Faculty Attitudes and Behaviors Towards Student Veterans

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Abstract

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2013), approximately 11% of undergraduate students reported having a disability in the 2007-2008 academic year. Of these students, veterans reported having disabilities more than their non-veteran counterparts (5% vs. 3%)[1]. This study investigates faculty members' attitudes and behaviors toward student veterans pursuing postsecondary education. Over half a million U.S. troops have returned from the wars in the Middle East and opted to use their GI-bill benefits to enroll in college. Many of these students face common post-war experiences such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI). Previous research has shown that mental health issues led student veterans to perceive faculty as judging them unfairly, but little is known about what faculty actually think of student veterans. Using survey data collected from 160 instructors at a community college and four-year university, we estimate structural equation models to explain the associations among faculty members' prior contact with the military, their attitudes toward student veterans and willingness to help them, and their treatment of military-related issues in the classroom. The results reveal that faculty who have greater contact with the military in their own lives discuss the military more often in class and are more willing to help student veterans because they know more of them. Policy recommendations in line with Universal Design (UD) are offered for training faculty who do not have contact with the military and need to be aware of special issues related to student veterans in their classrooms, such as helping students who are dealing with visible and invisible injuries related to their military service.

Keywords: veterans, faculty attitudes, and postsecondary education

The number of students with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary education is continuing to grow (Synder & Dillow, 2010). In the 2008-09 academic year, over 700,000 students with disabilities were enrolled in postsecondary institutions (Raue & Lewis, 2011). Of these, 86% were students with specific learning disabilities, followed by students who reported mobility limitation/orthopedic impairments (76%) and mental illnesses (76%, Raue & Lewis, 2011). In a separate study, 96% of all postsecondary institutions enrolled student veterans or their dependents in the 2012-13 academic year (Queen & Lewis, 2014). About half of a sample of student veterans participating in the Student Veterans of America (SVA) Million Records Project reported earning postsecondary degrees or certificates (Cate, 2014). In the 2007-08 academic year, approximately 5% of students with disabilities identified themselves as veterans (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

Postsecondary institutions throughout the U.S. have seen an influx of veterans joining the ranks of the student body, in large part due to the availability of tuition assistance through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Unlike previous versions of the education bills, the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill extended benefits to cover tuition and expenses at institutions of higher education for honorably discharged veterans who served 90+ days of active duty since September 2001, their spouses and their children (Grossman, 2009). With armed forces having largely exited Iraq and military presence continuing to decrease in Afghanistan, approximately one-half million returning veterans have opted to use their post-9/11 G.I. bill benefits in recent years (Sander, 2012). In a study examining the first implementation of the new GI bill, nearly 24% of survey respondents cited the existence of this legislation as a primary reason for enrolling in postsecondary education (Steele, Salcedo, & Coley, 2010). Research has documented the impact

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of military service on student veterans' health as well as their experiences in school (Elliott, 2015; Elliott, Gonzalez, & Larsen 2011; 2012). This study moves forward to explore faculty member's attitudes and behaviors toward student veterans in the interest of linking faculty input to student success.

Many veterans who enroll in postsecondary institutions have endured the consequences of the Global War on Terror (GWT) such as extensive physical wounds, mental health issues and traumatic brain injuries (Church, 2009). Concentration and memory problems, depression and anxiety, and issues related to impulse control and irritability are common manifestations of the GWT (Church, 2009). In a study on *Wounded Warriors*[2], participants reported psychological/emotional, health-medical, learning disabilities and mobility issues as primary disability categories (Vance & Miller, 2009). Experiencing military-related injuries may negatively impact the educational performance of student veterans, who tend to have lower grade point averages (GPAs) than their non-veteran counterparts (Durdella & Kim, 2012) and relatively low completion rates of their postsecondary programs (Cate, 2013). With such a large number of student veterans with disabilities enrolling in postsecondary education, there is an opportunity to re-shape Disability Services (DS) offered to all students with disabilities (Madaus, Miller & Vance, 2009). The Office of Civil Rights (OCR), for instance, announced the *Wounded Warriors Initiative* (Monroe, 2008) which pledged to support student veterans with disabilities by encouraging postsecondary institutions to adopt innovative approaches to serving this special population. The OCR has also stressed two important points: (1) veterans must be proactive in notifying their institution of their needs, and (2) just because a veteran was *not* determined as disabled by the military at the completion of service does not mean that he or she is ineligible for Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Section 504) or the American with Disabilities Act Amendments of 2008 (ADAA; U.S., Department of Education, 2008).

