An Emerging Population: Student Veterans in Higher Education in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

This paper, based on a qualitative study, explores the transition experiences of Post-9/11 Era military veterans from active duty military service to college students for the purpose of adding to the body of knowledge about this student population. The subjects, who voluntarily offered to participate, were 15 community college student/veterans and 10 four-year institution student/veterans. The themes which emerged from analysis of the interview transcripts were financial issues, interpersonal issues, academic issues, community issues, isolation, and inconsistency of information received from academic institutions.

Community college students reported high levels of interaction with faculty and virtually no interaction with other students, including other student/veterans, while the four-year institution students reported low levels of interaction with faculty, high levels of interaction with other student/veterans, and minimal interaction with nonveteran students. The information suggests the need and opportunity for continued in-depth studies of the student/veteran transition experience.

VETERANS AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Student/veterans represent a different population than previous beneficiaries of military education assistance or previous GI Bill recipients (Morreale, 2011). Today's student/veterans bring many challenges to higher education, such as relocation, academic skills, lack of continuity in education, physical issues, psychological issues, and social isolation (Hopkins, Herrmann, Wilson, Allen, & Malley, 2010). Financial concerns continue to be problematic for student/veterans. The Post-9/11 GI Bill does provide more generous benefits for education than did prior versions of military educational assistance packages. However, it does not eliminate these issues. The cost of supporting a family is still the veteran's responsibility. The resulting need for employment while enrolled in school provides an additional challenge. Although becoming a college student may represent a positive transition, the fact is that the experience can be difficult, if not overwhelming.

Direct input from student/veterans is the source of findings in the recent report on *Service Members in School* (Steele, Salcedo, & Coley, 2010). Their study, which had a sample size of 500, reflects that student/veterans identified multiple challenges when transitioning to the role of college student.

Transition

Transition involves reintegration into the civilian community after active duty service (Quillen-Armstrong, 2007; Stiglitz, 2008, p. 51). The changes from life in the military community to life as a civilian may include relocation, loss of social support systems, reintegration into civilian lifestyle, different or nonexistent health care services, and possibly a new job or career path. While adjusting to the civilian community the student/veteran may also be adjusting to life as a college student.

Although returning veterans may bring maturity and a broader understanding of global issues to the learning experience because of their military service (Byman, 2007), it is important for educators to understand the perceptions of the student/veterans as they transition to college students. Early awareness by the institutions of this population's needs provides opportunities for the college community to develop appropriate techniques to minimize attrition and increase the chances of success. This section of the literature review explores some of the transition experiences of student/veterans.

Studies that address the transition from secondary education to college indicate that the transition into higher education can be especially challenging for the adult learner who enters college after having a break in academic studies (Coreyman, 2001; Diyanni, 1997). This applies to

student/veterans who frequently experience a significant break in academic attendance as a result of the requirements of military service, which requires the student to readjust to the college environment and develop or recall appropriate study habits. Additionally, curriculum requirements may have changed during the student/veterans' service, requiring updating some academic skills.

Student/veterans experience a major change when they enter postsecondary education. Campus culture is quite different than military culture, so campus life, often referred to as campus culture, is one of the biggest adjustments for the student/veteran (Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011). The college environment is typically designed to encourage creativity and individualism (Rumann et al., 2011); independence and individuality are embraced in academic communities while the military structure requires conformity and adherence to predetermined behavior rules. Transition from a highly structured environment to a less structured environment may be problematic for some student/veterans and institutions need to be prepared to assist student/veterans with this potential difficulty. The relatively unstructured campus atmosphere can be an impediment to student veterans' abilities to work within the system. The military provides a highly structured, regulated, and well-documented environment. There is a schedule for every hour of every day. The steps necessary to accomplish a task or complete an assignment are provided in detail (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Although the institution may offer a comprehensive orientation program, timing constraints may prevent the student/veteran from attending the orientation so they may begin college without the benefit of an orientation. If the student/veteran does attend the orientation, the event is not typically devoted to specific issues facing student/veterans. The bureaucracy of academic institutions may be puzzling to those individuals who are unfamiliar with it (Rumann, 2010). The unique campus culture of each institution is also a potential stumbling block for some student/veterans (Zinger & Cohen, 2010). According to the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support Agency (2004), some institutions have developed military services offices which are separate from the veterans' benefits processing offices. The offices may focus on the transition experience from an academic and social standpoint.

