLD 101 Spring 2008
  Academic Skills for College
  - As part of my Master’s Degree curriculum, I was required to complete 150 hours of higher education experience, called a practicum. My area of study was teaching a section of EDLD 101: Essential Study Skills for College. I developed lessons, quizzes, and tests for 17 students on academic probation. This class met three times a week for 50 minutes each class period.
- Assistant Color Guard Instructor Fall 2007
  - During the fall of 2007 I served as the Assistant Color Guard Instructor for the Ole Miss Marching Band. I was a member of the Color Guard line during my four years as an undergraduate student, and was asked to return in this capacity. In this position, I was responsible for calling roll, supervising warm up, and correcting any issues the students had during marching rehearsals.

Other Pertinent Experience

Disney Travel Agent June 2013-Present
Independent Consultant, Affiliate of Academy Travel
- In this part-time position, I assist clients in planning and booking Disney vacations. I am a graduate of the College of Disney Knowledge and have been trained in all Disney travel destinations including: Disney World, Disney Land, Disney Cruise Lines, Adventures by Disney, and Aulani Disney Resort and Spa located in Ko Olina, Hawaii.

Head Music Teacher for AWANA Jan. 2010-May 2013
New Prospect Baptist Church, Oxford, MS
- This is a volunteer position at my church. AWANA is a children’s program that runs for two hours each Wednesday night. I am in charge for coordinating the opening ceremony and closing ceremonies each week as well as developing a ten-fifteen minute lesson for three classes of children. The age range of these children is age four to the completion of sixth grade.

Children’s Committee Chairman Sep. 2003-Sep. 2004
New Prospect Baptist Church, Oxford, MS
- In this volunteer position I supervised six other volunteers in creating and maintaining all programs for the children of my church. The ages of these children ranged from birth to completion of the sixth grade. During my tenure, we held a church wide fall festival, several trips, and many other activities. This committee was also in charge of maintaining the church nursery.

Vacation Bible School Director June 2004-July 2006

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New Prospect Baptist Church, Oxford, MS
  o  As VBS Director I was in charge of recruiting teachers to staff seven classrooms and serve over one hundred children. This task also involved organizing food and kitchen staff in order to provide a meal each night of Bible School. I served in this position for three years and each Bible school ran for five nights with a sixth night devoted to a commencement ceremony.

Tau Beta Sigma Chapter President  May 2005-May 2006
University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS
  o  In this elected position I was in charge of conducting all meetings and communicating the minutes of the meeting to the chapter sponsor. This organization is a national service sorority, so I was also required to organize service projects. During my service, the chapter volunteered at the Salvation Army and ran the Mid-South Honor Band Clinic. I was president over thirty members.

Tau Beta Sigma Chapter Vice President  May 2004-May 2005
University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS
  o  As Vice President, I was in charge of the recruitment and education of all new members. During this time I supervised the education and initiation of seventeen new members.

Education
Doctorate of Philosophy  Higher Education and Student Personnel  Expected May 2020
Teaching Cognate in Integrated Marketing Communications
The University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS
GPA: 3.94

Master of Arts  Higher Education and Student Personnel  May 2009
The University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS
GPA: 3.85

Bachelor of Business Administration  Marketing  May 2006
The University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS
GPA: 3.97