CAMMIES TO COLLEGE:
ORGANIZATIONAL SENSEMAKING OF STUDENT VETERANS ON “VETERAN FRIENDLY” COLLEGE CAMPUSES

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in
Communication Studies

by
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Gail Adriane Kirk

Spring 2014

APPROVED BY THE DEAN OF GRADUATE STUDIES
AND VICE PROVOST FOR RESEARCH:

__________________________________________

Eun K. Park, Ph.D.

APPROVED BY THE GRADUATE ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

__________________________________________

Susan Avanzino, Ph.D.
Coordinator

Stephanie Hamel, Ph.D., Chair Graduate

__________________________________________

Susan Avanzino, Ph.D.

__________________________________________

Nan Li, Ph.D.
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DEDICATION

To those who made it back,

But never made it home.

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This study investigates the experiences of student veterans on California State University campuses by examining how they are socialized on campus and how they navigate their identities as a student and a veteran. To understand the student veteran perspective, an overview of current issues facing student veterans is reviewed, followed by a look at three different methodologies currently used by Gannett Company, Victory Media, and U.S. News to determine and rank “veteran friendly” college campuses. The review of literature focuses on organizational socialization, organizational identity, and sensemaking. Qualitative interviews were conducted with 22 participants who narrated their experiences on CSU campuses and were analyzed using a grounded theory approach. The findings indicate that participants articulated their socialization experiences consistent with a framework
created by the White House Administration for student veterans called, “The 8 Keys to Success”. Participants in the study also revealed their veteran identity on college campuses shapes their interactions with other students, staff and faculty in both positive and negative ways. For those participants who viewed their veteran status as a potential barrier to their success in college, many choose to hide their veteran status for fear of negative consequences. The findings have important implications for universities that claim they are “veteran friendly” or are seeking that status, and the veterans who are looking for campuses that are equipped with an organizational culture that will facilitate their success. Future communication research on the role of identity and self-disclosure in the organizational socialization processes is also suggested.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Veteran students are returning to college in record numbers, doubling from 400,000 in 2000 to 800,000 in 2010 (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics [NCVAS], 2012). As veterans return home, separated from military life and faced with a struggling economy, many aspire toward self-improvement through higher education. The influx of potential student veterans and the $23.7 billion in federal money from the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 (also known as the Montgomery G.I. Bill) have created immense opportunities for veterans to improve their education and employment options (Student Veterans of America [SVA], 2013).

While financial opportunities for education are enhanced through federal programs like Chapter 30 and Chapter 33 Montgomery G.I. Bills (MGIB), personal and institutional barriers remain for some student veterans making the completion of a college degree that much more difficult. Because of these barriers, many veterans look for educational institutions that are prepared to assist them and claim to be “veteran friendly.” This research explores veterans’ perceptions of institutional support on “veteran friendly” college campuses and their socialization into these organizations. Through an examination of the communication that occurs on these campuses and in interactions with professors, students and staff, this study seeks to identify what institutional structures are missing and
those that are working. Given their previous experience as members of a large highly-structured military organization and their new role as student members of a large loosely-structured educational organization, the study also examines how veterans are navigating this transition in relation to their organizational identification and communication behaviors.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to understand student veterans’ perceptions of what constitutes a veteran-friendly institution of higher education and which aspects of college are empowering and/or undermining veterans’ educational success. Financially, veterans have options allowing access to college through various programs like the Montgomery G.I. Bill. However, college tuition is only one problem: health insurance, family responsibilities, childcare, mental health complications, and disability access are rarely considered. Veteran students, and their lucrative Montgomery G.I. Bills, are also targets for unscrupulous recruiters whose goal is increased enrollment, not student success. Even when student veterans choose reputable colleges, institutions are often not equipped to support veterans and the unique challenges they face. Student veteran success has many similarities to student diversity and student success programs which focus on racial minorities, disabilities, and first generation students. To assume the same tactics will be successful for veterans is flawed. Something is missing on campuses to promote success, and exploring the experiences of students is imperative to better understand their perspectives of the university system and to pursue increased effectiveness.