According to Herrmann (2007, 2009) the student/veteran's success relies not only on the individual, but also on the institution. Selection of an institution by the student/veteran is an important choice, but it is not as easy as it may seem. Murphy (2011) explains that what happens in the higher education process may be described as a "black box" (p. 45). Outward appearances of structure and program descriptions may not represent what is happening at the institution. It is difficult to understand the dynamics of a situation strictly from outside observations. An example of how a student/veteran and an institution might be incompatible are things as elusive as not acknowledging the presence of veterans on campus, a faculty member penalizing a student/veteran for missing class because of an appointment with the Veterans Administration, or an institution which does not recognize Veterans Day. Some institutions provide the requisite Veterans Services office and define themselves as military friendly organizations, but there is little to no support behind the self-assigned designation. Although the Veterans Administration (VA) website refers to and lists colleges which proclaim to be veteran friendly, what does the term "veteran-friendly school" mean? According to Harmeyer (2007) this is a general term used to describe those schools which have an awareness and sensitivity to military culture, which immediately establishes a common base of knowledge between the student/veteran and the institution. It is a loosely used term which is self-assigned by the institution. It is not a standardized term and is not monitored by the Veterans' Administration for its quality, nor is it a reflection of uniform institutional policies and practices for student/veterans. The VA website does list schools which have been approved by the VA to certify whether a student is a veteran. This "approval" does not reflect the treatment which veterans may receive at the institution, nor the institution's awareness of student/veteran issues (Herrmann et al., 2009).

Student/veterans must assess institutions for indications of a military-friendly environment. For example, the presence of a Reserve Officer Training Corps, commonly referred to as ROTC, unit on campus or at a minimum the lack of prohibition against ROTC creates a more military-friendly environment (Herrmann et al., 2009, p. 45). The veteran-friendly school is more likely to have administrative and faculty members with prior military service, which means some of the employees of the institution likely have a familiarity with various the challenges of military life. The process of selecting an institution is compounded by the fact that the military person is often faced with the need to select an institution far in advance of the actual date of matriculation. The geographical location of the prospective school may be across the world from the service member's current location. Information about the institution may not be readily available or the service member's ability to access such information may be limited as a result of mission requirements. This means that finding an appropriate school may be a difficult task for the student/veteran.

Student/Veterans as Nontraditional Students

Multiple definitions for what constitutes an adult learner exist. As early as 20 years ago, Cross (1981) described nontraditional students as including those who were employed full-time, had dependents, and were financially independent from their parents. Nontraditional college students have been identified as "adults beginning or continuing their enrollment as college students at a later-than-typical age" according to Ross-Gordon (2011, p. 26). Kenner and Weinerman (2011) define adult learners as "entry-level adult learners who are between the ages of 25 and 50, have a high school diploma or a GED, are financially independent and have one semester or less of college-level coursework" (p. 88). The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (Choy, 2002) defines nontraditional students as those students who meet one or more of the following criteria: college entry was delayed after high school by one or more years, single parents, do not have a high school diploma, students attending college part time, or 25 years of age or older. These definitions, depending on which one is used, indicate that nontraditional students range from 38% to 73% of the student population. Using the NCES definition of nontraditional students puts the categorization of nontraditional students at 73% of the student population (Choy, 2001).

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). In addition to specific support services to address the needs of each of these groups, these students often need developmental education. Student/veterans are generally older than traditional students, they are often transfer students because of prior credits earned, and they are considered nontraditional students (Herrmann et al., 2009; O'Herrin, 2011). Nontraditional students have a high attrition rate according to Kenner and Weinerman (2011). One body of research indicates that a counterpoint to high attrition is successfully integrating the nontraditional students into the college environment (Andres & Carpenter, 1997; Sandler, 1999; Weldman, 1985). An important motivator for adult students according to Clark (1999) is an effective support network.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill brings an increase in older students, an increase in minority students, and students with life experiences which are very different than those of other college students (Lum, 2009). It is interesting to note that Sander minimizes the age difference between student/veterans and traditional students, stating some student/veterans are "only a few years older than the traditional freshmen they sit next to in class" (2012c, p. 2). The difference, according to Sander, is not the age of the students, but rather the maturity level of student/veterans who have had more life experiences than traditional aged students (O'Herrin, 2011).

Student/veterans are adult learners and they are a campus minority (about 3% of a higher education institution's population (Herrmann et al., 2009), although O'Herrin (2011) states that the student/veteran population has increased to about 4% of the postsecondary education population.

