What Makes a Veteran-Friendly College or University Campus?

Donald W-R Allen

Hamline University, dallen02@hamline.edu

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What Makes a Veteran-Friendly College or University Campus?

By Donald W-R Allen, II

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in Education (M.A.Ed.)

Hamline University
Saint Paul, Minnesota
November 2016

Primary Advisor: Shelley Orr
Secondary Advisor: Julie Bach
Peer Reviewer: Renae Stinar
DEDICATION

I dedicate this research to my family, friends and co-workers and to the many veterans I served with and met on university campuses across the United States. I hope this research assists you in making the right choices in higher education. Thank you for your service and commitment to honor, bravery and valor; may you always find what you work towards. A special thanks to Ms. Chasen Crowson from the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs for having faith in me and to my boys, Jacob and Grayson: It is for you that I show commitment to excellence and the many rewards that accompany it. I would also like to dedicate this to my brother Winston; my sister Frances and my mother and father along with my extended family of Dr. Shirley Logan, Dr. William “Pop’s” Logan, Malcolm, Monica, Youlanda Logan and the girls, Chandler and Harper. To my heart-of-hearts and best friend for life - my wife Dr. Enid Logan (Allen), thank you for being the pillar of support during this project.
“Valor is a gift. Those having it never know for sure whether they have it till the test comes. And those having it in one test never know for sure if they will have it when the next test comes.”

~Napoleon Bonaparte

For all who served in the U.S. Armed Forces and gave the ultimate sacrifice,

this Capstone is dedicated to you.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A very special thanks to the Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB) and Dr. Jesse Mason and Dr. Tyrone Bledsoe for their unwavering support. To civil rights historian Ronald A. Edwards, friend and mentor, thank you for your personal support all my life. Thank you to the members of Hamline University Veterans Affairs Organization student group: Chris Bathurst, Gretchen Marie and our advisors: Dr. Matt Morgan and Dr. Monita Gray for the amazing work we did to bring veterans concerns to the forefront of the university. Thank you to Hamline University English professors Dr. Alice Moorhead –for teaching me how things should be written (Organizational Writing); to Dr. Mark Olson for rewarding his students when they read books; and Dr. Aaron McKain for teaching me to look for postmodernism in everything. A special thanks to Dr. Justin Killian for encouraging me to tell it like it is; and to Dr. Jermaine Singleton who everyday reminded me you cannot be what you do not see, thank you for being at Hamline University. My deepest and sincere thanks goes out to Hamline University School of Education and to all active military personnel and veterans who today still honor the oath. Thank you for your service, respect and steadfast commitments to higher education. Finally, I would like to thank my Capstone committee: Shelley Orr, Julie Bach and peer advisor Renea Stinar - thank you for putting up with me, it will always be a task. Thank you to The Oracle Newspaper and Hamline University President F. Miller for bringing veterans into focus at Hamline University. A reminder to all; the men and women who served in the Armed Services is why you are reading this today. Finally, a very special thanks to Ms. Mary Speranza-Reeder for all that she does for graduate students.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER ONE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of the Research</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background of the Researcher</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of The Researcher</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Research</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guiding Research Questions</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER TWO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans in Academia</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who are Student Veterans?</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges: Credits for Military Service</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom and Academic Integrations</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Concerns</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Solution for Retention</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans: Cultures, Gender and Socialization</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Struggle Continues</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What causes veterans to drop out?</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Female Veteran and challenges of gender</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans Mental Health Issues: PTSD, Depression and Suicide</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Mental Health in College</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health among Student Veterans and PTSD in the Classroom</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Campus Support Services</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veteran-Friendly Programs</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Yellow Ribbon Program</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 31 – Vocational Rehabilitation</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off Campus Support for Veteran Students</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER THREE</strong></td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DATA COLLECTION</strong></td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locations/Settings</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection Technique – In-Person Interviews</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why In-Person Interviews for this Research?</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigate Study Outline</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ETHICS</strong></td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONCLUSION</strong></td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER FOUR</strong></td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Settings</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants Demographics</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans’ Experiences</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four Summary</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER FIVE</strong></td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflections</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans Benefits: Bang for Their Buck</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Roadmap for Veterans</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most Sought After Degrees for Veterans</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflections on Minnesota’s Veterans Population</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>APPENDIX A</strong></td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Vocabulary (Military specific)</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BIBLIOGRAPHY</strong></td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

I’m a Factor VIII Hemophiliac, a bleeder. There was no way I was going to be allowed to enlist and be cleared into the United States Army for an experience that would forever change my life. But on October 1, 1979, I left Minnesota headed to Columbia, South Carolina to become one of the Army’s “Charging Charlie Company Four” on Tank Hill; one of the toughest boot camps known to military personnel. It’s not every day the average person wakes up at five-o’clock in the morning and walks over ten-miles in new boots. Testing an individual’s resolve and commitment is something the military does well. Later in life, diagnosed with severe depression to the point of PTSD, with degenerative arthritis in both knees and ankles. My resolve and commitment would be tested by a hostile process that I was trained to observe, analyze, deconstruct and eliminate: an unfriendly university campus - a place that tested my race, color and attempted to censor my First Amendment Rights, which forced me to wear many masks. This was much like people involved in the 1960’s civil rights movement and service-members who returned from Vietnam in the late 1970’s; unwanted, rejected and without a place to call home; an older student of color on any college campus becomes a suspect – veteran or non-veteran.

The United States Army slogan in the late 1970s was: Be all you can be. As a new recruit, along with hundreds of new recruits, I mingled inside of the holding barn - walking around, meeting others while nervously smoking cigarettes and telling war stories of why we joined the Army, Marines, Navy and Air Force…no one knew what was going on. As a 17-year-old black boy, I entered a culture with other young men from
different cultures and ethnic backgrounds who had never been outside of their hometown. We were teen-aged, pimple-faced know-nothings looking around at each other with terror. The abandonment felt like being the sole survivor in an apocalyptic drama – the same thing I would later experience arriving on a college campus.

The facial expressions of fear and anxiety, frowns and raised eyebrows among the group of young men and women left a permanent footprint in my memory—one that I cannot shake regardless of the many mild antidepressants the VA prescribes to me. Shortly after the makeshift networking event, I was directed to a truck by a very mean acting man with plenty of angry words he used freely in short period of time. The Drill Sargent, a man with an angry disposition, packed us into the cattle truck…over-capacity…with no place to sit down - preparing us for the trip to the army base. I felt the cattle truck starting to move; with no seatbelts or places to hold on, I ended up falling all over others during the 45-minute trip to the base. Getting a small glimpse of the driver's facial expressions, it looked like this was the zenith of his day. I was on my own, again. The innocence of not knowing and being on guard is not productive when attempting to make rational decisions. The “truck packing” process on some university campuses deny a process of inclusion for veterans and non-traditional students who are attempting a unsanctioned society-perceived approach to education – being a trained solider and an older student in classrooms designed and formatted for eighteen-year-old rural and suburban white boys and girls.

Reflecting on being new recruit in the armed forces was the most isolated and lonely feeling I have ever felt. My feeling of isolation and being in a silo was short lived. The Army has developed and implemented a time-tested system that acclimates new
inductees to the Army culture via exercising, reading and listening. After the first week of boot camp, in October 1979, I was a full-fledged member of the Army’s Charging Charlie’s Company Four on Tank Hill at Fort Jackson, South Carolina – later to join the 2nd/47th Combat Support Company at Fort Lewis, Washington.

Summary of the Research

This research will take me to three different local universities and one community college. My plans are to interview veteran certifying officials, veterans in veteran lounges and Deans of Students and veteran organization advisors. My goals are to find out what works and what needs to work better. In 1979, I took an oath as a member of the United States Army to never leave a fellow soldier behind so in 2011, I set a path into education, a path I will deconstruct, analyze and problem-solve pertaining the many issues affecting veterans, including ageism, classism, personal status, race and gender inside of institutions of higher learning. Universities have long been a place where young people develop an identity or a purpose in life. Students load up on debt as they find out who they are and what they can achieve. But for older students with wartime experience, those lessons have already been learned amid a procession of struggle and sacrifice that's impossible to reproduce in a classroom. A personality molded in the crucible of war doesn't easily bend to the institutional tenets that universities push in glossy brochures that might leaves student veterans not only detached from other classmates, but from the schools their classmates take pride in attending (Horton 2012). This paper will report on a construct and the concepts of a Veteran Friendly purchase that sometimes at no fault of the institution operates otherwise. Veterans and military personnel already have to
navigate in a sometimes antimilitary, antisocial and hostile minefield that is sometimes created on college and university campuses so my research will uncover and deconstruct what a veteran friendly college or university looks like in today’s society.

This fact-finding mission will also express some dissatisfaction with programs, professors and administrators and provide compelling evidence on why having veterans on any college or university campus is a sound business practice and to avoid, ignore or disqualify any veteran for credits, service or experience is based on faulty logic or bad decision-making.

**Background of the Researcher**

In the summer of 2012 I arrived on my new university campus. I made sure to keep a positive attitude. It was epic - one of the most respected universities in the Midwest. I checked online and found there was a chemistry professor that was a former Air Force officer. He was the university’s undergraduate advisor for the campus veterans. It was my mission to meet with him to talk about all the great ideas I had from a community college I transferred from. It has one of the best-rated two-year college veterans service programs. I thought every college campus was run like this when it came to service members.

At our meeting the professor told me there was no formal veterans organization on campus. If I wanted to do the work, the university would be my oyster. In August I set out to create the university’s first active undergraduate Veterans Affairs organization in over five years. Being a transfer student, I knew there would be many opportunities to speak with staff, faculty and professors during the universities indoctrination for new
students - I thought it cordial and diplomatic to do so. It turned out that the beginning chances of engagement were rare, and the words veteran or military brought out blank facial expressions or curiosity about why I chose this particular university and if the major land grant university would have been a better choice. In spite of the university just dedicating an aluminum star for a World War II Veteran that sat outside in front of a $10 million-dollar student center, it didn’t seem like the university was really focusing on the new veterans – or the old ones. I arrived on a campus that had no intention on being veteran friendly. From the person in financial aid who consistently reminded me her job duties for veterans was only 20 percent, to the censorship of my proposed articles in the university’s newspaper, fitting in would be an uphill battle. Veterans and those associated with the military love a challenge.

I became president of the campus’s veteran’s affairs student organization, the senior columnist for the campus newspaper and the senior class representative in student government. At most academic junctures, a battle for the justification of being on the campus and working feverishly to put in place systems and failsafe’s that would assist the university’s veterans in achieving academic excellence was derailed by younger students not knowing about veterans and the lack of real information provided by the administration and organization advisors to students.

Today, I am the President Emeritus of the veteran’s organization I created in 2012, but also today, in 2016, there is no new president for the 2016-2017 school year or staff who want to push the issue. While I am in graduate school at this university, and the bylaws of the organization clearly state the responsibility of keeping the organization running can be assigned to a graduate student, no one has approached me or commented about the
presence of one of the most important student groups on campus. The concern for the
campus veterans and current active military personnel has gone dark. The first warning
sign for any veteran looking to engage a promoted veteran-friendly institution is to make
sure they are friendly to veterans.

**Role of The Researcher**

I am a veteran of the United States Army and an 80 percent service-connected veteran.
I fully and successfully participated in the DANTES (Defense Activity for Non-
Traditional Education Support) since 2011. I am a certified Chapter 31 veterans and
receive the benefits available for my continuing education.

My focus is to provide timely and relevant information for over 100,000 enlisted men
and women who will seek to participate in the various programs through the U.S.
Department of Veterans Affairs. This research focus and action study will also provide a
platform for to address policy, identify and answer other research questions that come up
while collecting data, clarify theories and report my results. My objective is to take an
informed action to not only advise, but also warn fellow service members what they
should look for inside of a university or college denoting they are veteran-friendly.

**Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to investigate individual and
organizational experiences of veterans and active military personnel who had experienced
universities and college campuses that were not veteran-friendly and compare it to
veterans who attended veteran-friendly schools who did, or did not have to overcome
obstacles and graduated from a four-year program. I feel it is important to have the conversation about veterans and active military in higher education to reflect on what works; build community among like-minded thinkers and create new knowledge about a system of checks and balances that do need immediate improvements.