Multiple groups have attempted to articulate what is needed to ensure student
veterans success: The White House Administration, Victory Media, Gannett Company, and U.S. News have created comprehensive methodologies to prioritize and rank colleges based on their ability to best meet the needs of this population. However, while each ranking system attempts to speak for this population, each ranking system is missing veteran voices.

Student veterans are a unique population on campus and face an abundance of problems, including feelings of alienation on campus and disillusionment with civilian opportunities. Veterans’ needs are more diverse than traditional students. For some their alienation and disillusionment is a result of severe depression (25% of student veterans), PTSD symptoms (46% of student veterans) (Rudd, Goulding, & Bryan, 2012), or because this population is more likely “to be older, enrolled part-time, first-generation students, transfer students, and distance learners” (National Survey of Student Engagement [NSSE], 2010, p. 17). The student veteran population is more likely to consist of racial or ethnic minorities and twice as likely to report a disability than nonveteran students (NSSE, 2010).

Veterans also report lower “academic self-concept” scores than their civilian peers (Higher Education Research Institute [HERI], 2010). Academic self-concept is a “measure of students’ beliefs about their abilities and confidence in academic environments” (HERI, 2010, p. 146). It includes subjects’ beliefs about academic ability, drive to achieve, and intellectual self-confidence. Lower academic self-concept scores may be derived from two areas: First, for many veterans, it has been five years or more since participating in a traditional education setting, and second, many veterans “report receiving significantly lower high-school grades than other students entering the same colleges” (HERI, 2010, p. 22). Addressing veterans’ low academic self-concept should be a priority for schools serving this population and continues to be a major challenge for institutions.
The influx of the veteran population may create a strain on colleges not capable of meeting their needs. What must be considered is how organizations can create practices that permeate all aspects of these institutions and foster higher education excellence. Many of the educational obstacles veterans experience are vastly different from what traditional college students face. Despite these differences, veterans’ stories about returning to college are rarely collected.

Student veterans’ stories about their college experiences and their transitions to college student identities need to be understood before campuses can claim to be veteran friendly. In this light, the present study aims to investigate how this population is acclimating to university (organizational) life and how participants’ military identity is expressed in the college environment. By investigating this population’s experiences through an organizational framework, the nuances of the student veteran population may be understood, and in turn, used to help this population successfully and fully transition to college life.

The remainder of this research will be divided into four chapters. Chapter II will review literature on the challenges student veterans face, previous research on organizational socialization, identity and organizational identification, including high reliability organizations, and finally sensemaking. Chapter III will outline the methodology used in this study. Chapter IV will include the study findings, followed by Chapter V discussing the significance of the study’s findings for communication scholarship, implications for colleges, future research and the study’s limitations.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The following literature review will be divided into four sections. First, research is explored to better understand the population under investigation. Second, the review researches the four areas of organizational socialization, with special emphasis about how organizational socialization can benefit both members and the organization. The socialization of veterans on campus can highlight the different processes in place to ensure student success and to help understand which processes are working or broken. This section also includes high reliability organization (HRO) research. Veterans’ previous HRO structure in the military may shed light on perceived difficulties navigating college expectations. Third, a review of literature to understand how social identity theory motivates individuals is followed by a brief look at organizational identification. Fourth, sensemaking is defined and how student veterans may make sense of their environments and how they navigate college is discussed.

Veterans enrolling in college face numerous difficulties that many of their peers cannot imagine, such as minority dependants, significant medical needs, and financial responsibilities. The influx of this population creates a strain on colleges not capable of meeting veterans’ needs, and veterans unable to adequately survive in college may result in
failing classes and high attrition. It is critical to understand how veterans are socialized onto college campuses, the extent to which they identify with other students and their new identities, how they navigate this new experience, and how they bridge their military experience with civilian life.