Although the student/veteran has participated in numerous training programs in the military, the difference between skills training and academic success is marked by an increased emphasis on cognitive ability in the latter. The skills and competencies through which accomplishment is earned on college campuses may not readily transfer from military life. Lack of preparation or review of study skills for college as well as forced absences as a result of military duty requirements can be additional impediments for student/veteran success. Institutions need to be prepared to assist students in understanding how they can develop and adapt the necessary skills to perform competently in higher education.

PROBLEMS FACED BY TODAY'S STUDENT/VETERANS

Even though the recently passed Post-9/11 GI Bill provides the most generous education benefits for military veterans since the first GI Bill was implemented in 1944 (Mitchell, 2009), benefits alone are not enough to help student veterans succeed in higher education. A question arises: Why does it matter if the student/veterans succeed in higher education? During times of high unemployment, and a less-than-robust economy, education plays a major part in and helping veterans assimilate into society. Is it the role of the Veterans' Administration or the educational institution to help student/veterans transition to the academic environment? Both: The VA is responsible for providing military-related services and benefits, and the institution is responsible for helping the student/veteran acclimate to

the academic environment. These groups must work together to maximize benefits to the student/veterans.

Veterans and Developmental Education

Student/veterans may bring a need for remedial education and colleges should be prepared to accommodate this need. A historic basis for a strong relationship between developmental education and veterans was established in the post-World War II era (Bannier, 2006), and "Developmental education must remain prepared to assist these new veterans with the same vigor that our own predecessors used 60 years ago" (p. 41). Today's college students bring challenges with them, whether or not they are transitioning from the military. Many students from various backgrounds have difficulty with basic math and writing skills which puts them at a disadvantage as they begin their college studies. Levine (1997) says today's postsecondary students, "are not as well-prepared to enter college as their predecessors" (p. 9). Levine's comments are echoed by Van Valey (2001), who notes that modern students do not write well.

Another form of student diversity is the lack of strong backgrounds in math and writing skills. This presents special challenges to institutions of higher education. Some institutions are more interested than others in providing such remediation. The Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (SUNY) decided to offer noncredit developmental courses soon after they adopted an open admissions policy (SUNY Office of Finance and Management, 1996). However, a report from the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy on the decision of Board of Trustees of the City University of New York (1999) voted to eliminate remediation on its campuses and shifted the development work to junior colleges. The Board chair explained that they were not eliminating remediation, but rather shifting it to a different location.

Student/Veterans' Support Groups and Services

Student/veterans will also need on-campus support groups to improve their chances of success in the academic environment. Doc Foglesong, president of Mississippi State and a retired Air Force general, refers to his campus serving as a "halfway house for veterans coming back from the war and getting re-acclimated to civilian and academic life" (as cited in Kingsbury, 2007, p. 71). Mississippi State has about 400 veterans on campus and is one of the country's largest programs providing education benefits to veterans. The returning veterans bring needs not found in the typical student population, including readjustment to civilian life.

Litz (2007), Associate Director of the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, suggests that the veterans returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are at risk for "life course disturbances" and that these disturbances can continue throughout their lifetimes. This presents an additional challenge to those institutions which want to prepare to assist veterans returning to the academic community.

Student Veterans and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), not to be confused with traumatic brain injury (TBI), is another challenge facing many of the post-9/11 student veterans. This condition is often not readily apparent to those interacting with the student/veteran and yet affects a person's interaction with others and outlook on life as reported in a 2008 monograph entitled *Invisible Wounds of War: Psychological and Cognitive Injuries, Their Consequences, and Services to Assist Recovery* (Tanelian & Jaycox, 2008). Westgard (2009), a nursing instructor at Temple University, cites PTSD as being a challenge to diagnose. Sometimes the symptoms do not immediately appear, but may be delayed by "months or years" (p. 11). This complicates the student/veterans' access to treatment because of the delay between the appearance of symptoms and military service. It can also affect student/veterans' academic performance.

Many student/veterans come back with PTSD (Lafferty et al., 2008) and the institutions to which they return need to be prepared to help them with the reintegration process:

> Since the earliest record of warfare, the returning warrior has struggled to rejoin the society left behind. It has never been an easy transition, but the war on terror brings new and unanticipated complications for the combat veteran. New technology means survival for those who would have died in prior wars, yet that very survival is fraught with challenges we are only now learning to address. (p. 1)

A study of 2,530 soldiers indicates that "more than 40% of soldiers with injuries associated with loss of consciousness met the criteria for PTSD" (Hoge et al., 2004).