Such efforts to make postsecondary institutions more veteran-friendly would be well-advised to incorporate the core principles of Universal Design (UD, Center for Universal Design, 1997). The principles of UD emphasize making environments *flexible* for individuals of diverse abilities, including veterans. Because many student veterans are coping with post-deployment disabilities, enrolling and studying at a campus that implements UD would potentially make the transition to campus life easier. It is important to note, however, that much of the work on UD has focused primarily on creating malleable physical environments, such as by altering a space to better suit the needs of the students with disabilities or by using more ergonomically-sound desks and chairs. More recently, however, the work on UD has shifted to focus on instruction[3] (e.g., course planning, curriculum and assessment development).

Because student veterans returning from the most current wars often struggle with both physical and psychological injuries, it is imperative that instructors take UD principles into account when preparing class lectures and activities. It has been shown that military-related injuries impact student veterans' capacity to assimilate into campus life. For instance, symptoms of both post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression increase the likelihood that student veterans will feel uncomfortable in situations such as crowded auditoriums, unfairly judged, and like they do not fit in on campus (Elliott, 2015; Elliott, Gonzalez, & Larsen 2011; 2012). In addition, student veterans feel uncomfortable when their professors' version of military history departs significantly from their first-hand experience (Gonzalez, 2012) and when they are singled out as representatives of the military (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell 2008). Student veterans also feel that differences between conservative versus liberal perspectives on military-related issues result in unpleasant interactions with faculty members. Clashes between liberal professors and conservative students lead students to feel that faculty did not understand them (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009; DiRamio, et al., 2008). A substantial proportion of faculty identify themselves as liberal or left (Hamilton & Hargens, 1993), especially in the social sciences and humanities (Harris Poll, 2004).

Altering the learning environment to implement principles of UD could potentially assist in alleviating student veterans' feelings of not fitting in. For instance, 'a community of learners' encourages dialogue and communication between peers, as well as with faculty. Such a learning environment may promote relationship-building and feelings of belonging. Some techniques linked with the 'community of learners' principle include the creation of structured study groups, email lists, and chat rooms. Additionally, many of Burgstahler's (2012) performance indicator categories are applicable to service members enrolled in campus courses. For example, instructors could strive to create a safe and supportive class climate so that student veterans can inform their instructor of any physical, mental health, or learning issues they may be experiencing. Offering instructional content in various modes is also likely to serve a student veteran population, as sitting in a classroom for long periods

may be difficult for those with military-related physical injuries. In regards to feedback, student veterans are likely to benefit from receiving ongoing constructive feedback from their instructors. Because it has often been quite a while since many service members have been in a classroom, requiring that students submit drafts of written assignments prior to their due date is likely to assist student veterans in adjusting to their instructor's expectations and their role as a student.

To date, most research on student veterans has focused on their military background and other individual characteristics. However, success in college is not only determined by student input. The academic environment also plays a part in determining student outcomes (Astin, 1993). The present study builds on research about student veterans' college experiences to incorporate faculty input. To our knowledge, only one published study has examined faculty members' attitudes toward student veterans, finding that instructors with more negative feelings towards the military were more likely to report that they did not respect the service of veterans (Barnard-Brak, Bagby, & Sulak, 2011). In addition, they were less likely to feel confident and prepared to help student veterans who experienced PTSD (Barnard-Brak, et al., 2011). These results demonstrated how faculty members' perceptions of those who serve in the military can impact their perceived ability to work with student veterans who are affected by the consequences of their service.