Student Veterans and National Issues

The arrival of any new population can result in organizations needing to reevaluate communication strategies. Reevaluation helps organizations prevent marginalizing populations or minimizing their contributions. But which communication practices can be defined as military-friendly? The communication expectations of veterans, because of their military experience, may be quite different from non-veteran students’ expectations. Exacerbating those expectations is the difference between average military veterans – a 25 year-old student with an increased chance of a physical disability or mental illness, outside school employment obligations, and family dependents – and the average freshman college student – an 18 year-old whose main focuses surrounds school life.

Student Veteran Trends

Many news reports have raised awareness about issues veterans are facing while pursuing higher education. News articles have reported astronomical dropout rates, increased suicidal ideations, and predatory recruiting practices by technical schools, colleges, and universities. One of the most repeated statistics in articles from 2012 reported that 88% of all freshmen veterans who begin college in the fall will drop out before summer (as cited by Wood, 2012). The study, published by the Colorado Workforce Development Council, has
been thoroughly criticized by Student Veterans of America (SVA), the Navy Times, and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) as a false representation of veterans’ dropout rates. While the study and its methodology (which is no longer publically accessible) is suspect, the articles that reported the statistic clearly delineate the difficulties veterans are experiencing on college campuses. In fact, the Colorado Workforce Development Council study has exposed the need for an understanding of student veteran dropout rates that previously were untracked and unreported, and this often-repeated statistic has prompted groups to begin to track student veteran success. On March 24, 2014, the Student Veterans of America (SVA) published the first reports compelled by the Colorado Workforce Development Council study. The SVA report estimates that only 51.7 percent of veterans who enrolled in college using the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill graduated (Jelinek, 2014).

The majority of news articles reporting the Colorado Workforce Development Council study’s 88% dropout rate included personal anecdotes from student veterans. Betar (2012) reported that one veteran said, “I felt like I was on another planet” (para. 1). Navy Veteran Lucas Velasquez explains, “At 19, I was in combat as opposed to trying to go find a party… [19 year olds] really don’t realize how precious life can be, how it can go away in the drop of a dime” (Briggs, 2012, para. 7). Walter Sweeny said, “It’s lonely,” and trying to explain his experience from over half a decade in the Marines was like “trying to describe sex to a virgin” (Boodman, 2011, p. 2). While the statistic that launched a thousand articles is dubious (88% dropout rate, only 3% of veterans graduate), the challenges veterans face on college campuses have begun to garner national attention.

The life experience of student veterans may alienate them from traditional, relatively sheltered, nonveteran college peers. The average civilian college student is 18-22
years old, while veterans on average are between 23-27 years old (Humphrey, 2013). Veterans often have multiple obligations outside college, including caring for underage dependents, aging parents, and working off campus. Veteran students report working twice as many hours outside of school and spending six times as many hours on dependent care than nonveteran students (NSSE, 2010). In spite of outside responsibilities that occupy many hours per week, student veterans still spend as much time studying as civilian counterparts (NSSE, 2010). Student veterans dedicate as much effort to their studies as traditional students, yet they have multiple responsibilities outside of school. Colleges designed for more traditional students may not take into consideration student veterans’ needs as a subpopulation on their campuses.

Failure to consider unique student veteran needs may explain the discrepancies between veteran and nonveteran degree completion. A new population of post 9/11 veteran students is enrolling in higher education, but they still only comprise one percent of college students. Only 25% of veterans over 25 years-old have a four-year degree compared to 30% for non-veterans (Institute for Veterans and Military Families [IVMF], 2013; PR Newswire, 2012; Woods, 2012). However, veterans are more likely to complete some college than non-veterans, but many are not completing those degrees (NCVAS, 2011). Despite having financial flexibility more veterans fail to complete a degree than nonveterans.