Our military students and veterans are some of the best and the brightest on campus. They often make the highest quality students because of their maturity, dedication and military training. However, many experience challenges in adjusting from military life to campus life (Herrmann, 2011). The second-tier purpose of this study is to investigate the relationships between small private universities, two-year community colleges and large public universities (promotion) to determine methods, actions and processes that keep veterans on track for graduation (retention) and maybe onward to graduate school at the same learning institution (promotion).

The third-tier purpose of this study is to create a local roadmap of colleges and universities that are veteran-friendly as determined by participants at several institutions and create compelling evidence on why having veterans attending said universities or colleges is not only a patriotic must, but also a sound business decision that will positively affect the institutions financial bottom-line. Veterans and current active military personnel are communal. This means service-members will be inherently bound to those around them who been in the same branch (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines), war, unit and countries. It is imperative that higher education institutions have certified and designated veteran areas, as in veterans’ lounges throughout the campus.

However, after a decade of involvement in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, colleges and universities are experiencing a steady increase in the enrollment of student veterans.
As a result, many institutions have developed specific programs and services designed to enhance veteran success in higher education. In recent data from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) show that only a small percentage of veterans use all of their federal education benefits; the federal government does not track veteran retention or completion rates (O'Herrin, 2011).

**Guiding Research Questions**

The question for this research is and focuses on What makes a Veteran-Friendly College or University Campus? The research is focused on best practices at Veteran-friendly universities and colleges for promotion, recruitment and retention of military/veteran personnel. My question aims to answer the how universities and colleges can become veteran friendly while understanding the many challenging derivatives and variables in having a strong infrastructure for non-traditional students who served in the armed forces. I plan on identifying aspects that trigger the audience’s curiosity, establish some boundaries with which to limit my inquiry and answer my research in manageable format.

**Summary**

A record amount of military personal, described mostly as non-traditional students, are taking advantage of the Department of Veterans Affairs college programs. These programs range from 100 percent coverage of tuition, books, supplies and parking to reimbursement for veterans taking college classes part-time while they work. Some institutions have failed military service members who are eligible for automatic benefits
that go directly to the institution; and others have failed to realize that supporting veterans who for the most part are older and more experienced--must be one of the institution’s academic focuses. This study asks the question, “What makes a Veteran-Friendly College or University Campus.”

By Donald W.R. Allen, II, President Emeritus
Hamline University Veterans Student Organization
Since 2012
CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

Chapter One: Described the personal issues of the researcher as it pertains to being a veteran who has attend institutions of higher education.

Chapter Two: Reviews the most current literature on veterans, their challenges in society, and their reception in higher education.

Chapter Three: Describes the methodology for this study and data collected that addressed the reasons for choosing this qualitative and answering the research question.

Chapter Four: Tells the combined story of four college veterans; an advisor; and a student veteran who works for the VA as a service officer. Combined they explain the characteristics of what makes a veteran friendly college and university campus and why not every campus is veteran-friendly. The results who a need that administrators should pay attention to Dean’s, and student advisors that can mistake signs and signals of veterans because they have no experience with that segment of the population. Another point that is evident in the research is that institutions of higher education must hire veterans as advisory personal that deal directly with campus veterans…to miss this mark is devastating for both the institution and the worldly veteran student.

Chapter Five: A personal reflection of this capstone experience and explains there is more work to do on behalf of the veteran students and my personal summary on what has happened at my university and its student veteran organization and the necessary steps needed to maintain a veteran-friendly campus.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and now the conflict in the Middle-East, which has been called the longest war in American history has created the phenomenon of a large, all-volunteer U.S. armed force (Dilip, 1991). Since the attacks on the Pentagon and the Twin Towers in 2001, the United States has increased its military infrastructure with an emphasis on attacking terrorist hideouts and training its soldiers to recognize dangerous and hostile situations in-country. Because of the enormous need for military support in these countries, enlisted men and women have seen repeated tours in battle zones (Shanker, 2008). Also, with the continual enlistment of new service personnel (Beaver, Barnes, Schwartz, & Boutwell, 2015) and the segregation of thousands of men and women in the military culture (Eikenberry & Kennedy, 2013), the projected active duty end strength in the armed forces for FY 2016 was 1,301,300 people. At home in the United States, an additional 811,000 people served in the seven reserve components (USAF, 2016).

This war has led military personnel into regions of Iraq, Afghanistan, Africa and the Ukraine and into situations that leave some service members with life-long disabilities; others seek to be far removed from their military experience and look to colleges and universities seeking a degree and a change in social norms - others never return home (Mallet, 2012; Bergen, 2011). According to the American Council on Education (2014), since the passage of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of (2008), also known as the Post-9/11 GI Bill, the enrollment of active-duty service members and
veterans in American colleges and universities has increased substantially. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, more than three-quarters of a million veterans have used their earned benefit to enroll in postsecondary courses. In response to the influx of veteran student enrollment, a group of higher education associations and veterans’ organizations collaborated in 2009 and 2012 on a study that asked college and university administrators whether their institutions had geared up campus programs and services specifically designed to support the unique needs of veterans. The results indicated that administrators had indeed increased support levels, sometimes by quite significant margins (Kim, 2013, para. 3).

A study released by Student Veterans of America (2014) in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the National Student Clearinghouse, showed that 51.7 percent of a sample of 788,915 former military service members who pursued some kind of postsecondary credential earned one within a 10-year time frame. That completion rate only slightly lags that of the general student population. Veterans also take longer to earn their credentials, but that may be due in part to their often lengthy military deployments (Inside Higher Ed, 2014). With the increasingly large number of veterans entering colleges and universities across the United States, this research paper will examine the question, “What makes a veteran-friendly college or university Campus?”

**Veterans in Academia**

Friendly fire is weapons fire coming from one's own side, especially fire that causes accidental injury or death to one's own forces (Gene, 2006). Each year several publications are released that provide their readers lists of colleges and universities
judged to be officially “Veteran Friendly” by the publication. These annual lists are put out by popular media, business media, and military-oriented media. Criteria used to rate the schools range from minimal, such as Service members Opportunity Colleges (SOC) membership along with acceptance of the Concurrent Application, to more in-depth examination of the number and kind of services offered. Some of the lists provide a broad cross-section of schools in their reviews while others focus on a select group of schools, such as online programs to rank; what is important to remember, with respect to how the lists are developed is that the criteria, selection methods, and rankings have very little to do with the things veterans in higher education need to help them be most academically and socially successful (Minnis, 2014).

According to Horton (2012), in the years since 911, many veterans who have had first-hand exposure to fighting in campaigns like Operation Enduring Program and Operation Iraqi Freedom have been “inducted” into society and academia, with mixed results. The challenge of societal reintegration after war has mystified soldiers throughout recorded history. The saying "War changes people" is a profound understatement of the issue. It also displaces the sense of belonging to any number of groups, from peers to the countrymen who stayed behind. When Odysseus returned home after 20 tumultuous years of battle and incredible journeys, a sense of unfamiliarity overtook him. A college campus can unknowingly become a place of friendly fire; it will not cause death or injury, but can result in effects similar to the battlefield for veteran students (Dulchinos, 2014). The effect can be as far ranging as disorientation from campus life to the veteran student rejecting sound advice from professors and campus advisors. The veteran student’s sometimes self-imposed exclusions can keep them out of campus culture, i.e.
individualized studies, campus organizations like sports teams, newspaper reporters, or academic competitions. According to Kim (2013), “Student veteran’s/service members are less likely to participate in experiential learning opportunities, such as internships or practicums, learning communities, study abroad, or community service. Sixty-eight percent of student veteran’s/service members say they have plans to participate in or have already participated in community service or volunteer work, compared with 82 percent of nonveteran/civilian students” (Kim, 2013, para. 3). Though student veteran’s/service members are engaged in activities related to class work, they may not have the time to participate in co-curricular activities. Research has shown that student veterans/service members are generally older than nonveteran/civilian students and are more likely to have dependents to care for (Radford, 2009).

Veterans getting enrolled in a degree program from an institution and how their educational background as well as their social background interconnects plays a critical role in the focus of their study. For the purpose of this research, methods like critical hermeneutic participatory inquiry, using Ricoeur’s Concept of Identity (Crowley, 2003); Gadamer’s Concept of Fusion of Horizon (Vessey, 2009), and Kearney’s Concept of Imagination (Kearney, 1988), have been utilized to reach the results in the concentration on self in relation to society. This is important as the veteran student boards the train of academic norms that sometimes bring feelings of warzones and hostile engagements top-of-mind for the combat-trained student (Ray, 2013).

**Who are Student Veterans?**

Over 5 million post-9/11 service members are expected to transition out of the military by 2020. Since the enactment of the Post-9/11 GI Bill in 2008, Americans have invested
over $42 billion on educating many of these transitioning service members. However, little is known about student veterans and their enrollment characteristics at a time when higher education and policymakers need to better understand the needs of this growing, post-traditional undergraduate population, according to ACE (2016)…(See Figure 1) (ACE, 2016).

Knowing the age and work history of veteran’s students and those students who have dependents is of immense help to veterans and institutions that are moving towards a veteran-friendly environment where guns and bullets do not exist, leaving their past military service behind (Youssef, 2013). The number of these student veterans in 2015 was two-million, with an expected rise in the following years (ACE, 2015). Men and women who have served in and around combat zones, some of whom may already have college credits, want to begin or complete their education and achieve a university degree. Some veterans see college as an escape from the minimum wage cycle (Moon & Schma, 2011); however, as McDonagh (2008) points out, colleges and universities will have to meet the “earnestness of the veteran with a dynamic appreciation of his/her probable role in our society” (McDonagh 1947, p.149). Dunklin writes, “Veterans have sacrificed much to attend our institutions of higher
education, and our colleges must assume a responsibility toward each veteran accepted as a student, or there may be dangerous repercussions in the years to come from the cynicism of alumni veterans” (Dunklin, 2012, p. 1).

There is a complicated relationship between higher education and veteran students on college and university campuses; this means that some veterans in academia benefit being on campus, while some do not (O'Herrin, 2011). Universities have long been a place where young people develop an identity, or a purpose in life. Students load up on debt as they find out who they are and what they can achieve. But for older students with wartime experience, those lessons have already been learned amid a procession of struggle and sacrifice that’s impossible to reproduce in a classroom. A personality molded in the crucible of war doesn’t easily bend to the institutional tenets that universities push in glossy brochures. That leaves student veterans not only detached from other classmates, but also from the schools their classmates take pride in attending (Ackerman & DiRamoio, 2009).

According to Lighthall (2012), there are ten things you should know about today’s student veterans that not only makes them unique, but also a valued asset for any university or college campus:

10. Student veterans are a highly diverse group—as diverse as America itself: There are no generalizations that are remotely accurate about this group, other than their common hope that more education will make their lives and their families’ lives better. Returning military personnel come from all over, and are a rainbow of colors, shapes, religions, sexual orientation, and political views. It will benefit everyone if you open yourself to the enriching experience of listening closely to what they reveal about
themselves and their lives. This point is also made in Alex Horton’s (2012), “Lonely Men on Campus.

9. Veterans do not see themselves as victims. Victims are people who feel no control over their lives and perceive themselves as being at the mercy of others. Even when student veterans are psychologically struggling or physically wounded, they see themselves as powerful warriors. This is part of the reason it’s difficult for them to seek appropriate accommodations in the classroom. How can they acknowledge the change in their functioning as a disability and still maintain their identity as a strong soldier living by the Warrior Ethos? Framing these accommodations as “adaptations” that many people need, not just veterans, helps this internal struggle. And, once they can accept the adjustments, academic life often gets significantly easier.

8. They can feel very alone on campus: When a service member is discharged from the military, it’s aptly termed “separation” and it comes with all the heartbreak and disorientation that being torn from one’s tribe brings. They just spent the last several years inextricably tied to some type of social system, whether it was a brigade, battalion, company, platoon, squad, team, or just one on one with a battle buddy. During those years, solitude was rare. Now, suddenly they’re no longer attached to those systems, and the feeling of vulnerability can be terrifying. The loss of friendships, purpose, identity, structure, and income is enough to push most people to their limits. Throw in an unfamiliar social system that bears no resemblance to the military, has no clear chain of command, and is filled with many students and faculty who can’t even imagine the student veterans’ experiences, and you have a deeply alienating environment for many of them. Typically, student veterans are also older and more experienced than their
fresman peers, which helps them keep things in perspective and not sweat the small stuff. They can, and do, manage huge amounts of pain, both physical and mental, without complaint. But consequently, they also bristle at trivial matters called “crises” by others, and scorn the frequent self-absorption of their peers. Often they see most civilian students as not emotionally strong enough to be their friends, and so the student veterans usually isolate themselves in school. Connecting student veterans can effectively ease this isolation, and it’s especially helpful if connections can be made between new veterans and those who have successfully navigated a semester or two. Incoming student veterans need role modeling and guidance. They need to be reassured that, yes, school is a very different kind of battlefield and it requires an entirely different skill set and mental map. They need to hear, “I’ve made it work and you can too.” From a shared sense of alienation, they bond together, and that bonding then mitigates their alienation.