Greenwald's (2006) findings report that about 30% of the returning veterans will experience PTSD symptoms or diagnosis, with that percentage rising to 70% for those returning from a second deployment. The Millennium Cohort Study, started in 2000, studied 77,047 military members for concerns related to health surrounding deployments and other service connected experiences. The preliminary results indicate that 40% of the participants who reported combat exposure and were on active duty between 2001 and 2006 had three times the likelihood to experience PTSD symptoms or diagnosis (Smith, 2007).

This information indicates that the Post-9/11 Era veterans who return to campus are likely to need on-campus support beyond that of merely readjusting to the academic world. The implications of PTSD on psychological and sociological adjustments are still not fully understood by mental health experts (Hoge et al., 2004), but are an evolving discipline.

Veterans and Traumatic Brain Injury

Another consideration institutions must address is the way in which student/veterans' injuries will impact their studies. Institutions of higher education must be prepared to identify, recognize, and accommodate the unique needs of injured student/veterans. Traumatic brain injury (TBI) has been identified by the Veterans' Affairs as one of the "signature injuries" of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars (2007). TBI causes problems with thinking, memory, focus, and various other functions. Individuals who experience TBI often suffer with pain and mood disorders. The student/veteran who enters college with the burden of TBI requires special support such as knowledge and training to manage symptoms and to "live, work, learn and socialize" in different conditions (MacDonald-Wilson, McReynolds, & Accordino, 2009, p. 4). Institutions that put support in place make themselves more attractive to the potential student/veteran.

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO THE POST-9/11 GI BILL

Student/veterans are not a new presence on campus, but this population has the potential to increase as a result of the Post-9/11 GI Bill which will enable more veterans to participate in postsecondary education (O'Herrin, 2011). The anticipated increase in the student/veteran population (O'Herrin, 2011) suggests that postsecondary institutions prepare to serve this group by identifying their needs and characteristics. This section discusses what institutions are doing to prepare for student/veterans.

To help student/veterans sort out the multiple options available to them in higher education, The American Council of Education in conjunction with the Lumina Foundation for Education (2009) created a website called TodaysGIBill.org. This site provides information to help veterans who are interested in pursuing their education by providing details about specific colleges and their programs for student/veterans. One veteran who took advantage the website TodaysGIBill.org applied and was accepted to Dartmouth College in 2007 and relates that he has had a very positive educational experience on campus. Kingsbury (2007) reports that President James Wright of Dartmouth College, who previously served as a Marine, is highly supportive of having veterans on campus: "A student who has a gunshot wound from a battle in Fallujah is going to bring something intangible to any classroom discussion" (p. 71).

Despite the abundance of literature about the transition experiences of the student/veterans covered under the original GI Bill in 1944, relatively little is known about today's student/veteran population. Two seminal studies provide information for institutions about the anticipated student/veteran population and some of the issues the student/veterans face. The studies, *From Soldier to Student: Easing the Transition of Service Members on Campus* (Cook & Kim, 2009) and *Issue Tables: A Profile of Military Service Members and Veterans in Higher Education* (Radford & Wun, 2009) describe a basis of information from which to begin planning programs, practices, and policies to serve today's student/veterans.

From Soldier to Student: Easing the Transition of Service Members on Campus (Cook & Kim, 2009) presents the results of a survey of 723 institutions which asked colleges and universities what they plan to do in preparation for an increased student/veteran population as a result of the new GI Bill. The survey presented the data in three categories of institutions: 2-year public, 4-year public, and 4-year private. The three categories were shown individually and as a total. The results, in decreasing order of popularity were:

- Provide professional development and training for faculty and staff in how to work with veterans.
- Pursue federal and state funding sources and search for grants to assist with the cost of offering programs for veterans.
- Increase the number of programs and train counseling staff to accommodate veterans' health issues including post-traumatic brain injury, were tied for third place.
- Establish a center and increase staff.
- Increase budget. (p. 22)

The surveyed institutions plan to implement their plans within five years from the date the data was collected in 2008.