Veterans recently separating from the military may not have the community support to encourage them to pursue college or to overcome education hurdles. For many traditional college students, college is the logical next step. However, for new veterans returning home without cultural expectations suggesting they should be enrolling in college, bureaucratic college applications, federal student loans, Veterans Affairs’ paperwork, and
transcripts from previous education and military training can seem daunting. This is especially true if veterans do not have access to other students experiencing the same problems. Brenda Allen (2005) wrote about her experience as a young black female scholar in the 1950s, graduating from high school and “mimick[ing classmates] by registering for college entrance exams and enrolling in college prep courses” (p. 43). Many student veterans do not have a peer group who can explain the process or whom they can emulate. Even after they enroll, many do not have built in resources they can turn to for assistance with college questions and expectations. Furthermore, there is often a “stigma” attached to pursuing college at a later age. This is the same stigma re-entry students often face. Their friends and peers of similar ages have already graduated from college or chose not to attend, leaving older students feeling isolated on campuses.

Mental health issues of student veterans also constitute a major challenge for many. A study exploring psychological symptoms, symptom severity, and suicide risk of student veterans reported over one-third of respondents experienced severe anxiety, one-fourth of respondents experienced severe depression, and nearly one-half of respondents reported post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms (Rudd et al., 2012). However, it is rates of suicidal ideations that are of particular concern. Forty-six percent of all respondents reported thinking about suicide, and 20% of participants have a suicide plan. With nearly one-half of student veterans thinking about suicide (as compared to six percent of nonveteran students), schools are simply not prepared to deal with the influx of mental health related issues (Rudd et al., 2012). Significant rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts can be exacerbated without proper support, support that could be offered from college campuses trying to recruit veterans to campuses which claim to be “veteran friendly”.
Veterans can improve their chances of succeeding in college by choosing institutions able to support them. In response to the large influx of incoming veterans and their access to educational financial flexibility through the MGIB, more colleges, universities, and technical schools are touting “veteran friendly”, “military support”, or other euphemisms with little concrete meaning. Robert Bothel, the voluntary education chief for the U.S. Coast Guard, said “military friendly [must be] more than a slogan” (Lederman, 2008, para. 3). But while the post 9/11 MGIB successfully helps veterans offset the ever-increasing cost of college, they are now targets of predatory school recruiting.

More than a Slogan: Colleges and Universities Ranking Systems

Students with guaranteed tuitions are attractive candidates for any institution, and for-profit colleges recruit accordingly. For-profit colleges have an added incentive to recruit veterans. A federal law prevents for-profit colleges from receiving more than 90% of their revenue from Title IV federal student aid, and allows them to satisfy the remaining ten percent through the MGIB and student veterans. For-profit colleges, which enroll less than one-quarter of student veterans, receive over one-third of the $26.7 billion in federal tuition money (Jacobs, 2012; SVA, 2013). However, only 13 percent of student veterans graduate from for-profit schools (Jelinek, 2014). These organizations use recruiting tactics through official looking websites like G.I.Bill.com; ArmedForcesEDU.com; UseYourGIBill.us that are run by marketing firms hired by for-profit colleges (Weinstein, 2011). (Since beginning this research all these websites have been shut down or navigate the user to an official VA website.) From student veterans’ perspectives, the flexibility of online programs, allowing them to continue their employment, to take care of family obligations, and to graduate sooner
(accelerated programs) are enticing options for those whose age and experience seem out of place on traditional college campuses.

For-Profit Schools. Because of for-profit schools’ seemingly attractive qualities, veterans can be easy targets for unscrupulous schools looking to make a profit. This trend prompted President Obama to sign an executive order “to bring an end to the aggressive, and sometimes, dishonest recruiting [of veterans] that takes place” (Marshall, 2012, para. 8). In an investigation by Senator Tom Harkin, Harkin reported that “[m]ore than 1 in 5 students enrolling in a for-profit college default within three years of entering repayment on their student loans” (Cohen & Erikson, 2013, para. 2), and more than half of the students who enrolled in the largest 30 for-profit schools left without a degree (Lewin, 2012). Even with the 9/11 MGIB, student veterans still require loans to afford for-profit schools. President Obama addressed predatory recruiting practices of some schools in a speech to the 3rd Infantry Division soldiers at Fort Stewart, Georgia (2012):

But as some of your comrades have discovered, sometimes you’re dealing with folks who aren’t interested in helping you. They’re not interested in helping you find the best program. They are interested in getting the money. They don’t care about you; they care about the cash.