7. They are often unaware of their own mild traumatic brain injuries: Almost every Marine or the frontline soldiers have experienced a significant explosion. But if it wasn’t their truck that blew up or their limb lost, they often don’t see it as their experience. When a bomb detonates, its concussive impact on nearby soldiers is massive. If it weren’t for the brain’s remarkable plasticity and the indomitable human spirit, these men and women would be mostly incapable of learning, much less taking on a college education. Difficulties with memory, attention and concentration, as well as mental processing, abstract reasoning, and executive functioning, are common problems for student veterans.

But there are ways to assist your student veterans, and some of the most common strategies will not only assist them, but all of the students in your classroom. For example, make and share recordings of your classroom lectures and discussions, and
allow note taking on laptops so that students can review and process the classroom material in a less sensory-stimulating environment. Wear a microphone to enhance auditory clarity, and make sure that class videos are captioned. Also try to use texts that can be obtained electronically, in case the student needs the text to be read aloud. Posting your notes ahead of time will help the student veteran better prepare, and allowing students to use a ruler during exams will help them keep their place. If they’re highly anxious during exams, it may be helpful to give them a different time and place. Make yourself available for out-of-class office hours.

6. There are three things you should never say to a student veteran (but they still hear them every day). These wars were atrocities and a waste of human life; I don’t get why you’re having so much trouble—you volunteered, right? The worst of all: Did you kill anyone?

These comments do more than upset veterans; they wound the hearts of men and women who are already overburdened with sorrow. For this reason, opinions about the military or recent wars are best kept out of the classroom. You may not always be able to prevent a student from saying something hurtful, but you can model awareness of other viewpoints, and explain how these comments might be hurtful.

5. Female veterans suffer deeply, and almost always in silence. While women make up about 15 percent of today’s military, it’s still very much a man’s domain—something female service personnel were acutely aware of every day we were in uniform. Women had to do it better, faster, and smarter than the guys to earn their respect. And we had to have a better sense of humor and a stronger sense of self to survive their constant covert, and sometimes overt, tests of our emotional and physical strength and trustworthiness.
But more insidious, and infinitely more damaging, is the persistent sexual harassment and sexual assault of female soldiers. The Veteran Administration estimates that at least 22 percent of females are sexually assaulted during their time in service (USDVA U. D., 2016).

It's important to understand that when a female service member experiences a sexual assault from a comrade, she experiences it as incest. After all, this is her military family, and these men are her brothers in arms. This physical and psychological breach causes immense damage to the assaulted soldier, who often feels she must keep it a secret to maintain her own safety and family unity. Only when she gets home can she begin the long process of fully untangling this very complex experience and all the emotions that go with it. Be aware of these potential issues, and follow your school’s guidelines for referral if it comes up with a student veteran in your classroom:

1) They often want to go back to the war zone: Combat veterans often miss the intense closeness they had with their comrades, and being in an environment where everyone understands them, where they’re doing a job they’re trained for and competent at, where everything they do matters. As the saying goes, “War may be hell, but home ain’t exactly heaven either.” Often, returning veterans feel guilty about surviving when friends have not. Often, they want to go back, regain that closeness, and “make things right.” Deploying downrange, or going outside the green zone and into the raw world of unpredictable violence, even once, is a huge experience. Doing it over and again adds up to a set of experiences that has no civilian equal. It is not “like” anything else. It’s terrifying and thrilling, heartbreaking and empowering, destructive and constructive, all at once, and it is
intense all the time. When veterans get home, not only do they feel alone and that their lives suddenly have less meaning, they also feel bored. Facing death every day made them feel completely alive, but being bored makes them feel dead. It takes quite a while to throttle down and adapt to the lower level of adrenaline that civilian life calls for. That’s part of the reason so many discharged soldiers go into law enforcement or engage in extreme sports. They’re trying to experience that same adrenaline rush that made them feel so alive before. So if they write an essay about how much they enjoyed being deployed or how they wish they could go back, take it in stride and respect the process they’re going through. I’ve had aging Vietnam veterans tell me that if they could deploy to Afghanistan today and “help these young soldiers,” they’d go in a heartbeat. Once a warrior, always a warrior.

2) Combat trauma is an injury, not a mental illness: Witnessing your best friend get blown apart by an improvised explosive devise (IED) is a massive shock to the amygdala, the brain’s emotional command center. And the emotional shock is just one component to the injury. The subsequent events and bursts of emotions that swiftly follow an attack of that magnitude will flood the brain with chemicals and commands that leave behind physical imprints that can cause long-term physical, psychological, and emotional distortions. Healing often can’t begin until the service member is no longer receiving signals of danger and the brain’s chemistry begins to normalize. Sometimes, it takes months, other times, years. But adaptation and recovery are well within the human capacity, and that fact that should be reinforced to the student veteran at every opportunity. For every label
they are saddled with ("You have PTSD," "You are disabled," etc.), we should counter with what traumatic brain injury expert Dr. (and Colonel) Heidi Terrio calls, “the expectation of recovery.” It is that expectation of recovery that provides hope. And hope is the antidote to giving up on life.

3) To succeed, veterans need your understanding, compassion and respect: To the vast majority of Americans choose not to join one of the branches of the military, our student veterans are surrounded by people who have no experience, or context, for understanding their experiences. To many of them, the student veteran’s behavior may be confusing, inexplicable, or even frightening. Because of anxiety or injury-related disorganization, they may show up late or even miss a class. Or they may come 15 minutes early so they can find the perfect desk that allows them a full view of the room, reducing their sense of physical threat.

During class, they may have difficulty sitting still or staying focused, and they may need to leave the room to compose themselves. After class, still struggling to process the taught information and skills, they may be silent or stoic when they need to be reaching out for guidance and support. Regardless of how it looks, what you’re seeing is almost never meant to be disrespectful to you. Your student veterans value and honor authority figures; being deliberately disrespectful would go against their military training and experience. Understanding that their actions are not personal, reaching out to them with compassion and respect, accommodating their individual learning needs, and most importantly, seeing them as people who chose to serve our country and who have endured burdens beyond anything we can imagine, could make all the difference to that student
veteran. It might even mean the difference between him or her finding success in life, or getting lost, jobless, and homeless.

4) Student veterans are one of America’s greatest untapped human resources: They are emotionally mature, goal-oriented, mission-driven, experienced leaders. They work tirelessly to achieve their objectives and look for ways to make meaningful contributions. They are self-sufficient; they will only ask questions when they cannot find the answers themselves. They not only understand the concept of sacrifice for the greater good, they’ve lived it. They are respectful and protective of those around them. They think globally and bypass most things trivial or trendy (National Education Association, 2012).

In short, they are the kind of role models we need on our campuses, and graduating to lives of fulfillment in our workplaces. With support, veteran’s academic success can allow them to become some of America’s strongest, most insightful leaders. We owe veterans our gratitude, of course. But more importantly, we owe them a chance to have meaningful new careers and fulfilling civilian lives, from which we will all richly benefit.

**Challenges: Credits for Military Service**

Veterans need special attention when it comes to the transfer of military experience to academic credits (Dunklin, 2012). When looking at credits for military experience for those who serve in the armed forces, it is a complete different category: therefore, a completely different classification needs to be provided to them, separating the normal students who get their credits transferred traditionally, from military personnel who have been on the warzone or served the armed forces (Transcript, 2016).

It can be commented that trained veterans who re-start their education might have
issues initially when starting the journey again - most of the times it is a cumbersome task for veterans to change their state of mind to start the process of being enrolled in the degree program (Tsai J., 2014). Some colleges and universities do not recognize the military as a learning experience. There can be a drastic disparity or differences between trained veterans starting their degree program at local colleges and universities. For instance, some veterans have real-life experience, in some cases the veterans’ vast knowledge of geography, procedures and processes might overshadow the instructors; secondly veterans recognize when games are being played at any and all levels.

Not all experiences are without challenges that can be overcome by a consistent stream of collaborations with student veterans. This collaboration is tiered much different than those regular students who have not served in the military. When looking at military students (veterans) and experience credits for real-time military training, sometimes credits do not get grade-point transfers based on the service period completed by a veteran in the armed forces (Best Value Schools, 2016). Institutions of higher education have not streamlined process of recognizing credits for military service the way grade points and credits are transferred of regular students (Dunklin, 2012). University veterans certifying officials who work in financial aid must be trained to recognize military-civilian education equivalents to successfully transfer grade points to the veteran’s transcript. For any training courses and services rendered to the Armed Forces, the grade points can easily be transferred on the fundamentals provided by the American Council on Education (ACE) rubric (Ureno, 2014). Although not always the case, some colleges and universities give bare minimums to veterans – mostly for boot camp and Advanced Individual Training (AIT). Degree awarding institutions that participate in any VA
program for veterans are expected and mandated to follow the core fundamental of American Council on Education (ACE) and the Principles of Excellence (Ness, 2014).

There are several key points about converting military experience to college credits that Veteran-Friendly colleges and universities see as a must-do requirement to benefit both the student veteran and the institution:

1) Veteran student experience for military service must be recognized and transferred to civilian credits which would shorten the academic calendar for veteran students (ACE, 2016).

2) To figure out how much credit veterans have earned, school certifying officials and veterans can contact the ACE military program’s website. Funded by the Department of Defense and coordinated through DANTES (Defense Activity for Non-traditional Education Support), the program helps members of any military branch capitalize on their hard work and service to our country (USDVA, 2016).

3) They must do is request a transcript from your branch of the military. Every service has its own system for how to request and receive transcripts. Usually, though, once a veteran has made a request they receive an unofficial copy, while the schools you want to attend will receive the official copies (ACE, 2016).

In making transfer credit decisions, colleges consider comparability of credit to be transferred to the receiving institution and appropriate applicability of the credit in relation to the selected program of study. According to Dunklin (2012), academic institutions establish their own transfer credit policies and procedures. Institutions look for evidence that the learning acquired through military training courses or experience directly relates to the objectives of the academic courses the institution offers. For
example, if a credit recommendation for technical mathematics is cited, a veteran might receive transfer credit for a course with a similar title, but may not get credit for college algebra. Dunklin (2012), admits the selected program of study will also have a significant impact on the amount and type of credit the veteran may receive. For example, if the veteran has several credit recommendations in electronics, but is enrolled in a Bachelor of Science in Psychology program, they will find that very few, if any, of these credit recommendations will result in the award of transfer credit. However, even if the credit recommendations are not applicable to the major, the veteran may be able to use them as free elective credits. When the college or university determines whether and how much credit to apply to the individual record, that credit will then appear on the transcript. Typically, grades are not included with the transfer process, so they are not factored in as part of the grade point average, (ACE, 2015).

**Classroom and Academic Integrations**

Intentional participation from all the components of college academics such as fellow students, professors and other members of the campus are essential in order to develop a welcoming and supportive environment for the veteran students (Elliot, 2015). In order to assist the veteran students in the most effective manner, it is important that institutions work in conjunction with the external Veteran Affairs (VA) organizations and professional associations and the ways in which the institutions can assist with the available capital is also essential to be analyzed (Wiess, 2016).

Students, whether veterans or regular, have some sort or the other type of communication during the course of study. Meaning academic support, or an office of academic success with on and off campus services should be a few of the departments
that veteran students interact with (Youssef, 2013). According to Osborne (2014), to serve veterans effectively many institutions have implemented specific programs or an independent veteran’s office to mitigate the stressors associated with transitioning to a civilian higher education environment (Osborne, 2014). Despite an increase in student service programs, fewer than half of the schools that offer these resources provide training to faculty and staff designed to enhance understanding about military culture and veterans’ unique needs and transitional issues (O’Herrin, 2011).

In July 2012, the American Council on Education released a report based on a survey of 700 institutions that was designed to assess the diverse range of campus programs and services offered to veterans. The report, From Soldier to Student II (McBain, Kim, Cook, & Snead, 2012), found that initiatives designed to assist veterans with their transition to higher education have increased dramatically over the past three years since the Post-9/11 GI Bill took effect. However, the report also concluded that institutions are deficient in training faculty and staff about military culture and the complexities surrounding veterans’ diverse service experiences (Osborne 2014).