Another report, by the American Council on Education (2009), surveyed academic institutions, asking them to identify their most urgent student problems; 75% listed financial aid and retention. It is interesting to note that although retention is rated at 75%, less than a quarter of the institutions who serve veterans have a streamlined

reenrollment process to help students who are deployed mid-semester and must therefore leave mid-semester. The majority of institutions require the students to reenroll through the traditional avenue when they return from deployment: "Only 22 percent of institutions with program and services for military personnel have developed an expedited re-enrollment process to help them restart their academic efforts" (ACE, 2009, p. 3). Of the 22% of institutions that reported an expedited reenrollment process for veterans, 16% of the institutions actually require students to begin the application process again, with no acknowledgement of their previous enrollment and interrupted status. Sixty-two percent of the institutions allow students returning from deployment to utilize the standard reenrollment process. The message given by the institutions is a confusing one. The majority of institutions identify retention as one of their primary concerns, but the processes to accommodate students who must interrupt their studies due to military service do not facilitate reentry and eventual completion of an academic program.

According to *Issue Tables: A Profile of Military Service Members and Veterans in Higher Education* (Radford & Wun, 2009), student/veterans enrolled in undergraduate education in public, postsecondary institutions in 2007 to 2008 represented 64.7% of the total student body. Of the 64.7% attending public postsecondary institutions, 43.3% chose public, 2-year institutions (ACE, 2009). The American Council on Education report entitled *Military Service Members and Veterans in Higher Education: What the New GI Bill May Mean for Postsecondary Institutions* include the following information. The gender distribution of the student/veteran population is 73.1% male and 26.9% female, which is the opposite of the nonmilitary independent undergraduate population which is 35.2% male and 64.8% female. The ethnicity of the student/veteran undergraduates is 60.1% White, 18.3% Black, 12.8% Hispanic, 3.2% Asian, and 5.7% other. The age ranges of student/veterans are similar to those of the nonmilitary independent undergraduate population, with the largest percentage of student veteran attendees in the 24 to 29 age range, followed by the 30 to 39 age range at 28.2%. The over-40 age group represents 24.9% of the student/veteran population and the students under 23 represent 15.5% of the student/veteran population. Regarding marital status, 35.3% of the student/veteran population is unmarried with no dependents and 32.5% of the independent student/veteran population is married with children. Those married with no dependents and single parents comprise about 29.3% of the independent undergraduate student/veteran population with 14.8% and 14.5% respectively (ACE, 2009).

In 2007 to 2008 (ACE, 2009), military undergraduate students made up 4% of all postsecondary undergraduates. Within this group, 43% chose to attend public, 2-year community colleges. There are two schools of thought about whether this trend will continue. The authors of the American Council on Education report recently hypothesized that because the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits are more financially generous than previous veterans educational assistance programs, the new student/veteran population may choose 4-year institutions (generally more expensive) because the benefits will make it possible for them to attend (2009). However, statistics indicate that the student/veteran population has historically chosen public, 2-year community colleges (Rumann et al., 2011).

A third study, although smaller in scale than those of Cook and Kim (2009) and Radford (2009), was presented by Adelman, Senior Associate at Institute for Higher Education Policy Veterans Summit, in 2008. "What Do We Know and Not Know about Service Members as College Students?" described a major problem in understanding and obtaining information about the student/veteran population. As recipients of the Veterans Education Project there are two services, The Sailor/Marine American Council on Education Registry Transcripts (SMARTS) and the Army/America Council on Education Registry Transcript Service, which are not integrated with the American Institute for Higher Education. This is in direct contrast to the Community College of the Air Force, which is integrated. The number of students in Veterans Affairs studies is based on students new to postsecondary education, which eliminates those students who entered postsecondary education and left it to join the military and then reentered postsecondary education (Adelman, 2008).

What is apparent is that U.S. colleges and universities have seen an increase in student/veterans' enrollment as a result of the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits (Adelman, 2008). This is confirmed by O'Herrin (2011) who describes troops increasingly taking advantage of the Post- 9/11 GI Bill as the drawdown of military troops in Iraq and Afghanistan continues. According to Carr (2009), Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Military Personnel, 97% of service members plan to use the new GI Bill for education benefits based on a survey conducted by the Department of Defense in August 2009.

In terms of the number of students applying for or using the Post-9/11 GI Bill, the numbers range from over half a million applications for certification (p. 1) with more than 300,000 individuals using the benefits (Carter, 2009) increasing the workload of administrators in postsecondary institutions. Reasons for this increased workload include increased enrollment, the need to understand/learn the ramifications of the new legislation and track its effects, and the need to provide student assistance in understanding their new benefits (Steele et al., 2010, p. vii).