The present study explores what predicts the manner in which military-related issues are treated in the classroom as well as faculty member's willingness to help student veterans who are taking their classes. Predictors included faculty members' existing contact with the military, contact with student veterans, and attitudes toward student veterans with the expectation that each of these predictors will affect how military issues are treated in the classroom as well as faculty members' willingness to help student veterans. By "helping" student veterans, we are referring to behaviors that acknowledge student veterans' likelihood of living with mild to severe disabilities as a result of their service, accompanied by a willingness to assist such students in dealing with them. Specifically, we expect that faculty members who think highly of student veterans, who have contact with the military outside of academia, and who have relatively more contact with student veterans will be more likely to address military issues in class in a way that does not alienate student veterans. We also expect these same factors will increase faculty members' willingness to help student veterans, such as by listening to them, developing accommodations for them, and directing them to sources of assistance (e.g., disability resources) where appropriate. In addition, we control for a number of faculty characteristics that may be correlated with these two outcomes, including gender, age, job rank, years teaching, teaching locale (community college vs. a university), political party affiliation, fiscal conservatism, and social conservatism.

Method

The Institutional Review Boards at both academic institutions from which data were collected approved this study. All instructors (311) from a two-year community college (n=239) and a four-year university (n=72) who taught courses that met general education requirements were recruited to participate in the survey between February and May 2012. Instructors of required courses such as English 101 were targeted to increase the odds that they would have had student veterans in their courses since most students take such core courses during their first two years of college.

The tailored design method (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009) was followed to maximize the response rate. Instructors were contacted via their institutional email addresses and invited to either complete an online survey or to request a hardcopy in the mail. The invitation included an information sheet that advised potential participants of the nature of the study prior to taking part in the survey. Consent was implied by survey participation. Each instructor was contacted a total of four times, including the initial invitation and reminders. A total of 160 out of 311 (51.4% response rate) instructors completed the survey.

Since this survey was the first of its kind of which we were aware, we developed the survey items directly related to student veterans ourselves. Several faculty members and staff who worked with veterans pretested the survey by completing it and reporting what the questions meant to them. Using their feedback, we modified the questions until we were reasonably certain that they captured our intent.

The first set of questions in the survey asked faculty how much contact they had with the military throughout their lives, including whether or not they had ever been in the military (0 = no, 1 = yes), and how many of their close friends and family had been in the military (1 = none, 2 = 1-2, 3 = 3-4, 4 = 5 or more). We then asked if any of their friends or family had been (1) physically wounded during military service (0 = no, 1 = yes); (2) emotionally injured by military service (0 = no, 1 = yes); or (3) killed in service (0 = no, 1 = yes). Next, we asked faculty about their on-the-job contact with student veterans, including how many student veterans they knew (from 1 'none' to 4

"five or more"), and how well they knew them (from 1 "not at all" to 4 "very well").

In the interest of gauging faculty's attitudes toward student veterans, we asked them how they viewed student veterans in comparison to all other students. More specifically, we asked them to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that student veterans were (1) more deserving of a college education, (2) more serious about learning, and (3) more aware of global issues, each assessed on a four-point scale ranging from 1= Strongly Disagree to 4 = Strongly Agree.

The next set of questions addressed the manner in which the military came up in class so as to identify situations that might be perceived as offensive or insensitive by student veterans. First, faculty was asked how often military-related issues were covered in the class curriculum and how often they shared their views on the post 9/11 wars (from 1 = "never" to 4 = 'often'). Then, faculty were asked how much they agreed that student veterans should know their positions on the post 9/11 wars. These items were intended to capture moments described in earlier research by student veterans when faculty alienated them by criticizing the very wars in which students had recently served (Gonzalez, 2012). Lastly, we asked faculty how much they agreed that instructors should ask student veterans to identify themselves, because students reported that being identified in class as a veteran made them uncomfortable (Gonzalez, 2012).

In order to gauge how willing faculty members would be to give extra help to student veterans, we asked how much faculty agreed that they should (1) make sure student veterans are doing okay in class; (2) mention on-campus services for student veterans in class; and (3) be responsible for understanding the needs of student veterans. We also asked how likely faculty would be to attend a voluntary seminar on the needs of student veterans (from 1 = "very unlikely" to 4 = "very likely").