The American Council on Education-(ACE) (2015) Veteran Success Jam faculty training was cited as one of the best ways to reduce confusion and stigma related to the student veteran population. It helps reduce confusion about the importance of Department of Veteran Affairs appointments and raises awareness among faculty of available institutional services for veterans. These trainings can also offer faculty a better understanding of military culture, which can go a long way toward ensuring military students perform to the best of their ability. Veteran students face many of the same challenges as adult or non-traditional students: They are older and more mature, many are
tending to the needs of a family, and some are commuting long distances to complete their education. Military students, however, also bring with them a structure, sense of discipline, and work ethic that typically far exceeds faculty expectations (ACE, 2016).

With a greater number of veterans expected to enter all areas of post-secondary education in the years to come (USDVA U. D., 2016), it is important to highlight the additional leadership and other qualities and characteristics that veterans bring to the academic environment and communicate those to faculty (Drew, 2015). For example, today’s military has been trained to work with groups from different cultures. They are skilled in getting groups to focus on tasks and use each other’s' strength to accomplish goals. Most have experiences that bring with them a breadth of knowledge that is generally more global and worldly than the average college student. These experiences can add significant depth to classroom discussions (ACE, 2016).

Today’s veteran student population is an experienced and knowledgeable academic asset. College campuses, classrooms and professors can benefit from including veterans and their experience in real-time teaching to help promote a wide breath of knowledge for all students (Moore, 2011; O’Herrin, 2011).

**Social Concerns**

In some academic, employment, social and mental health ideologies, veterans are considered a protected-class (Strong, Ray, Findley, Torres, Pickett, & Byrne, 2014).

Special attention must be paid to social connections with veterans as well as non-veterans on college campuses because it is important for balance in academic success - but does not always happen naturally. In 2015, the Vietnam Era Veterans’ Readjustment Assistance Act (VEVRAA) was introduced (USDVA U. D., 2016). This act requires
covered federal government contractors and subcontractors to take affirmative action to employ and promote veterans protected by the Act and prohibits discrimination against veterans. For institutions of higher education, the act failed to turn in the direction to assist veterans in obtaining services for unique needs (Browning, 2015). While this act did nothing for veteran students, it is worth mentioning because of the number of veterans that will graduate with a lettered degree and will seek employment in the private sector (Swaggert, 2015).

However, the new mandate becomes enforceable as part of a company’s 2015 Affirmative Action plan and established a hiring benchmark commensurate with the national veteran population, or 7.2 percent (Military, 2015). According to Swaggert (2015), this is a double-edged sword.

Swaggert’s, centers around inspiring and convincing companies to hire veterans. Too many companies falsely believe veterans will be a liability, and so they tend to shy away from opportunities. The new act puts some muscle behind the need to hire veterans, yet there is a real problem when veterans need the government to force companies to act. For institutions of higher education, the act as failed to turn in the direction to assist veterans in obtaining services for unique needs (Browning, 2015). There is definitely an aspect of veterans who are not setting their goals high enough, but there is also a lack of awareness of what they can reach if they (veterans students) strive and work hard. The VA has published data on veterans transitioning out (of the military). More than half of them will be first-generation college students; more than half will be eligible for full-pay for college (USDVA U. D., 2016). Many veterans see the schools available to them as for-profit schools because those schools target veterans most aggressively because of their
benefits. There is no training or coaching for these veterans on what's best for them and how to make that transition (Swaggert, 2015).

According to Benedict (2013), cultural and social factors that have an impact on veteran students who go to college. It is the focus of some anthropological research specifically for veterans that has an emphasis the culture of student veterans who prevail both academically and socially. According to Benedict (2014), Doe & Langstraat, (2014), people create a bond or connection with other people on the basis of the different cultures people come from. In order to analyze the culture a person belongs to it is required to analyze how the person feels, what values he or she possesses and how creative is the idea generation process (Langstraat, 2014).

Benedict’s (2013) research tells us it is culture that keeps the male members of the society in a bond. The type of thought and standards builds a relationship amongst men. In a college environment, students who belong to the armed forces are able to create their own group structure along with other veterans since they have the same thought process, culture and standards and it makes them distinct from the regular students too. It allows developing and identifying the social norms, how things are in the environment and a better insight into the rules and academic requirements of the institution (Benedict R. , 1959). The meaning developed about the student culture by the veteran students allows easy adaption of change from the life of an army man/woman to that of a college student - meaning is established due to the social action The culture which is installed in the individual allows the interpretation of the culture. How to analyze the academic and social norms is established by the learning acquired by veterans during the course of training in the military academy (Scott, 2014). Therefore, moving from the military
culture to the culture of an educational institution is an essential task for veterans. A veteran student can be assisted to adapt to the environment by the help of the support services in place. Things learnt in army academies form the basis of the social communication and generation of meaning for the veteran students. Change can be easily adapted by the learning in the military environment. Group culture, finding meanings to symbols and the impact the veteran students take of the college or university culture has been analyzed and detail explanation has been provided from the viewpoint of various theoretical concepts (Brady, 2014).

Looking at veteran students from an institutional view shows us ninety-seven percent of [college] students, faculty, and administrators lack a military background. Some of these individuals are naïve about the military, and can be insensitive, and even offensive to service members and veterans. The problem stems to be largely a cultural one, a clash of cultures between academics, military and non-military members of the academy, all of whom have their own worldviews. The nature of the challenges encountered by student veterans is examined [in this chapter] and some means of alleviating these are suggested (Raybeck, 2011). The problems enmeshed in the introduction of [Veterans] to academic environments are both numerous and complex. The principal difficulties involved in resolving these issues stem from different cultural backgrounds, filters, and perceptions. Cultural differences can be particularly difficult to deal with or solve because some of their strongest elements are not accessible to the consciousness of the participants. Stated another way, most of us are unaware of at least some of our cultural biases (Raybeck, 2011). If institutions of higher learning are not prepared to deal with veteran student social concerns, then how can the GI Bill or Vocational Rehabilitation help the
institutions to assist student veterans?

Military.com (2015) argued, “Some academics and veterans' advocates are warning that many colleges are unprepared to deal with the unique social and academic needs of former service members. Many veterans face a difficult transition to civilian life, ranging from readjustment issues to recovery from physical and mental injuries. And they say without special attention, many will fail to graduate” (Post-Dispatch, 2009, para. 2).

According to O’Connor (2011), if colleges are not prepared to help transition soldiers from combat you do run the risk of losing an entire generation of the Iraq and Afghanistan (O’Connor, 2011). Colleges and universities that are willing to work closely with their veteran populations gives student veterans a mission and allows them to move forward in life. It's a backstop so you're not walking right off the plane from combat in to the civilian world. It was designed to be a soft landing (St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 2014, papa 3). Studies from the American Council on Education (2105), the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2015) and Students Veterans of America - (SVA), show that some strategies work to keep veterans in school. They include specialized orientation programs, helping veterans connect with one another, training faculty and staff on challenges veterans face and offering more counseling and financial aid. Surveys show that many schools are lacking in such efforts. At the University of Missouri-St. Louis, the number of students enrolled on the GI Bill from 2000 to 2009 fluctuated between 180 and 200 depending on deployments. Since 2009, when eligible veterans were provided significantly more for tuition, housing and books, that number has risen to 270 and the school expects it to go up even more. The St. Louis Post-Dispatch recently met with four veterans attending UMSL on the GI Bill. Their experiences mirrored those facing many
service members entering the college ranks. All said they had felt isolated, and had difficulty adjusting to the campus culture and trouble relating to younger students (Post-Dispatch, 2009).

In Goldberg’s (2015), Ensuring Success for Veterans with Disabilities in STEM Degree Programs was research done to assist in understanding the veteran coming in for education and bringing along some social and academic requirements in comparison to other small groups existing in the institutions (Goldberg, 2015).

The veteran student social demeanor on college campuses can become tragic if close attention to collaborative programming is not inserted into daily campus life. While some veterans thrive in academic settings, there are some who rehash old military experiences that lead to depression and dropping out of college (Leach, Herbst, Armstrong & McCaslin, 2013).

**The Solution for Retention**

It is suggesting that an explicit commitment to creating a supportive, academically rigorous culture that meets students where they are - men of color, in particular, face a unique set of challenges to getting through college -- helps boost retention and graduation rates. Students of color are also disproportionately first-generation college students who often do not have the economic and academic advantages of their white peers and are more vulnerable to the whims of the economy and other barriers that impede academic achievement. These numbers and stories suggest that closing the graduation gap need not be an elusive goal. There isn't even some great mystery to how to make sure men of color graduate from college (Trust, 2012).
Veterans: Cultures, Gender and Socialization

There are different challenges for Black Americans in higher education that is much different from their male and female non-black counterparts. After completion of military service, many African American veterans return to neighborhoods that do not have an abundance of the basic resources that all veterans need, such as access to adequate housing, quality healthcare, tertiary education, and sustainable employment. While higher education is paramount to the returning African American service member for self-improvement and economic stability. Unless basic necessities, such as safe housing, employment and quality healthcare, are met, higher education cannot and will not be a viable avenue of opportunity (Ottley, 2015).

Ottley (2015) argues that previous researchers have shown that in past wars as well as the current war, African Americans and other non-White ethnic minority veterans have experienced forms of discrimination, particularly related to the distribution of VA benefits. However, under the Obama administration, there has been a significant increase in the number of veterans who have gained access to VA healthcare benefits. Access to such benefits is extremely important as mental illness from war trauma can significantly influence one’s educational pursuits (Ottley, 2015).

Minority veterans, more specifically the Black American veteran’s population, is on the rise. The Veteran population is projected to decrease from 22.7 million in year 2011 to 14.5 million in 2040. Over this same time period, the percentage of minority veterans will increase from 20.9 to 34.0 percent. Among these, the percentage of Black Veterans is significantly higher than other minority groups and is projected to continue to be the largest portion of minorities Veterans in comparison to other non-white veterans.
Beginning in 2020, the Black Veterans will gradually decrease in the number but the percentage of their total population will increase from 13.4 to 16.5 percent. The other minority races will be relatively static through 2020 followed by modest increases in numbers and percentages. The Hispanic Veteran population will steadily increase in number from 2011 to 2040 (1.4 to 1.7 million. Hispanic veterans in the Armed Services will double in percentage between 2011 and 2040 (6.0 to 11.4 percent).

Minority Veterans made up about 20 percent of the total Veteran population in 2011. The majority of minority Veterans was Black (11 percent), with Hispanics as the next largest group (6 percent). According to the Department of Defense data, about 25 percent of accessions to the Armed Forces in 2011 were minorities, which means a large percentage will qualify for benefits for college (Minority Veterans Report: 2011, 2013).

**The Struggle Continues**

Black American veterans have historical and generational obstructions to contend with before they arrive at any college or university campus. Morton’s (2013) Experiences and Expectations of an African American Male Veteran Student in Higher Education states the perspectives of Black American male students’ history is of scorns to their manhood such as deportation from Africa, American slavery, physical beatings, lynching. Some experiences on college campuses has caused African American males to experience unpleasant stressors of racism, obstruction and oppression. Sometimes African American males are marginalized in political, economic, and social arenas with media and literature projecting Eurocentric power and dominance (Spurgeon, 2009), (Cole-Morton, 2013).

These challenges for the Black American veteran are not unique to campuses, but do restrain the opportunities for graduation success. In each of the three years from 1998
through 2000 there was a one percentage point decline in the graduation rate for black men. But for the past four years the graduation rate for black men improved by one percentage point and now stands at 35 percent. But over the past 15 years, black males have improved their graduation rate from 28 percent to 35 percent.

**The black female in college**

This year the college graduation rate for black women rose by one percentage point to 46 percent. Over the past decade and a half, the graduation rates for black women have shown strong and steady gains. Turning in a powerful performance, black women have improved their college completion rate from 34 percent in 1990 to 46 percent in 2005. Graduation rates play an important role in measuring the success of affirmative action programs. Many opponents of affirmative action assert this without even looking at the actual data that black student graduation rates are damaged by race-sensitive admissions. It is critical to review the statistics to see if this is true. In this report research from the *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (2005), it emphasizes the graduation rates of black students at the nation's highest-ranked colleges and universities. The reason is that almost always these are the institutions that have the strongest commitments to race-sensitive admissions (Research, 2005).