O'Herrin expanded on this topic in 2011:

> One of the most important steps that campus leadership can take is to gauge the specific needs of veterans at their institution before devoting resources to new initiatives.... Both student veterans and campus administrators have spoken to the success of efforts that have been created with direct input from the enrolled student veteran population and have emphasized this is the best approach to designing supportive programs. (p. 3)

O'Herrin identifies six practices implemented by institutions attempting to proactively meet the needs of this population: (a) identify specific points of contact on campus for student/veterans; (b) create a multidiscipline campus working group; (c) collaborate with community organizations to provide services; (d) establish a student veterans campus group, educate faculty and staff about student/veteran issues, and establish a space designated for veterans use only; (e) veteran-specific campus learning communities; and (f) streamline veteran and disability services.

The services that colleges and universities are most likely to offer to veterans are financial aid counseling, employment assistance, and academic advising (ACE, 2009), services offered by 57%, 49%, and 48% of the institutions, respectively. Another finding is that schools with a small percentage of student/veterans are less likely to have special programs or offices devoted to assisting this population (Schuster, 2009). However, this is understandable considering institutions' emphasis on cost control and cost benefit relationships.

Services to student/veterans which were offered in fewer than 25% of the institutions included transition assistance to college, a veteran student lounge, and an orientation tailored to veterans (ACE, 2009). However, student/veterans, when asked, have reported the need to connect with other veterans on campus as being very important to them. A veteran student lounge and veteran orientation would be beneficial in providing opportunities for veterans on campus to get acquainted with each and establish some type of informal support system. Clubs or other veteran support organizations exist on only 32% of the campuses. At community colleges, only 7% of the campuses have veterans clubs or organizations (ACE, 2009).

Examples of Institutional Programs

Current literature contains numerous articles about developing issues related to the Post-9/11 GI Bill. On November 9, 2009, the *Staten Island Real-Time News* reported on the efforts being made by the College of Staten Island to welcome and support the recipients of the Post-9/11 GI Bill (Slepian, 2009). The staff and faculty had worked with the already existing on-campus Veterans Centers to facilitate veterans' registration process. The college had tailored an existing general education class to meet the needs of the veteran/students. A student, Adam Gramegna, was quoted as saying, "They really take care of us here" (Slepian, 2009, p. 1). His sentiments are echoed by student/veterans Lee Siegfried and Maria Durham who note that the veteran-specific general education course at College of Staten Island has created a niche in the college in which they feel very comfortable (Slepian, 2009).

Michael Johnson, Director of Military and Veterans Office at George Mason University in Fairfax, VA, was at the helm of a one-stop resource center for veterans, active duty personnel, and dependents (Lum, 2009). He planned to hire a part-time counselor to help with the Veterans' Administration's delay in providing these services (p. 2). This program continued under the direction of Jennifer Connors, Director of Military Services, and the site is now an established college unit. It provides a dedicated lounge area for student/veterans and is outfitted in a manner conducive to studying and well as providing a quiet place for reflection and decompression in a supportive environment.

Montgomery Community College in Rockville, MD, has instituted a program called Combat to College: Facilitating College Success for Combat Veterans (Sander, 2012d). The program, often referred to as C2C which stands for Combat to College, was developed in conjunction with the National Rehabilitation Hospital in Washington, DC, the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Palo Alto, CA (currently housed at UCLA/National Center for Child Traumatic Stress), the VA Medical center in DC, and the U.S. Navy. The purpose of the program is to help student/veterans find a campus community and use the skills and characteristics developed as a result of military service to create a successful academic experience. Included in this program is recognition that some of the veterans have conditions beyond the "normal" adjustment from military to civilian to college student. Another consideration is that it can be implemented by maximizing existing college programs of student support and with minimal cost to adapting these programs to serve/apply to the student/veteran population.

A partnership between San Diego Community College and Balboa Naval Hospital provides continuity between recovery and life as a student/veteran. Carroll, chancellor of the San Diego Community College District, wrote about the American Council on Education's initiative Se-

verely Injured Military Veterans: Fulfilling Their Dreams project which began in April 2007 and has assisted more than two hundred service members. This initiative, according to Carroll (2008), "aims to help these veterans by ensuring they receive the full support of the higher education community" (p. 17). The assistance program begins as veterans are still recovering in the hospital. They meet with academic advisors who help them identify career and/or academic goals and then determine a path of action to achieve those goals. Carroll (2008) continues to describe how the initiative supports veterans: They receive therapy and curriculum to help them understand the nature of their injury; "They are learning to develop new life skills, memory enhancement techniques, and other strategies" (p. 17) for coping with traumatic brain injury.