So they harass you into making a quick decision with all those calls and emails. And if they can’t get you online, they show up on post. One of the worst examples of this is a college recruiter who had the nerve to visit a barracks at Camp Lejeune and enroll Marines with brain injuries -- just for the money. These Marines had injuries so severe some of them couldn’t recall what courses the recruiter had signed them up for. That’s appalling. That’s disgraceful. It should never happen in America. (para. 32-33)

To help veterans choose the best colleges, multiple groups have articulated what they believe is needed to ensure student veteran success. The White House Administration’s “The 8 Keys to Success”, Victory Media’s “Military Friendly Schools”, Gannett Company’s “Best for Vets”, and U.S. News’ “Best Colleges for Veterans” (now part of their yearly
college rankings) have created comprehensive methodologies to prioritize and rank colleges based on their ability to best meet the needs of the returning veteran population.

**School Rankings.** President Obama’s administration has identified objectives important for veteran educational success. On August 10, 2013, President Obama revealed to the Disabled American Veterans National Convention eight implementations for colleges and universities to emulate. “The 8 Keys to Success on campus are (Baker, 2013):

1. Create a culture of trust and connectedness across the campus community to promote well-being and success for veterans.
2. Ensure consistent and sustained support from campus leadership.
3. Implement an early alert system to ensure all veterans receive academic, career, and financial advice before challenges become overwhelming.
4. Coordinate and centralize campus efforts for all veterans, together with the creation of a designated space (even if limited in size).
5. Collaborate with local communities and organizations, including government agencies, to align and coordinate various services for veterans.
6. Utilize a uniform set of data tools to collect and track information on veterans, including demographics, retention and degree completion.
7. Provide comprehensive professional development for faculty and staff on issues and challenges unique to veterans.
8. Develop systems that ensure sustainability of effective practices for veterans” (para. 3-10).

The steps articulated by President Obama’s “Keys to Success” focus on the support colleges and universities can offer veterans. However, Sean Collins, Vice President for Victory Media, commented that, “The administration’s ‘8 Keys to Success’ provide high-level, macro suggestions that schools can take to help veterans and service members transition into the classroom, but lacks actionable definition of best practices needed to really move the needle on campus” (PRWeb, 2013, para. 3). Victory Media, along with Gannett Company and *U.S. News*, publishes a yearly study intended to help veterans choose appropriate institutions and help schools improve veteran services. The studies survey colleges and weigh selected categories. Combined, each college is compared, and the list is
published annually – a hierarchical list of colleges which meet or exceed certain benchmarks intended to help military personnel choose the most appropriate learning environment.

Institutional support for veterans is a focus of all four groups. While the Administration sets levels that universities are asked to strive for, Victory Media, Gannett Company, and U.S. News calculate colleges’ services or competence already accessible by student veterans. Services include veteran staff and academic support, financial support, and credit acceptance for military training. Competence includes the institution’s accreditation, graduation rates, and post-graduation success (for a full list of published categories, see Appendix A). However, while the Obama administration was criticized for having abstract goals, “Military Friendly Schools” and “Best for Vets” endorse for-profit schools that meet the minimal criteria for list inclusion without reporting on their quality. “Best Colleges for Veterans” avoids for-profit schools, but they include only institutions that participate in the Yellow Ribbon program (the program is explained in detail below) (Best colleges for veterans: National universities, 2013). Because the California State University system does not participate in the Yellow Ribbon program, they are not included in the U.S. News’ “Best Colleges for Veterans” ranking.

The Yellow Ribbon program helps Post-9/11 G.I. Bill recipients when college tuition exceeds the maximum the G.I. Bill will pay. The Post-9/11 G.I. Bill will pay a maximum of the most expensive public university in the state, while the tuition for private colleges or out-of-state residency for public universities may exceed that amount. To assist veterans, some colleges participate in the Yellow Ribbon Program promising to contribute a specified dollar amount to tuition expenses, and Veterans Affairs will match the contribution. Any remaining cost of tuition is the student veteran’s responsibility. However, many public
colleges wave state residency for veterans (like California State University), therefore, there is no reason for these institutions to participate in the Yellow Ribbon Program: The Post-9/11 G.I. Bill will cover all tuition and fees. *U.S. News’s* methodology haphazardly excludes colleges like California State University and many other public institutions.