Lastly, we asked faculty to describe themselves in terms of their gender, age, job rank, years teaching, whether they taught at the community college or at the university, their political party affiliation, how fiscally conservative vs. liberal they were, and how socially conservative vs. liberal they were.

Mplus 6.12 software was used to estimate latent factors with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and causal models of the relations among latent factors with structural equation modeling (SEM) (Muthén, & Muthén, 2010). Multiple-item measures were estimated using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) because this method distinguishes shared variance among items from idiosyncratic (or error) variance specific to a one-item or subset of items. We used SEM to estimate relationships among the latent factors because it allowed us to specify relationships between factors as bi-directional, directional, or indirect. Given that this study was largely exploratory, it was important to use a flexible method of data analysis. Model fit was evaluated with multiple indices including the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and the ratio of the Chi-square to the degrees of freedom. CFI values at or above .90 (Meyers, Gamst, & Guarino, 2006), RMSEA values at or below .05 (Kline, 1998), and Chi-Square/df values less than five (Wheaton, Muthén, & Alwin, 1977) represented good model fit.

Results

Descriptive statistics for all these variables are presented in Table 1. The sample was half male, half female with a broad age range from 24 to 83 and a mean of 50.1 (SD = 13.94). The typical respondent was an instructor (M = 2.01, SD =.75) and 70% of the sample taught at the community college. The average years teaching was 13.1 (SD = 10.39). Most respondents were Democrats (52.4%), while 13% were registered Independents, 12.3% were Republicans, and the remainder subscribed either to a different political party or to no party in particular. Lastly, respondents were more fiscally conservative (M = 2.85, SD = 1.19) than socially conservative (M = 1.87, SD = .93).

The CFA measurement models of faculty member's contact with the military, on-the-job contact with student veterans, attitudes toward student veterans versus other students, treatment of military-related matters in the classroom, and willingness to help student veterans are presented in Table 2. The overall model fit was within the guidelines specified above. Each CFA model had a reference indicator fixed at 1.0 to establish the metric for the latent factor, and each additional indicator was a significant predictor of the latent factor.

Next, the relationships among the latent factors were explored using structural equation modeling (SEM). The two dependent CFA models were how military issues are treated in the class and how willing instructors are to help student veterans. The unexplained variance in each of these CFA models was allowed to co-vary. All the predictors, including the other three CFA models and the faculty characteristics presented in Table 1, were regressed on each dependent CFA model. Predictors that were known to be significantly correlated with the outcomes but did not have direct pathways predicting them in the SEM

model were explored to see if they were indirectly related to the outcomes. For example, contact with the military was not directly related to willingness to help student veterans in the SEM model. However, tests of alternative models revealed that it was indirectly related to willingness to help via a mediator (i.e., how well the faculty member knew student veterans). The final model included both direct and indirect pathways that were identified through the modeling process as significant predictors of how the military comes up in class and faculty members' willingness to help student veterans. Predictors that were neither directly nor indirectly related to the outcomes were removed from the model and not included in the final results.

The SEM findings are displayed in Figure 1. The overall model fit was within the set guidelines. Two-headed arrows indicate the covariance estimated between exogenous variables (that are not predicted by other variables) and the two endogenous, dependent CFA models.

Standardized coefficients are presented with their level of statistical significance indicated by asterisks. Exogenous factors in the model included faculty member's contact with the military, teaching at the community college (vs. the university), and attitudes toward student veterans.

The results of the SEM are summarized as follows. The more contact with the military a faculty member had outside of academia, the more often military-related issues came up in class. In addition, faculty members who had more contact with the military were more likely to know student veterans well, and the better acquainted faculty members were with student veterans, the more willing they were to help them. Furthermore, the more highly faculty members thought of student veterans, the more likely it was that military issues came up in class, and the more likely it was that the faculty member was willing to help student veterans. It is important to note, however, that faculty members who reported being helpful to student veterans may have been more helpful to all students, including student veterans, than faculty who did not report being helpful. Finally, faculty members who taught at the community college as opposed to the four-year university were more willing to help student veterans. Most of the faculty characteristics were unrelated to the two outcomes, including gender, age, job rank, years teaching, political party affiliation, fiscal conservatism, and social conservatism.