For many years Harvard University, traditionally one of the nation's strongest supporters of affirmative action and veterans has produced the highest black student graduation rate of any college or university in the nation. Harvard slipped to second place in 2004. Today, Harvard's black student graduation rate has increased to 95 percent, once again the highest among U.S. colleges and universities (Livingston, 2016).
What causes veterans to drop out?

While dropout rates for veteran’s increases, tens of thousands of Iraq and Afghanistan War veterans are enrolled in colleges and universities across the country, courtesy of the GI Bill (Woods, 2012). But almost all of them, 88 percent, will drop out by summer from feeling isolated and frustrated in an alien culture. The loneliness and isolation for some veterans without a good supportive network usually leads to a self-medication with either drugs or alcohol, or simply dropping out of society. The struggle of veterans to stay in school, and the failure of many colleges and universities to help them, is part of a broader challenge as some 2.3 million veterans flood home from Iraq and Afghanistan to confront a difficult adjustment to civilian life. Jobs and affordable housing are harder to secure. Many veterans find civilian life pointless and flat after the excitement and stress of war. Families are exhausted from the strain of long separations. Forty-six percent of veterans on campus had considered suicide, compared to six percent among civilian college students (Wood, 2012).

The Female Veteran and challenges of gender

Since the military culture is based on the male characteristics of dominance, conformity and being one of the good old boys, seeking help is seen as a sign of weakness. In the 40-year rich history of research about gender and help seeking attitudes, college age women have been shown time and again … to score statistically better in quantitative studies and empirically more favorably in qualitative studies than men in their attitudes toward seeking psychological help and … academic assistance. In the 2007–2008 school year, some 85 percent of military undergraduates were aged 24 or older. During that same period, military undergraduates were more likely to be non-white
than veterans in general and traditional undergraduates, and more likely to be female. According to What the New GI Bill May Mean for Postsecondary Institutions (2009), co-authored by the American Council on Education, female veterans are more likely to face problems finding work after leaving the military, are more likely to become homeless, and about 20 percent of them have been victims of military sexual trauma (Radford, 2009).

The report also detailed 27 changes or policies that need to happen in order for female veterans to be equally served. At a time when the number of women veterans is growing to unprecedented levels, our country is simply not doing enough to meet their health, social and economic needs. Issues that need to be addressed include disability compensation, employment programs, housing assistance, sexual trauma, as well as several cultural changes. However, the Disable Veterans of America (DAV) also pointed out that they consider themselves a partner with the VA and said they intend to work with the agency to find solutions to these problems (Biansett, 2014).

The DAV also shows a record number of female veterans have strained the VA system. This includes educational benefits, health care, housing and mental health challenges. A demographic analysis shows that 17.4 percent of post-9/11 Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans are women. More than a quarter of those women are black, almost twice the proportion found in the entire U.S. population. Yet, these same women are less likely to find a job than male veterans and more likely to be a single parent with children to support, interviews and records show (Toppe, 2006). They [female veterans] return to a nation that historically defines “veteran” as male, which in the post-9/11 era
has meant a lack of female-specific resources at VA facilities across the country (Dumbauld, 2007).

Currently, 360,000 women use VA medical services. The number is expected to double as more women come home and seek care, many of them relatively new to its services. “Historically, research on the health of veterans has focused on the health consequences of combat service in men, and there has been little scientific research of the health consequences of military service in women who served,” according to the report (Anchan, 2004, para. 7).

With the strain already on VA services, it’s critically important for a female military member to act on creating a transition plan early, prior to leaving the military. A flexible, get-it-done mindset can go a long way towards enabling a female veteran to work towards obtaining the education and career that fits her lifestyle and professional goals as a civilian. By acknowledging and actively using the core strengths developed during their military experience, female veterans can propel themselves into the life and education, they want (Dumbauld, 2007) (Toppe, 2006).

**Veterans Mental Health Issues: PTSD, Depression and Suicide**

Student veterans have many mental health issues and concerns of depression, suicide and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Depression and suicide become important campus safety issues for colleges and universities and of course, the student veteran. In 2015, a Minnesota State University student died after shooting himself on the second floor of the campus library. The 27-year-old junior philosophy major and Iraq War veteran turned the gun on himself and committed suicide (Bies & Gottlieb, 2015). According to Shane & Kime (2016), roughly 20 veterans a day commit suicide
nationwide, according to new data from the Department of Veterans Affairs — a figure that dispels the often quoted, but problematic, “22 a day” estimate yet solidifies the disturbing mental health crisis (Shane & Kime, 2016). Researchers (Department of Defense, 2016), found that the risk of suicide for veterans is 21 percent higher when compared to civilian adults. From 2001 to 2014, as the civilian suicide rate rose about 23.3 percent, the rate of suicide among veterans jumped more than 32 percent. The problem is particularly worrisome among female veterans, who saw their suicide rates rise more than 85 percent over that time, compared to about 40 percent for civilian women. Roughly 65 percent of all veteran suicides in 2014 were for individuals 50 years or older, many of whom spent little or no time fighting in the most recent wars. Providing support and assistance to suicidal veterans has proven difficult, in part because of the lack of data on the scope of the problem (Department of Defense, 2016).

The U. S. Department of Defense (DOD) has expended considerable resources examining and responding to the escalating rates of psychological problems among active-duty service members that have emerged over the last decade of combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, with a particular focus on suicidality (U.S. DOD, 2010). These issues have also received considerable attention in the popular press. DOD has acknowledged that military life during wartime is remarkably stressful, not just for service members but also their families. Despite DoDs best efforts to enhance wellbeing, promote resilience and related life skills (cf. Casey, 2011), 10 years of combat across two different war zones has resulted in escalating rates of PTSD, substance abuse, depression, and suicide (U.S. DoD, 2010).
General Mental Health in College

The American College Health Association’s (ACHA, 2011) most recent national college health assessment provides additional insight into the general college and university student population, although the data is not specific to clinical diagnosis. With respect to mental health findings (i.e., students reporting the problems within “the previous 12 months”), the report indicated that a total of:

- 43.9% felt things were hopeless
- 83.6% felt overwhelmed by all they had to do
- 28.4% “felt so depressed it was difficult to function”
- 46.4% felt overwhelming anxiety
- 6% seriously considered suicide”
- 1.3% attempted suicide
- 5.1% intentionally cut, burned, bruised or otherwise injured themselves (Andes, 2011, p. 73)

Although not indicative of specific clinical diagnoses, the ACHA findings are alarming and provide some limited basis for comparison of results to a general college and university student population (ACHA, 2011).

Mental Health among Student Veterans and PTSD in the Classroom

The physical layout of the classroom can play a large role in any student’s learning experience, exponentially so for veteran students. PTSD and TBI contribute to a “sensitized hyper arousal response” (Perry, 2001) where an extreme bodily stress response results from a generalized reminder of the initial traumatic event often referred to as a “trigger” (Schore, 2002). When a veteran diagnosed with PTSD becomes triggered, his/her body’s stress system reacts as it has been trained to do in the past in
order to survive. After repeated exposures to extreme stress, the body no longer requires the full onset of a traumatic experience to develop the “fight or flight” response. It may simply take a reminder of the original traumatic experience to have a full-blown stress reaction. The body reacts in survival mode – primed and ready to run away or fight off the attacker. Blood is pumped away from the brain and into the major muscle groups. These reactions can significantly impede the student’s ability to learn (Brady, 2014). According to Sinski (2012), holding the extreme physiological reaction in mind, the physical experience of the classroom itself may be a potential trigger for a returning veteran (desks crammed together or student backpacks, books, and personal belongings block the aisles, etc.). This situation can prevent a quick exit and trigger an extreme stress response in veteran students. In a war zone, blocked pathways could mean potential death for a soldier needing rapid escape from enemy fire. To clear aisles, ask students to store belongings beneath desks or behind the instructor’s podium or desk. Many schools employ a safety officer responsible for ensuring safe egress from classrooms and hallways. If possible, enlist the help of the safety officer to help structure a safe classroom. Additionally, the experience of loud, sharp noises or aggressive and domineering body movements could trigger veterans with PTSD or TBI. Notify students before making loud noises or sudden movements when possible. If it is necessary to physically touch a student, always ask permission first. For example, “May I touch your arm in order to demonstrate the correct way to handle that cuvette?” Avoid hovering above a student sitting in a desk. Either squat next to the desk or roll a chair next to the desk. Lighting may also trigger stress responses or overload sensory responses in students with an injured brain. Consequently, an educator should avoid leaving the classroom in
complete darkness. Another consideration is assigned student seating, which may interfere with learning for veteran students. Assigned seating can position a veteran in a seat where he or she feels exposed and unsafe. A veteran student might also experience hearing or vision impairments that require preferential seating (Church, 2009).

Allowing freedom of choice in seating avoids potential problems. Additionally, the educator should explicitly note at the beginning of the semester that if a student needs to leave the classroom, he/she may do so. Reading body language for obvious signs of stress can prove to be a useful skill for any educator. Upon detecting signs of stress, the educator may move quickly to diffuse the situation by redirecting the classroom discussion or altering the activity. As noted in From Soldier to Student (Cook & Kim, 2009), very basic training can be provided to faculty as professional development to provide a “veteran friendly” environment. Providing a calm and comfortable classroom environment help (Sinski, 2012).

**On Campus Support Services**

In order to ensure that soldier students excel in their academics, it is important that support services on-campus are facilitated for the students. It is quite difficult for a person to suddenly adapt to a laid back environment from a disciplined environment and that what exactly happens with the veterans returning to pursue a degree from a warzone. How a veteran student is assisted by the available tools with the educational institutions in order to adapt to changes is the focus of the research from the Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice (Barry, 2014). Through roundtables, conferences, focus groups, and interviews, student veterans have voiced unique needs compared to traditional undergraduates. Because veterans are a diverse population with an incredibly
wide range of experiences, it is impossible to take a one-size-fits-all approach to serving
them. Thus, 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 crafted with direct input from the enrolled student veteran
population and have emphasized this is the best approach to designing supportive
programs (O’Herrin, 2014, p. 16).

Finding information in the most effective manner through bonding with the peers and
discussing similar issues is an easy task if there exists on-campus student organizations.
Even veterans can come into contact with other veterans pursuing their degree with the
help of the on-campus organizations. Overall, a veteran can have easy access to all the
facilities that are available in the institution without much difficulty if there is on-campus
organization working for the veterans (Ureno, 2014). Requests of veteran students can be
hard at difficult in times if there is not a veteran student organization on campus.

According to Benedict (2013) and Tsai (2016) peers from the campus and fellow students
who do not belong to the Armed Forces including teachers and other members of the
educational institution such as student counselors and psychological services must be
required to provide an exceptional standard of veteran student services in situations
where no solid student organization is operational (Benedict, 2013). Tsai (2016) point out
that states that academic advisors should be able in advance to be trained on veterans and
have a proper data on the many traits that impact the changes in an individual from the
military to an educational institution, due to continuous meetings with the veteran
students’ on-campus. Another notion of Tsai (2016) is that, in order to reduce the
proximity between veteran students, regular students, staff and teachers of the educational institution, it is essential that a student organization and armed forces student awareness programs are initiated (Tsai, 2016).

A great example of on-campus support and commitment to veteran-friendly engagement is to create a packet of information for both prospective student veterans and for the newly admitted student-veterans. Each student is contacted to provide a welcome to campus with an introduction to campus resources for veterans, with periodic follow-up contacts to ensure that each student-veteran's individual circumstances are reviewed and addressed. Also, individual folders can be created for each student-veteran documenting needs and tracking both provision of relevant information and progress made (MU, 2007). Finding information in the most effective manner, bonding with the peers and discussing similar issues. Veterans can come into contact with other veterans pursuing their degree with the help of the on-campus organizations. Overall, a veteran can have easy access to all the facilities that are available in the institution without much difficulty if there is on-campus organization working for the veterans on behalf of academic and social success (Ureno, 2014).

**Veteran-Friendly Programs**

This study, “What makes a Veteran Friendly Campus?” will review and analyze programs that have been successful for the veteran student and what makes the ideal campus for veterans to learn and graduate from college. Of course asking these questions in real-time to veterans in college will provide an insight that is new and informative. One of the programs for warzone veterans is the Principles of Excellence for colleges and
universities. The program provides services to veterans were approved by President Barack Obama as a Special Order (Obama, 2012, p.1). In the special order, combat zone veterans are able to get the assistance from institutions in various ways such as counseling, grade utilization, and expenses for completion of the education curriculum and any other important issue seen, by the approval given by the President (Aronson, 2013).