The needs of student/veterans on campus go beyond academic challenges. Describing aspects of the adjustment for student/veterans, Schwartz and Kay state "Academic difficulties are often the least of their issues" (2010, p. 2). Campus mental health services need to be proactive in serving student/veterans. Ideally, these programs would be offered cooperatively with the Veterans' Administration (Chang, 2010). Community college counselors confirm that student/veterans seek help for PTSD and other problems and report that they are often overwhelmed with students needing assistance with personal and/or mental health problems (Sewell, 2010, p. 1). Michael Dakduk, the former Deputy Executive Director of Student Veterans of America, stated, "one in five combat veterans reported having a disability, compared with one in 10 nonveterans. Veterans also spend more time working or caring for a family than do traditional college students" (as cited in Johnson, 2010, p. A6). This parallels the four categories of Thomas' (1991) classifications of challenges facing adults in postsecondary education: entry challenges, individual life cycles, societal changes, and the unique circumstances accompanying individuals as they enter the academic community (p. 81). These statements are further reinforced by Tanielian and Jaycox (2008), who report that approximately one-third of the Iraq and Afghanistan veterans have one or more of these after effects of the war.

Querry of Columbus State Community College in Columbus, OH, is the campus' Mental Health Coordinator and he echoes the needs for campus mental health services (2010). He identifies the population as having unique sets of needs as a result of their military experiences. He is also a consultant for U.S. military and works extensively with the veteran/student population both on campus and in his consulting work. Querry (2010) advocates strong faculty involvement in identifying and treating student/veteran issues.

Student/Veterans and Learning

Educators recognize that the student's frame of mind impacts his or her ability to learn (Palethorpe & Wilson, 2011). College performance is affected by physiological, psychological, and social functioning (Schwartz & Kay, 2010). Describing aspects of the adjustment for student/veterans, Schwartz and Kay state "Academic difficulties are often the least of their issues" (2010, p. 2). Campus mental health services need to be proactive in serving student/veterans. Ideally, these programs would be offered cooperatively with the VA (Chang, 2010). Palethorpe and Wilson (2011) discuss the impact of stress on a student's ability to learn, explaining that high levels of stress can hinder the ability to learn, while moderate levels of stress can enhance the ability to learn. Some individuals experience such high levels of stress that they are debilitated and therefore unable to learn, which can lead to high dropout rates and poor academic performance. For student/veterans the risk of high stress levels is probable, especially for those returning from combat zones. These individuals may need assistance in identifying academic situations that could become stressful before they become problematic. Another study of stress on nontraditional students (Forbus, Newbold, & Mehta, 2011) explored the possible results in terms of lifestyle adjustments. Excessive stress on nontraditional students could result in various stress coping behaviors, negative attitudes about the institution and the college experience, and lower grade point averages.

Faculty members, who are often the first line contact with the student/veterans, need to be aware of the types of problems student/veterans may bring to the campus. The American Council on Education (Cook & Kim, 2009) identified faculty training related to needs of the student/veteran population was the primary activity institutions planned to initiate in response to the new GI Bill. This need is reflected in the works of Herrmann (2007) and Herrmann, Raybeck, and Wilson (2008). Faculty members are often not familiar with the challenges facing the student veteran. Statements made unwittingly by faculty members in the classroom can distress the student/veteran (Persky & Oliver, 2010). Unintentional statements made may cause sensitivity and may be perceived as negative to the student/veteran. This problem may not be limited to faculty. Students may be insensitive in their interactions with student/veterans. Finally, the student/veteran may become impatient with the students who have not had military service, further complicating the transition process (Sander, 2012c).

A large percentage of students, 83%, report that while transitioning to college they were also dealing with "career, family, health, religious, or citizen changes" (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980, p. 65). The career, family, and health categories have a strong probability of being present in the student/veteran population. Many student/veterans are transitioning from fulltime employment in the military to the role of full or part time college student. While making this transition they may also be reuniting with family members after long periods of absence. In some cases they will be adjusting to children born during their time of service while they were deployed. The health issues student/veterans may experience range from severe, in the form or some physical challenges due to loss of limb or other catastrophic injuries they may be in less visible forms such as post traumatic stress syndrome. Regardless of the level of severity and visibility of the impairment, this has relevance for the study of student/veterans because not only are they are transitioning from the military (career) which is a significant lifestyle change, but they also may be adjusting to physical or emotional challenges.