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to explore the predictors of academic faculty members' treatment of the military in the classroom and their willingness to help a special population of students taking their classes (i.e., student veterans). Most existing research on veterans in postsecondary institutions has focused on the students themselves. The current study is only the second study to focus on faculty. Student veterans are at-risk of having academic difficulties, in part because of the health consequences of military service such as PTSD and depression. Given that student veterans, especially those coping with health problems, have cited issues with their professors as a source of feeling alienated on campus, it is important to analyze the complex issues surrounding student veterans in postsecondary institutions from the perspective of those who teach them and the environment in which they are taught

The results of this study highlight the importance of faculty members' contact with the military outside of academia. Prior contact with the military leads faculty members to get to know student veterans better, which in turn increases their willingness to help student veterans succeed in college. Such faculty members were also more likely to teach at a community college, and community college instructors in general tend to be more willing to help student veterans. While it is true that faculty members who taught at community colleges tended to have more contact with the military than university faculty, the two are not causally related and their influences (whether direct or indirect) on willingness to help student veterans are independent of one another. It is important to bear in mind that our findings reflect relative, not absolute, differences between faculty and that there most certainly are some faculty at four-year universities as well as faculty without any military experience who are willing to help student veterans.

Another important predictor of willingness to help student veterans was overall attitudes toward them, such as believing that they were more deserving of a college education given their military service. These results have important implications on how to improve student veterans' experiences on college campuses. Because student veterans may enter the academic environment with special needs, we recommend that colleges and universities committed to student veterans' success consider training their faculty on the military culture, as well as common experiences of those who have been in the military. *Veteran Ally* training (Osborne, 2014), for example, offers strategies for developing an informed and supportive network

of faculty and staff to serve as liaisons for student veterans on campus.

Postsecondary institutions across the nation have begun offering training for faculty and staff topics related to military services, such as mental health and physical health issues, as well as transitions from military to civilian life (Queen & Lewis, 2014). As they develop such programs, postsecondary institutions should enlist their disability resource centers in increasing faculty sensitivity to student veterans whose disabilities are often not visibly apparent. Such training could urge faculty to include statements in their syllabi that encourage student veterans to privately self-identity and self-advocate with their instructors early in the semester. In addition, the training could potentially change misconceptions faculty may hold that predispose them to view veterans negatively, thus improving faculty-student interactions, faculty members' attitudes toward student veterans and, in turn, their willingness to help them. In sum, training of faculty should emphasize how to help student veterans who qualify for disability services, yet enhancing faculty understanding of issues faced by student veterans in general, including those who are not disabled, may be broadly beneficial.

In addition to training faculty and staff, the overall university environment should be adaptable for all students, including those with disabilities. The principles of UD stress the importance of making an environment flexible and equitable for all individuals, with minimal need for adaption (Center for Universal Design, 1997). These principles hold true when serving students with disabilities, including student veterans. In 2001, the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD, n.d.) launched the Universal Design Initiative in support of constructing equitable and collaborative postsecondary learning environments that promote access to diverse populations.

Several universities across the nation are making great strides in UD for instruction. The University of Connecticut, for example, uses this approach when serving students with disabilities at their postsecondary institution. The Center for Postsecondary Education and Disabilities strongly suggests that learning environments should be infused with the Principles of Universal Design for Instruction (Scott, McGuire, & Shaw, 2001). This approach is based on the following nine principles: (1) equitable use, (2) flexibility in use, (3) simple and intuitive, (4) perceptible information, (5) tolerance for error, (6) low physical effort, (7) size and space for approach and use, (8) a community for learners, and (9) instructional climate. These principles, individually or in combination, emphasize planning and delivery of instruction to serve a diverse group of learners. For instance, creating an environment that is 'simple and intuitive' allows students to understand clearly how they will be graded in the course. An instructor who utilizes UDI Principles may provide his or her students with a grading rubric to clarify course expectations (Scott, McGuire & Shaw, 2001). By providing students with such information, students can focus entirely on learning the information being presented rather than making the task unnecessarily complicated.