Educational institutions participating in the Principles of Excellence program agree to the following guidelines:

Provide students with a personalized form covering the total cost of an education program:

- Provide educational plans for all military and Veteran education beneficiaries;
- End fraudulent and aggressive recruiting techniques and misrepresentations;
  Accommodate Service members and Reservists absent due to service requirements;
- Designate a point of contact to provide academic and financial advice;
- Ensure accreditation of all new programs prior to enrolling students; and
- Align institutional refund policies with those under Title IV, which governs the administration of federal student financial aid programs.

It is important to note: Foreign schools, high schools, on-the-job training and apprenticeship programs, residency and internship programs, and institutions that do not charge tuition and fees are not required to comply with the Executive Order (Obama, 2012, p.1)
The Yellow Ribbon Program

For military-trained veterans to achieve their university degree and any other higher qualification, programs like the Yellow Ribbon were formed. This program is a Post-9/11 GI Bill that pays all resident tuition and fees for a public school and the lowers the actual tuition and fees for the veteran student. For private schools, it pays the national maximum per academic year depending on the state and college. Veteran’s actual tuition and fees costs may exceed these amounts if they attending a private school or are attending a public school as a nonresident student. Institutions of Higher Learning (Degree Granting Institutions) may elect to participate in the Yellow Ribbon Program to make additional funds available for education programs without an additional charge to a veteran’s GI Bill entitlements. Institutions voluntarily enter into a Yellow Ribbon Agreement with VA and choose the amount of tuition and fees that will be contributed. VA matches that amount and issues payments directly to the institution. Only veterans entitled to the maximum benefit rate, as determined by service requirements, or their designated transferees may receive this funding. Active duty Service members and their spouses are not eligible for this program. Child transferees of active duty Service members may be eligible if the Service member is qualified at the 100 percent rate (USDVA U. D., 2016)

Chapter 31 – Vocational Rehabilitation

The Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) program is authorized by Congress under Title 38, United States Code, and Chapter 31. It is sometimes referred to as the Chapter 31 program. The VR&E program assists veterans with service-connected disabilities, handicaps and career changes in employment. It also assists members who
are in the process of transitioning from military to civilian employment prepare for, find, and keep suitable jobs. For Veterans and Service members with service-connected disabilities so severe that they cannot immediately consider work, VR&E offers services to improve their ability to live as independently as possible. The inner workings of the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E), commonly known as Chapter 31 program pays institutions directly for veterans who attend college. Some of these veterans are disabled with ratings between 10 and 100 percent, which mean they are disabled in some way as determined by the VA. While in college, the VA provides counseling, personal mental health monitoring; eyeglasses, along with technical support like buying computers, iPads, printers, paper, parking, books, supplies and tuition for the veteran in college. The veteran also receives a small stipend every month to assist with household commitments (VA Benefits, 2016). The Chapter 31 program and its support services for academics and counseling is essential so that the veterans can jump out of their past and move on with the new academic developments. Since a large number of students from the armed forces background have decided to start their education, some with limiting disabilities, the program assists the institutions by providing support programs especially designed for veteran students. Institutions should have a result-oriented system in place that will assist Chapter 31 veterans to accept the new environment and have no problems adopting it in any way necessary for academic success (Naphan, 2015). The intersection between combat zones and college campuses meet in several areas of concern; one being the attitude toward veterans, especially older veterans and the time it takes to complete a bachelor’s degree. That four-year time frame is sometimes problematic for veterans, especially ones with families, mortgages and
active civilian careers. In college for the veteran student, everything is new and alien and since the veterans need to cope with the needs of the academic curriculum, social and personal constructs, it goes hand-in-hand with their sense of duty and responsibilities to be successful (Leard, 2013).

Off Campus Support for Veteran Students

In order to provide the essential requirements of the veterans, the college can join hands with off-campus military institutions for better provisions; the local VA office; county veterans service officers; and vocational rehabilitation personnel have profound resources to help veteran students. How a soldier participates in the environment of the college or university can be the result of the impact of the soldier as in mind; experiences, finances and socialization. Utilization of VA resources for the purpose of providing service to the veterans is highly essential if the educational institution does not have the facilities (Lee, 2014). However, it is important for the institution to make sure there is staff completely dedicated to veteran students’ concerns (Ureno, 2014). Veteran students’ military training and active service experiences provide them an understanding of a command and control culture that is discordant to the relaxed and informal college student environment. “To effectively adapt to their new college student identity, it is important for veteran student to engage in conversation with professors and classmates in order to expand their horizon and understanding of college norms, and ultimately navigate their own unique success in their academic course of study” (Ureno, 2014, p. iii)

Research Question

This study, “What makes a Veteran-Friendly College or University Campus?” seeks to answer questions about the surreptitious connections between higher education
and veterans who have served inside combat zones during times of war and those veterans who served during peacetime to discuss, research and supply data on the many components of a veteran friendly college or university campus. The goal of this paper is layered to create a better system of checks and balances that would help determine if a college or university was indeed veteran friendly. Secondly to create a roadmap for marketing departments, veterans service organizations, administrations and professors to assist in creating retention of veterans and raise graduation rates for all military personnel who walk on any college campus. This is the interconnection of veteran-friendly.

**Conclusion**

It can be said that students from the Armed Forces do face issues in adjusting to the college environment. The academic process can and is very hostile in many areas like schedules, grades, finances, personalities and self care. The battle that starts in the mind of a veteran must be won; there is no room for failure. Issues can be encountered in adjusting to the new environment of an institution for the students just like issues that are similar to military physiologies. All the experiences, whether good or bad, leave a print on the minds and hearts of the veteran student. According to Lopez (2012), along with pursuing a degree, it is usually seen that veterans have a hard time in providing for dependents at home. It is highly probable that the academic performance and how the person connects to other people will be inversely influenced due to the previous experience, stress and background of the veteran student. While there is a calm demeanor outwards by a student veteran, the veteran student might be suffering though some hardships outside of campus (Lopez, 2012). If proper counseling is provided initially, things can turn out to be better for the veterans pursuing their degrees. The student
service departments can face issues to develop and use the student programs in order to provide academic facilities to the veterans pursuing the degree. On the other hand, these arrangements tend to be expensive for the institutions as well. Furthermore, it can be concluded that some sense of pride and honor is also a factor to acquire rather than just revenue if services are provided to the veterans. In order to pay back the people who have played a vital role in keeping the nation safe and sound from foreign threat, it is important that educational institutions develop curriculums that can be beneficial for the veterans in the most effective way.

Veterans on college and university campuses face challenges that go far beyond the average 18-year-old freshman (McDonagh, 1946). Institutions of higher education must adopt policies, people and areas designated for these military personnel who have gained valuable experiential learning tools to assist them in becoming successful versus a dropout statistic.
CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

In Chapter One I stated the purpose of this qualitative research study is to investigate individual and organizational experiences of veterans and active military personnel who attended universities and colleges that have been ranked by national organizations like Military.com, Forbes and Student Veterans of America-SVA to have been certified as veteran-friendly. I felt it was important to have the conversation with veterans and active military personnel in higher education to reflect on what works and what will build the strongest community among like-minded thinkers to create new knowledge about a system for veteran students that need immediate upgrades.

My research, “What makes a Veteran-Friendly College or University Campus?,” was a study that took an in-depth look a cordial and diplomatic relations for veterans who are attending college and are involved in the various veterans’ activities such as the Veterans Student Organizations. This is important because of my experience as a veteran student where I saw myself and many veterans face hostile engagements with colleges and universities while the institutions were being paid by our benefits to make sure there were no obstacles for the student veteran attending that intuition. Although this study deals with the better side of veteran-higher education relationships, there is a vast dark side.

The qualitative research in this study was designed to interview veterans and to answer the many questions behind an institution that has a top-of-mind engagement with its veteran population. The study included talking to veterans and key point personnel in institutions through series of in-person interviews. Other interviews will include a
Minnesota veteran who works on staff with a local county veteran’s office. The
successful templates at Augsburg College and University of Minnesota have been
nationally recognized for welcoming and supporting its military and veteran population
are the foundations for this study. Augsburg College was named a 2016 Military
Friendly School, (Friendly, 2016) a list that is compiled through extensive research and a
free, data-driven, survey of more than 10,000 VA-approved schools nationwide (both
Hamline University and the University of Minnesota are VA-approved schools)
(Friendly, 2016).

DATA COLLECTION

Participants

The student veterans were all connected by experience, therefore the first data
collection point was from a local college with less than 30,000 students for a total of
three (3) interviews at that college. The second data collection point was at a local
university with more than 30,000 students. The rationale to do personal interviews at
these two institutions is because of their reputation among veterans who dialog with each
other at training exercises and other military-based/social network gatherings. The
veterans felt better talking to a person versus doing an online survey, which is sometimes
intrusive and impractical based on the need to talk with a human interviewer to explain
answers in detail. The personal interview data collection did assist in getting to the real
challenges and truths from the veteran’s interviewed for this study.
Locations/Settings

The study was done locally at the colleges mentioned in the previous data collection paragraph. If different arrangements were needed, it was based on the participants’ request (example: let’s talk at the college coffee shop). I retained permission for each interview prior to starting by letting them review the abstract and signing a consent to be interviewed for this research.

Data Collection Technique – In-Person Interviews

Each interview was recorded on a stand-alone digital recording then transcribed and the recording erased. All participants and institutions are labeled by designations of a letter, example: Veteran #1 (designation for human subjects), and Institution #1 (designation for college/university).

Each participant was verbally introduced to the study before the interview began. At any time during the interview, the subject could ask to stop the recording. Since Federal Law requires that any research involving human subjects and receiving federal funding, or located at an institution receiving federal funding, must be reviewed and approved by an institutional review board (IRB) before research can proceed. After preparing Letters of Introduction to the two institutions of higher learning and receiving approval from their personnel, I was granted full permission for in-person interviews at their locations by the IRB. Research denotes that veterans, sometimes closed and sheltered, prefer informal, conversational interviews. No predetermined questions are asked, but I did have a possible line of questions to assist in guiding the data collection in order to remain as open and adaptable as possible to the interviewee’s nature and priorities. In-person
interviews provide a wealth of answers for my research with veterans on what they think a veteran friendly campus is made of (Campion, 1994).

The second-tier interviews were investigative interviews with one representative of the VA who engages directly with their local/county veteran population on a regular basis.

Why In-Person Interviews for this Research?

1. The qualitative research interview seeks to describe and the meanings of central themes in the life world of the subjects. The main task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say (Kvale, 2006)

2. A qualitative research interview seeks to cover both a factual and a meaning level, though it is usually more difficult to interview on a meaning level. (Kvale, 1996)

3. Interviews are particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant’s experiences. The interviewer can pursue in-depth information around the topic. Interviews may be useful as follow-up to certain respondents to questionnaires, e.g., to further investigate their responses. (Kvale, 2006)

Investigate Study Outline

The questions in this investigative study covered the investigative focuses based on the question for veteran students and Veterans Affairs vocational personnel. The goal is to study the effects of outreach from the veteran’s point-of-view, then find out if the engagement by the school has been effective from the interviewing of the advisor. Finally, I spoke with a point person from the VA who collaborates with local veterans to better understand the expectations of veterans and institutions of higher education that
claim the veteran-friendly status. Below is a checklist of guiding top-of-mind narrative
suggestions used for the study:

1) **What is a Veteran-Friendly College or University?** I asked four veterans from
two local colleges/universities what it means for a school to be veteran-friendly.

2) **Veteran and military personnel programs available for a debt-free education**
   and the expectations: I interviewed one Veterans Service Officers from the
   Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs to get updated on current, past and
   upcoming VA programs for veterans in higher education. This will cover the
   expectations of the Federal Government for veterans in college.

3) **Question for all student veterans:** In your opinion, how does your school
   maintain success with its veterans? What can an institute of higher learning do
   better?

**ETHICS**

During this study I employed the following safeguards to protect informant’s rights:

1. Research objectives were shared with participants;
2. Written permission was obtained using a participants informed consent form;
3. Transcriptions were made available and a review by participants if requested;
4. Anonymity of participants was guaranteed; and
5. All data (recordings) were secured in a locked container inside a personal
   briefcase.
My study, “What makes a Veteran-Friendly College or University Campus?” did show the intersection between student veteran success and the demand for high quality collaborations with professors, staff and administrations of higher education. It also proved the strategic benefits for institutions that purposely engage the VA to recruit veterans qualified for the various VA educational programs.