Reuniting veterans with their families post deployment requires careful attention and integration with the other aspects of their lives. An example of this is Lum's (2009) interview with Tess Banjko, a former Marine, who stated that she felt "more scared when she began college in 2004 than in her three years as a Marine" (p. 9). Banjko attributes this fear to the difference between the highly structured military life, to which she quickly became accustomed, and the relatively unstructured aspects of college life. She was also dealing with the loss of a spouse and injuries sustained in the Marine Corps which ended her career.

The Veterans Administration website, as well as sources on military bases, provide information about the transition to civilian life. However, the information offers limited discussion of the details of becoming a college student. This is a role for the academic institution. Many colleges and universities have offices to assist students who receive GI Bill assistance, but the primary activity of these offices is as certifying authorities for veterans' benefits. They also may do some academic advising and may assist veterans in registration for classes. The identification of student/veterans as an under addressed group reinforces the importance of research for this population (Katopes, 2009; Kenner & Weinerman, 2011).

Postsecondary Institutions and the New GI Bill

What do institutions have to do to attract federally funded veterans? One suggestion is to revive the partnership between the military and higher education with the goal of boosting enrollment, which would improve revenue flow for the institutions. Institutions must develop programs designed to attract and support veterans as they pursue their academic training. Jon Henry, Dean of Enrollment Services at University of Maine at Augusta, began gearing up to attract veterans as soon as he became aware of the legislation (Stone, 2008). The institution has a veterans' support team of more than 12 people whose goal is to provide support services to veterans including academic guidance, personal counseling and a student/veteran campus group. Roughly 5% of the University of Maine at Augusta's student population consists of veterans. The college hopes to attract more veterans, and their federally paid tuition, to strengthen their budget position in the coming years.

Research suggests that the student/veteran population pursuing postsecondary education faces unique circumstances (Lum, 2009; Rey, 2009) and reports that student/veterans may face unique problems as they transition from active duty military service to college student. The American Council on Education reports that one of the top two changes all institutions are considering are providing professional development for faculty and staff on dealing with the issues facing many service members and veterans, and exploring state or federal funding sources or private grant proposal to fund campus programs. A third change for many public institutions involves plans to increase the number of veteran services and programs on campus. (as cited in Cook & Kim, 2009, p. 5)

SUMMARY

Because the student/veteran population brings unique experiences to the learning stage it is important to develop programs which accommodate these experiences. Both Merriam and Brockett (1997) and Malley (2010) of the Creative Conflict Engagement Service identify colleges and universities as being in good position to assist student/veterans with their education and their reintegration into civilian society. At the 2009 Conference on Improving College Education for Veterans, Malley (2010) stated, "Effective re-integration into civilian society requires flexibility and adaptation, not only from the service member, but from those in the community" (p. 239). At the same conference Gomez (2010), Strategic Alliances Executive at Educational Testing Service, emphasized the need for institutions of higher education to recognize and utilize the human resources student/veterans bring. Gomez contended that emphasis is placed on K-12 education and that adult learning is often overlooked not only for veterans, but also other populations. He noted that veterans can be instrumental in improving our global competitiveness and productivity by improving educational attainment (pp. 94-96). This was also mentioned by Merriam (1993), who describes the learning process as being capable of being viewed from the perspective of "learner, process or context: considered together, we have a broadened understanding of the complex nature of learning in

adulthood" (p. 105). Merriam and Caffarella (1991) first introduced this model of adult learning.

Student/veterans' success relies not only on the individual student, but also on the institution (Herrmann, 2007, 2008). The unique campus culture of each institution is a potential stumbling block for some student/veterans (Zinger & Cohen, 2010). A holistic approach by the institution is needed to address the needs of the student/veterans. Meeting these needs is not limited to one department but is a college-wide challenge and requires the coordinated efforts of all campus departments to support and serve this population. The need to develop interdepartmental programs requires coordinated effort, knowledge, and ability to support and serve this population.

Institutions of higher education have the potential to increase enrollment by attracting eligible veterans who will receive generous educational benefits under the new G I Bill. However, in return for the possibility of increased tuition dollars, the institutions must be prepared to create a campus environment which will enhance the chances of the veterans' academic and social success. Institutions will be well served by developing a campus environment that supports veterans. This study, therefore, provides information about today's student/veteran population and their perceptions of their experiences as they transition from active duty military personnel to college students from a transformative learning perspective.

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