It is important for faculty to be cognizant of the diversity of the student body they serve and be prepared to instruct students with special needs without compromising academic standards of the courses. For this reason, the University of Washington's Center for Universal Design in Education (UDE) has played a pivotal role in developing resources for faculty, including curriculum and assessment on how to best apply UD to the classroom. Burgstahler (2012) offers guidance on eight performance indicator categories for employing UD instruction. These indicators include: (1) class climate, (2) interaction, (3) physical environments and products, (4) delivery methods, (5) information resources and technology, (6) feedback, (7) assessment, and (8) accommodations. Class climate and interaction, for example, ensure an environment that encourages students to communicate their disabilities and needs with their instructor. Physical environment and delivery methods also support the UD philosophy by guaranteeing that classroom facilities and equipment are easily accessible to all students, and making sure that course content and materials are offered in multiple modes (e.g., lecture, field work, internet-based activities, etc.). In line with delivering content in multiple ways, Burgstahler (n.d.) describes how to integrate webpage development into course curriculum, including concerns faculty and students should keep in mind when developing webpages for diverse audiences (e.g., those who cannot operate a mouse, have audio impairments, etc.). Burgstahler (2012) also stressed the importance of providing students with regular feedback on their performance. For example, faculty could consider allowing students to submit sections of a complex project prior to its final due date for critique by the instructor or fellow students.

In line with Burgstahler's work, the American Council on Education (ACE, n.d.) recommends incorporating UD into learning environments for student veterans. For example, ACE recommends allowing audio recording devices in class to act as aids for students with concentration/memory problems, or giving short breaks during class sessions to minimize stressful

situations from arising (ACE). Branker (2009) suggests looking at the university environment, including the classroom, strategically. First and foremost, Branker emphasizes the importance of understanding the challenges that student veterans face in higher education. Once challenges are identified, Branker suggests brainstorming solutions, testing these ideas, evaluating their effectiveness, and implementing them on a larger scale. Branker goes on to stress the importance of merging good teaching and learning practice with UD principles for veteran-friendly postsecondary institutions, including components such as engagement efforts, mentoring, peer support, and leadership experiences needed for successful integration into student life. Many postsecondary institutions have begun to renovate existing features on their campuses to conform to UD principles, as well as provided opportunities for students, faculty and staff to give input during the planning stages (Raue & Lewis, 2011). Postsecondary institutions, however, did cite barriers to implementing UD features, including limited resources for training, costs associated with technology changes, and lack of incentives for faculty to alter their current teaching practices (Raue & Lewis, 2011).

Engagement of student veterans is crucial for their success in school. Recent data suggest that student veterans in their senior year were less engaged than their non-veteran peers and also viewed the campus environment as less supportive (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2010). In order for student veterans to thrive in postsecondary institutions, Lighthall (2012) stressed the importance of a supportive, informed and engaged faculty. Without a doubt, faculty behaviors and attitudes profoundly impact students' collegiate experience (Umbach & Wawrynski, 2005).

The greater willingness of community college instructors to help student veterans may reflect cultural differences between the two types of institutions of higher education, such as community college instructors being completely focused on teaching in contrast with university instructors who are often divided between teaching and scholarship. Although community colleges could improve their services for student veterans by streamlining them (Persky & Oliver, 2010), the structure of these educational settings are still better equipped to serve the needs of non-traditional students such as military veterans (Runmann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011). While there is only limited research on the differences between faculty members who teach at two-year community college versus four-year universities related to the student veteran population, research on transfer students suggests that students view community college and university faculty differently, with community college faculty being perceived as more helpful and interested in their students in comparison to university faculty (Bauer & Bauer, 1994; Townsend, 1995; Vaala, 1991). One factor that may differentiate how community college and university faculty are perceived is the size of their classes. Typically, community colleges have a smaller student-faculty ratio allowing for more personal interactions between students and faculty members. Research has also shown that transfer students often have difficulty making social connections with fellow students and faculty at larger four-year institutions (Britt & Hirt, 1999; Vaala, 1991). It is important to note, however, that community college students tend to be non-traditional students (i.e., older, more likely to be working and have more interruptions to their enrollment) (Britt & Hirt, 1999), all of which may influence whether students develop social connections on campus.