Veterans are considered a protect class under the assumption that they have special needs inside of academia and these needs are important to make sure the veteran/military student graduates from college. It is necessary to explore the relationship to veteran students in higher education by asking many questions including the research question: “What makes a College or University Campus Veteran-Friendly?”

This study is only the beginning in a series of unanswered questions that remain a mystery for many veterans as well as college and university staff, faculty and admissions departments. If systems are in place and successful, the student veterans academic success must be expunged and shared with others inside the institutions that struggle with the academic needs of campus veterans.

The final goal of this study is to create a platform to continue this research while assisting developing new programs and curriculum that focus on successful engagements with veterans. By creating a comprehensive roadmap for institutions of higher learning, active military personnel and veterans who are actively engaging higher education to further their non-military training/education in civilian life, this study is a start to develop a comprehensive list of ideas and solutions that focus on veteran’s success in higher
education and start to develop a platform to advise local and national institutions of higher education about veterans needs in college. The solutions will be based on information from the data collection of student veterans, their advisors and VA personnel as to what they think is the ideal model for a veteran-friendly campus in higher education.
CHAPTER FOUR

Results

This study is based on research using interviews with veterans asking the question: “What makes a Veteran-Friendly College or University Campus?” The veterans involved in this study were very helpful in defining the roles of their corresponding institutions and providing their personal experiences and expectations. Many veterans defined themselves as one who has served in the armed forces, especially one who has served in combat or have made a career in the military. The study showed that a veteran’s life becomes very different outside of their units and inside of civilian life. Campuses have a duty to engage their student populations to assure individual and group success of veterans in higher education. This is a small sample of veterans who are husbands, wives, corporate professionals and older non-traditional students attempting to fit into a social construct that denotes college students should be in their late teens or early twenties, or an older student must have somehow failed and is not catching up, which is not the case with veteran student.

Interview Settings

All interviews took place in the Veterans Lounges, or areas denoted as safe spaces for veterans. Interviews were done with veterans who were pre-arranged or set up and agreed to this study. For the results in this chapter the institutions of higher education will be denoted as: Institution #1 (I1): A local (Minnesota) university with more than 30,000 students; and Institution #2 (I2): A local (Minnesota) college with less than 30,000 students. Veterans and active military students are sometimes sensitive about answering
any questions (in some cases, active duty personnel will be limited to yes/no construct depending on their jobs in the military). The interviews in this study flowed with vigor and true expression from all of the participants. The veterans and soldiers were comfortable with the short interview format. The main questions to all four veterans:

What makes a Veteran-Friendly College or University?

Participants Demographics

The following veterans attended an I1 college:

- Veteran #1 (Male)
- Veteran #2 (Female)

The following veterans attended an I2 college:

Veteran #3 (Male)
Veteran #4 (Male)

For this study, the veteran staff advisor is a female Air Force veteran.

Study Questions

Question #1: What branch of the armed services did you serve?

- Veteran #1 – U.S. Army
- Veteran #2 – U.S. Marines Corps
- Veteran #3 – U.S. Army Reserves
- Veteran #4 - U.S. Army

1. What year are you in College/Major?

- Veteran #1 – Senior/Business Management
- Veteran #2 – Senior/Social Justice
Veterans’ Experiences

Question #2: Can you describe your experience as a veteran in college?

Both Veteran #1 (I1) and Veteran #4 (I1) agreed their experiences in higher education was mixed bag of forms, delays and dealing with college and university staffers who did not talk the military lingo. In comparison, both veterans #2 and #3 were transfer students from other colleges in the Midwest. When they arrived at their current college, they were not prepared, but surprised enough about the veteran-friendly campus and how easy everything was to register, get credits for military service and have a place to sit and study on campus with other veterans. Both veteran students agreed that having staff advisors, faculty and financial aid personnel that are veterans themselves was a big plus in getting things done in a timely manner.

Veteran #1 - “When I arrived on this massive campus, I thought for sure I’d be just another name and number – but it didn’t happen that way. The veterans who had been here for at least two years and were getting ready to graduate tracked me and other veterans down and took us out for pizza. Needless to say, I was pleasantly surprised. I live not too far from campus on my own. My benefits cover my rent and groceries so I’m not too worried about going hungry. The great thing about this veterans’ organization is that they had gift certificates to several of the major grocery stores and if any veteran (especially those with veteran’s families that live off campus and get in a bind they don’t think twice, you are taken care of…and that’s how it’s supposed to be!”
Veteran #2 - “Being a female veteran and a Marine was hard at first. But our veterans’ student group has a female component that meets regularly with the other WAC’s [Woman’s Army Corps], and it makes us feel safe and a valuable part of this campus. Our advisor for both the males and female veterans is a female who kind of ‘Mother Hens’ us a little – but that’s great, you feel like this is still a unit, like in the military. Overall, I wish my two-year college had the same systems in place versus just lying about being veteran-friendly.”

Veteran #3 - “My experience has been nothing but great. I didn’t go to a two-year college; I started here and I will graduate in 2017. I’m a reservist and sometimes I get called for training or active duty; the great thing about my college experience is that I can complete all my work online, or if I’m out-of-country, my class and grade stop until I get back. I never lose with this school. It’s been surreal. I hope to do my masters work here in the fall.”

Veteran #4 - “What I can add is that having veterans who teach us is a plus. One of my professors tells the younger students that they should listen to me because I’ve been in combat. I kind of sit back and smile because you know that professor (a veteran too) has seen hard times in the military and respects what we all have given up and sacrificed.”

Question #3: If there were one thing that needs to be changed, what would it be?

All four veterans overwhelmingly agreed that the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs should not be giving out veteran-friendly ratings to colleges and universities that just have their veteran certifying officials fill out paperwork to comply with federal regulations. The veterans felt veteran-friendly statuses were misleading and given to just
some schools that didn’t even have a veteran’s student group or advisors. Veteran #2 was
the harshest critic of smaller schools which, she said, “leach” off of veteran benefits,
hiding behind false claims of being helpful to the veterans.

**Veteran #2** - “I understand it’s a business and the bottom line is the all-mighty dollar;
but some of us have been through hell and back and we have to be able to trust what a
college or university says about their programming for veterans. After I found out the
reality at the smaller school, I felt like dropping out. Nobody, and I mean nobody, really
seemed to care about my PTSD, depression or my service-connected injuries. If one thing
needs to be changed, it’s the system that determines veteran-friendly status because right
now, if a kindergarten classroom teacher answered the right questions, his/her class
would be considered veteran-friendly – and that’s an atrocity that needs to stop
now…don’t you think?”

**Question #4: In your opinion and experience, what makes a veteran-friendly college
or university campus?**

**Veteran #4** - “A veteran friendly college means they don’t think of your benefits as
entitlements and you are a respected member of the campus community. In classrooms,
the professors use your knowledge to provide real-world experience into lessons and a
veteran’s hard work is recognized. I think of a veteran friendly campus as a second
home.”

**Veteran #1** - “It’s hard to say...you’d like to think that any college or university big or
small that advertised they were veteran-friendly would actually be. To me a veteran-
friendly college is a place where you do not go unnoticed, you can tell your stories and
there’s a place that other veterans can be together on campus but outside of the mainstream.”

Veteran #2 - “I have to be who I am…a veteran; hard, unapologetic and sometimes dismissive. A veteran-friendly school is one that respects my space, time and work, but also does not block me from my individual goals and objectives. This does not mean to let me have run of the place, but it’s pretty close because we are veterans of the United States Armed Services.

Veteran #3 - “I don’t think I’ve really experienced a full veteran-friendly campus. Maybe it’s because of my service-connected challenges, or that I look past the little things that people throw in front of you. Simply put, a veteran-friendly school must always have staff, professors, advisors and administrators who served in the armed forces.

Veteran #4 - “A campus that recognizes that veterans are part of the community.”

Question #5: Are there any comments that you have from this research experience?

Note: This question was asked of all four veterans. The following is a combined narrative summary. All the veterans who participated overwhelmingly agreed that there needs to be a “test” for college campuses before they are certified as “veteran-friendly” and that experiential learning should be a part of earned credits for non-traditional learners like veterans.

All four veterans had high expectations for experiential learning credits to help them shorten their time in college. This became a topic of concern for them, because they felt that most colleges want you to take courses that did not challenge them personally or
academically. The veterans felt there should be a way to test out using a study guide, then taking a test prepared by the professor or department heads that would be graded on a pass/fail basis. If this were the case, any veteran could use the DANTES system (2016) and graduate earlier than in a four-year plan (USDVA U. D., 2016).

Secondly, all four veterans have experienced less than friendly college campuses that noted they were veteran-friendly. The veterans suggested there should be a survey of campus veterans done by the national veterans’ organization Student Veterans of America (SVA) to determine if colleges and universities were actually welcoming to their veteran populations. Veteran #2 noted, “This is the only way to find out if schools are veteran-friendly is by asking the veterans on campus, not the financial aid offices!”

VA Representative Response: During this study, the researcher had the opportunity to attend several Minnesota-based veteran hiring events. VA representatives spoke in at length about what is expected from colleges and universities across the state, as well as about veterans having high expectations for themselves while in school. The researcher attended one presentation that encouraged veterans to consider community colleges as the best bet for a higher education starting point. From this study and others shows smaller colleges, community colleges, or universities with solid collaborations with its veteran population offer broad-based curricula, quality teaching, flexible class schedules, and (unlike many for-profit schools) college credits transferable to four-year institutions, all at an affordable price. Many young people opt for military service specifically to qualify for educational benefits, and some are primed for STEM training because of the positions they filled in the service. We owe these students quality STEM educational opportunities.
Community colleges offer a superior product and value; they are veterans’ best bet (Murphy, 2012).

**Question #6: What are the expectations for veterans who use the Yellow Ribbon or Chapter 31 Programs?**

“It’s simple; our veterans must be given every opportunity to succeed. If this means buying groceries for the family of the veteran in college, or assisting with monthly rents or mortgages, we must make sure that all the options for non-veteran’s students that are available are also available to our campus veterans. There is no doubt in my mind that not every veteran will be successful be it for PTSD, homelessness, mental illness, drugs and alcohol or even suicide, but we must be able to identify the signs and signals to head off any bed set of circumstances. The college and university campuses are businesses and we must understand the veterans’ contribution to the bottom line; if we treat our veterans great, other veterans will start the whisper-campaign, which is common inside of like-minded cultural groups where word of mouth from a trusted source tells others that something is good or worth looking into. The campaign benefits the veterans seeking safe engagement and benefits institutions bottom line. As point people for veterans on campus, both the Yellow Ribbon and Chapter 31 programs have seen unmatched success. Veterans graduate debt-free; the school is paid directly from the Department of Veterans Affairs and there is a sense of freedom in academia to collaborate and work harder on behalf of our veterans. Not any two veterans are alike; not any two veterans have had the same experiences. Some are suffering inside and want to be a part of a bigger community, that’s what we and others (campuses) provide in our campus-wide veteran
events and recognition of the bravery and commitment of our veterans. It may sound vain, but we want our veterans to stick out like Supermen and Superwomen because they are and all of them have earned their keep!”

**Chapter Four Summary**

Many college campuses offer a venue for veterans’ groups, a place for veterans to meet and to socialize. It’s important for veterans and service members to be around people with like experiences and similar challenges, if only to exchange coping mechanisms and study habits. It’s often quite helpful to see someone else conquering the same challenges. Veterans only make up a small portion of the overall population, so many veterans are also counseled to spend some time getting to know the civilian population. It might seem a little silly, but making friends helps. It provides a support system and can help with some of the unexpected college road bumps, especially in academia. It also emphasizes a simple fact: Veterans are civilians, too (College, 2016).
CHAPTER FIVE

Reflections

The interviews in this study suggest that veterans must be recognized as a very important part of the campus community. It’s a fact, most veterans do complete college (Figure 2). To understand what makes a veteran-friendly college or university campus is to understand that meeting the needs of men and women who have served the United States during wartime and peacetime must be a central focus of campus administrators as long as there are veterans on college campuses.