Our study also highlighted predictors of the classroom environment in terms of how often military-related issues came up in class. We found that faculty who had more contact with the military outside of academia and who had more positive attitudes toward student veterans discussed military-related issues in class, including being sure to share their views on the post-9/11 wars. These findings were unexpected given that we were attempting to capture the uncomfortable experiences that some student veterans have reported having with their instructors, which we expected would be more common among instructors with negative attitudes towards the military. In retrospect, our measures of the classroom environment were probably not subtle enough to differentiate between positive and negative student experiences in the classroom. As such, the results do not really explain what causes the uncomfortable aspects of the classroom that student veterans have cited. However, they did reveal that faculty members who were most familiar with the military through contact with it outside of academia were the most likely to address military-related issues in the classroom, including sharing their viewpoints on the post 9/11 wars.

Future Research and Limitations

Future research on faculty treatment of military-related matters should ask more detailed questions on a range of in-class behaviors that differentiate between course material that is perceived as supportive, neutral, or critical of the very wars in which the student veterans recently served, as well as of the veterans of those wars. It may be that faculty members who have greater contact with the military are better able to address the military in class in a manner that does not

alienate student veterans. In contrast, faculty with little contact with the military may not be equipped to address military-related issues in a way that is perceived as inclusive of, rather than dismissive of, student veterans. Again, training faculty on differences between the military and academic culture as well as the often traumatic experiences student veterans have recently had could address these types of problems.

Despite the unique contributions of this study, it is not without its limitations. The sample size was small (n = 160), with a response rate of 51%, and it may have over-represented faculty who had served in the military and those at community colleges. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all faculty, or to the institutions from which the data were collected, let alone community college and university faculty throughout the U.S. Additionally, the survey data are cross-sectional so the causal predictions highlighted in our model are only tentative, and must withstand the test of longitudinal panel data in which cause precedes effect in time. Finally, the survey was the first of its kind and therefore can be improved in several ways for future research on this subject. More information is needed on the ways in which military-related issues come up in class, as well as how faculty who know student veterans interact with them. Ideally, future research should link data from faculty to student outcomes so as to learn whether faculty can actually diminish (or exacerbate) the impact of military-related health problems on student veterans' academic success. Nonetheless, this study is a step toward connecting what is known about student veterans with the academic environment in which they often struggle to succeed.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlighted several factors that are related to the classroom environment and faculty members' willingness to help a special population of students with disabilities, student veterans. Having a connection with the military (i.e., through personal experience or the experiences of family members and friends) and having good impressions of student veterans is positively associated with how often military-related issues came up in class, and with the willingness of faculty to assist student veterans. However, only a minority of faculty has served in the military, so it is important to increase faculty members' knowledge and understanding of military culture and the consequences of war on veterans. The goal of training should not be to change faculty members' opinions regarding the military and its activities. Rather, the goal should be to sensitize faculty to the presence of student veterans in their midst, some with disabilities, who may react badly to wholesale criticism of the military and its veterans and who may need extra help succeeding in college. In so doing, faculty may play a key role in assisting veterans through the complex transition from military service to civilian life by maximizing their opportunity for academic achievement.

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Footnotes

[1] For the purpose of this paper, student veterans are defined as active-duty service members, members of the National Guard and Reserve, and veterans.

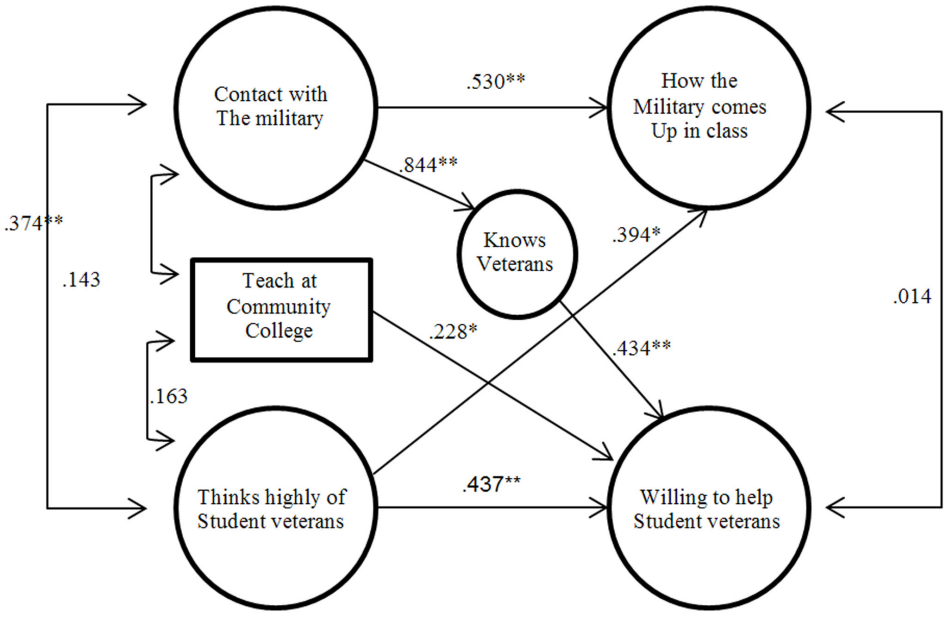
[2] Monroe (2008) defined "wounded warriors" as students enrolled in postsecondary institutions after serving in OIF, OEF or Operation Desert Storm.

[3] Although educators use the UDI acronym for UD for Instruction, the authors will use the acronym for all aspects of a UD environment, including instruction.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Faculty Participants

Sample Characteristics (*N*=160)	Min	Max	Percentage	Mean (*SD*)
Male	0	1	50.3%	
Age	24	83		50.10 (13.94)
Job Title (adjunct, instructor, professor)	1	4		2.01 (.75)
Teaches at a community college	0	1	70.0%	
Years teaching	1	47		13.10 (10.39)
Democrat	0	1	51.4%	
Independent	0	1	13.0%	
Republican	0	1	12.3%	
Other/no political party	0	1	23.3%	
Fiscal Conservative	1	5		2.85 (1.19)
Social Conservative	1	5		1.87 (.93)



Note. Model fit: RMSEA=.039; CFI= .90; Chi2/df=3.04; * $p < .01$; ** $p < .001$

Figure 1. Structural equation model of classroom environment and helpfulness.

Table 2

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (N=160)

	Min	Max	Percentage	Mean (*SD*)	Factor Loading
Faculty member's contact with the military					
Number of friends/family in the military, (1=0, 2=1-2, 3=3-4, 4=5+)	1	4		2.99 (.99)	1.000
Was faculty member ever in the military, 0=no, 1 =yes	0	1	18%		.877*
Were friends/family ever wounded in the military, 0=no, 1=yes	0	1	50%		1.223**
Were friends/family ever emotionally injured, 0=no, 1=yes	0	1	47%		1.276**
Were friends/family ever killed in service, 0=no, 1=yes	0	1	27%		1.129**
Faculty member's contact with student veterans					
How well do they know individual student veterans ("Not at all" to Very Well")	1	5		2.88 (.92)	1.000
How many student veterans fo they know ("None" to "More than Five")	0	3		2.06 (.92)	1.248**
Faculty member thinks highly of student veterans (vs. other students)					
Agrees that veterans are more deserving of a college education	1	4		2.59 (.86)	1.000
Agrees that veterans are more serious about learning	1	4		3.14 (.71)	1.051**
Agrees that veterans have a greater understanding of global issues	1	4		2.86 (.73)	1.101**
Faculty member's treatment of military-related issues in class					
How often does the military come up in class ("Never" to "Often")	1	4		2.22 (.97)	1.000
How often are views on post-9/11 wars shared in class ("Never" to "Often"	1	4		2.03 (.81)	1.005**
Agrees that student-veterans should know their position on post-9/11 wars	1	4		1.72 (.85)	.597*

Note. Model fit: RMSEA=.039; CFI= .90; Chi2/df=3.04; * $p < .01$; ** $p < .001$