Universities have long been places where young people develop identity and purpose in life. Students (non-veterans) load up on debt as they find out who they are and what they can achieve. But for older students with wartime experience, those lessons have already been learned amid a procession of struggle and sacrifice that's impossible to reproduce in a classroom. A personality molded in the crucible of war doesn't easily bend to the institutional tenets that universities push in glossy brochures. That leaves student veterans not only detached from other classmates, but from the schools their classmates take pride in attending (Horton, 2012). College administrators, staff, professors and campus organizations and advisors must make sure that all veterans are able to take part in college activities normally meant for first-year engagement by students who might be 17-18 years old. In some cases, veterans will shy away from “kiddie stuff” so the attempt...
must be made to customize student groups. An example of this is an on-campus monthly veteran’s newsletter produced by campus veterans for the whole campus student body. Veterans must be allowed to participate in student government without being looked at as outsiders trying to circumvent a system meant to teach younger students how to govern on behalf of others. Veterans are natural leaders with the leadership-chip built in – for a college or university campus to ignore this important human feature would be tragic for the veterans and the campus.

Helping veterans succeed in college contingent on two things. On one hand there are some things the veteran or service member can do to ease the transition into academia. On the other hand, colleges that take seriously the individual challenges of veterans are much better positioned to offer the kind of help that can make a big difference to a struggling student. Veterans in college are often counseled to give themselves plenty of time to prepare for the transition. There’s an adjustment to a lack of chain of command and of becoming the boss of your own day. Veterans are often reminded that finding time to study and complete assignments is now within their realm of responsibility. It’s certainly a shift and one where colleges can help, especially in the form of subtle reminders from understanding instructors or a frequent checkup from student services. Because socialization is also a large part of the college experience, veterans are encouraged to socialize in two different ways.

Asking the right questions about what makes a veteran-friendly university or college campus opened up many different routes to carry on this research such as making sure veterans’ have a designated lounge or safe area to study. I found that veterans who attend college today in Minnesota hold a 3.0 G.P.A. or higher and yet are homeless; there are
veterans suffering from serious mental illnesses who still make it to class everyday while dealing with administrations that do not understand their circumstances. Many older veterans with spouses, children, car payments, and mortgages strive to move into the workforce by getting a college degree. After all, college can be a necessary stepping-stone during the transition from armed services to civilian life, just as it can be a necessary stepping stone during the transition to a new career.

As a veteran who has been diagnosed with severe depression by the Minneapolis Veterans Affairs Hospital Partial-Psychiatric Hospitalization program, I have to admit that I struggled on a college campus that did not have the necessary tools for me and other veterans. I wrote for the school newspaper, becoming an award-winning columnist; I entered student government and became the senior representative for my graduating class. I participated, but there are many who do not. This is what needs to change.

Collaborations between veterans and mainstream students, staff, and faculty must be facilitated by campus administrators. These collaborations must be intentional but not forced, since most college certifying officials are non-veterans, usually female and do not have any experience with veterans, their families, or the bigger picture of the Department of Veterans Affairs, DANTES, or their requirements and expectations for a veteran-friendly campus (Dunklin, 2012). There has been a disconnect for far too long between many universities and their veterans where critical incidents like suicide rates have rocketed and good intent has turned into malfeasance with a heinous disregard for military personnel who are now students. While I understand it is hard to change a culture of benign neglect, it is easy to make sure that campus employees are alerted to the
sensitivity of veterans’ issues and how important veterans are at any campus. In my research about the great side of college campuses, there is a not-so-great side.

**Veterans Benefits: Bang for Their Buck**

According to the Student Veterans of American (SVA) website, which is the portal for all veterans in higher education, the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill is the most generous, comprehensive federal education benefit in existence. The Department of Education in collaboration with the Department of Defense, and the service has been focused on best practices for service-members, veterans, and their families. Getting the most “bang for their buck” when veterans use their educational benefits means that not only is this the best time for veterans to get a debt-free college education, but also that the institutions of higher learning must focus on the financial benefits the VA provides its students who attend (Schmeling, 2016).

**The Roadmap for Veterans**

From the start of this study, I wanted to make sure this became a roadmap for veterans who are in college or planning to enroll. The following are some key points for veterans to consider before directing any funding on their behalf to any college or university:

- Consider on-campus veteran friendly initiatives: Is there a legitimate veterans’ student organization? Is there a day care for veterans with families attending the university? Is there a veteran-friendly culture?
- Is the campus veteran advisor a veteran?
• Will the institution grant at least 10 credits for your military service for every four-years served? Veterans starting college must contact the SVA or DANTES to get an official transcript.

• Make sure there are professors on the faculty who were (are) veterans. They can offer invaluable advice about the campus.

• Investigate whether the institution has a graduate program you might be interested in. At some universities, especially with VA funding, if your G.P.A. meets certain requirements, you can be admitted to a program taking one class a semester towards a graduate degree while still an undergraduate student.

• Talk to the editor of the college newspaper about writing about veterans in higher education at that school. Consider writing as a columnist.

• Offer understanding to younger students on campus without military experience. Look for ways to open up conversation.

• Seek out scholarships available exclusively to veterans.

• Look into the program accreditation. Even though the prospective school might be accredited, does the individual program have the proper accreditation for you to obtain employment after degree completion. (For example, law schools that are not ABA accredited may not allow you to practice in other states.) (America, 2016).

Besides the above, the United States Department of Education denotes The 8 Keys (2016) for veteran-friendly college and university campuses as a pathway to success for veterans (U.S. Department of Education, 2016):
• Create a culture of trust and connectedness across the campus community to promote well-being and success for veterans.

• Ensure consistent and sustained support from campus leadership.

• Implement an early alert system to ensure all veterans receive academic, career, and financial advice before challenges become overwhelming.

• Coordinate and centralize campus efforts for all veterans, together with the creation of a designated space for them (even if limited in size).

• Collaborate with local communities and organizations, including government agencies, to align and coordinate various services for veterans.

• Utilize a uniform set of data tools to collect and track information on veterans, including demographics, retention, and degree completion.

• Provide comprehensive professional development for faculty and staff on issues and challenges unique to veterans.

• Develop systems that ensure sustainability of effective practices for veterans (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Most Sought After Degrees for Veterans

We know that the most sought-after undergraduate degrees by veterans were in business, social sciences, homeland security, law enforcement, firefighting, and computer and information services (Wiess, 2016). Researchers say veterans appear to be doing better than other so-called non-traditional students — those who delay attending college, enroll part-time or have children, factors common with many current veterans (Zoroya, 2014).
When looking at veterans finishing college, completion rates varied for veterans depending upon branch of service. The largely ground combat duty of Iraq and Afghanistan falls disproportionately on Army soldiers and Marines.

- Air Force veterans had a higher academic completion rate of 67%, while Army veterans were at 47% and Marine veterans at 45%.

Most colleges calculate graduation rates based on students who enroll in their institution and obtain a four-year undergraduate degree. The veterans’ completion rate usually counts those who used GI Bill benefits to obtain a bachelor's or graduate degree, but also a vocational certificate or associate degree, even those who completed an on-the-job training course (Zoroya, 2014).

**Reflections on Minnesota’s Veterans Population**

In Minnesota there are over 300,000 (See Figure 3) veterans from different eras. Colleges and universities must be aware of this fact and be ready to facilitate a welcoming environment. It doesn’t matter if it’s a newly released veteran or a veteran from the Vietnam war, every veteran has a right to higher education and to use the benefits provided an institution of his/her choice (USDVA U. D., 2016).

It is clear to me that this study is just the tip of the iceberg. During my time spent talking to veteran college students from all walks of life, there is one thing they all had in
common at their particular campuses: they all felt they were a part of the broader community, wanted, needed and appreciated for their service.

It’s been a long time since I was a teen-aged, pimple-faced know-nothing looking around every corner with terror when I joined the Army. But as I stated in Chapter One of this study, the abandonment felt like being the sole survivor in an apocalyptic drama; which was the same thing I later experienced arriving on a college campus. This study begins to answer important questions that need addressing at every college and university campus across the United States.
APPENDIX A

Research Vocabulary (Military specific)

**Active Military Personnel (AMP):** Is any person(s) who currently is a member of one of the branches of the armed forces. As of 31 December 2013, an estimated 1,500,000 people were on active duty in the armed forces, with an additional 850,880 people in the seven reserve components.

**Chapter 31 Veterans:** VA Vocational Rehabilitation Education Program. VA Vocational Rehabilitation is a program whose primary function is to help veterans with service-connected disabilities become suitably employed, maintain employment, or achieve independence in daily living.

**Yellow Ribbon Program:** Institutions of Higher Learning (Degree Granting Institutions) may elect to participate in the Yellow Ribbon Program to make additional funds available for your education program without an additional charge to your GI Bill entitlement. Degree-granting institutions of higher learning participating in the Yellow Ribbon Program agree to make additional funds available for your education program without an additional charge to a veteran’s GI Bill entitlements. These institutions voluntarily enter into a Yellow Ribbon Agreement with VA and choose the amount of tuition and fees that will be contributed. VA matches that amount and issues payments directly to the institution.

**Service-Connected Disabilities:** Disability compensation is a monetary benefit paid to Veterans who are determined by VA to be disabled by an injury or illness that was incurred or aggravated during active military service. These disabilities are considered to be service connected.
Post-9/11 GI Bill: If a Veteran has at least 90 days of aggregate active duty service after Sept. 10, 2001, and are still on active duty, or if you are an honorably discharged Veteran or were discharged with a service-connected disability after 30 days, you may be eligible for this VA-administered program. Many Vietnam veterans stay this program has failed.

GI Bill: The term GI Bill refers to any Department of Veterans Affairs education benefit earned by members of Active Duty, Selected Reserve and National Guard Armed Services.

PTSD: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that can develop after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event, or learning that a traumatic event has happened to a loved one. Many veterans, both piece-time suffer from depression associated with PTSD, as the author of this research does.

Veteran (Military) Friendly Campuses: The terms military-friendly and veteran-friendly to describe institutions of higher learning (IHL) likely gained mainstream attention after implementation of the Post-9/11 GI Bill in 2009. However, before the rollout of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, IHLs recognized the growing student service member population—mostly using military tuition assistance— as the military force increased in size to accommodate engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq. In 2008, at the Council for College and Military Educators (CCME) annual meeting then voluntary education chief for the Coast Guard challenged higher education officials to make military-friendly more than a slogan. It may be the first modern account of a credible figure not only elevating the term military-friendly, but also providing thoughts around defining the term.
**Experiential learning experience**: Experiential learning is the process of learning through experience, and is more specifically defined as "learning through reflection on doing."

**Troops To Teachers**: Troops to Teachers (TTT) is a DANTES-managed Department of Defense (DoD) program that can help you begin a new career as a public school teacher – giving you the opportunity to use your leadership skills, knowledge and experience to have a positive effect on our nation's youth.

**DANTES (Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support)**: DANTES is a Department of Defense agency that provides leadership and support for this important effort through partnerships across the education community.

**Black Veterans of America**: BVA currently advocates for Veterans and helps them navigate VA Systems. The BVA also serves as a cultural advisor to the city, county, state, and regional Veterans Service Organizations. We collaborate with Veterans and Community Organizations to help Veterans, especially African Americans, access VA services.

**Disabled American Veterans (DAV)**: DAV is a nonprofit charity that provides a lifetime of support for veterans of all generations and their families, helping more than 1 million veterans in positive, life-changing ways each year. The organization provides more than 700,000 rides for veterans attending medical appointments and assists veterans with more than 300,000 benefit claims annually. In 2015, DAV helped attain more than $4 billion in new and retroactive benefits to care for veterans, their families and survivors.
**Grunt – Infantry Man:** The warriors on the battlefield, the men in the shit. There is no higher honor than being a grunt in the Marine Corps, Army infantry.

**WAC:** Female enlisted or veteran personnel.

**The VA:** The Department of Veterans Affairs. Most military people and their families refer to the massive bureaucracy as the VA.

**Veterans Lounge:** An enclosed area provided with technology for campus service-members to relax, work on studies and network with other military personnel.

**Veteran Service Officer (VSO):** Both Hennepin and Ramsey County have county veterans service officers who are able and bound by-law to assist veterans in navigating the Veterans Administration.

**Veteran (Military) Friendly Campuses:** The terms military-friendly and veteran-friendly to describe institutions of higher learning (IHL) likely gained mainstream attention after implementation of the Post-9/11 GI Bill in 2009. However, before the rollout of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, IHLs recognized the growing student service member population—mostly using military tuition assistance— as the military force increased in size to accommodate engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq. In 2008, at the Council for College and Military Educators (CCME) annual meeting then voluntary education chief for the Coast Guard challenged higher education officials to make military-friendly more than a slogan. It may be the first modern account of a credible figure not only elevating the term military-friendly, but also providing thoughts around defining the term.
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