“Keys to Success,” “Best for Vets,” “Military Friendly®,” and the newly inducted “Best Colleges for Veterans” report how colleges and universities can be structured to support veteran students, but their approach is top-down without considering veterans’ perspectives. The element missing from each approach is the voices of veterans’ experiences leading to a real understanding of what this population needs.

**Organizational Socialization**

How veterans are socialized as new members of a college campus community influences their ability to be successful. Organizational socialization can benefit both the member and the organization by increasing a member’s satisfaction within the organization (Morrison, 1993), commitment to the success of the organization (Ashforth & Saks, 1996), and performance proficiency (Chao, O’Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994).

Organizational assimilation, the process of new members joining, integrating into, and eventually leaving an organization, is important for newcomers’ outcomes (Jablin, 2001; Sollitto, Johnson, & Myers, 2013), and research is needed to explore student veterans’ socialization at universities and colleges.

When new members begin a transition into an organization (job, school, or social club), they are exposed to immediate socialization from the new environment. Colleges spend significant resources on programming and staffing to assist new students, especially
during their first year. Socialization can occur during planned or unplanned events. Planned socialization can include oral or written introduction to organizational life through handbooks, “welcome aboard” events, indoctrinations, organizational produced literature, or mandatory meetings. Unplanned events are not specifically scheduled by the organization, and they may include first contact with more experienced members of the organization or contact through public advertising. Organizational socialization occurs in multiple stages: anticipatory, encounter, metamorphosis, and exit.

Anticipatory socialization occurs when potential members seek out organizational information regarding membership (Jablin, 2001). The information gathered helps to limit the uncertainty newcomers may experience during transitional periods. Would-be members gather information by all means available (online resources, organizational literature, or discourse through representative members). Traditionally, anticipatory socialization is separated in two categories: vocational anticipatory socialization and organizational anticipatory socialization. Vocational anticipatory socialization begins during childhood when individuals through direct and indirect means (family, peers, friends, part-time jobs, educational experiences, and media) gather occupational information and compare it against their self-concept, eventually making choices and selecting vocational options which best represents their experiences and beliefs about themselves (Jablin, 1987; Jablin, 2001). Research investigating the effects of vocational anticipatory socialization is limited (Jablin, 2001); however, while considering the educational experiences of many student veterans (lower reported grades and lower academic self-concept scores), and the vocational choices made (military service), it is clear that the vocational anticipatory socialization may have a profound impact on the experience of student veterans (HERI, 2010).
Organizational anticipatory socialization occurs as individuals build expectations regarding specific organizations. These expectations are learned through literature (for example, college websites, advertisements, college fair pamphlets) and interactions with persons (recruiters, alumni, peers, social network ties) who have knowledge regarding the institution (Jablin, 2001). Individual expectations about an organization may be inflated because of recruiter and media bias intended to entice applicants to the organization. For student veterans, for-profit schools have successfully inflated expectations, but many fail to provide accurate information necessary for student veteran success (Jablin, 2001; Smith & Maggio, 2011).

Encounter socialization occurs as each new member enters an organization and weighs expectations against reality (Bernardi, 2006). The result can be shocking for newcomers who anticipate vastly different experiences. During the encounter phase of socialization, newcomers’ energies are focused on deciphering norms which are communicated through other members (Kramer, 2011). Behavior norms include proper communication between peers and throughout the hierarchy (Gilsdorf, 1998), acceptable dress (Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997), and expectations and limitations of humor (Meyer, 1997).

During the encounter phase of socialization, members attempt to individualize their roles to match previously held values and attitudes by realigning organizational values to better reflect their personalized beliefs and attitudes (Jablin, 1987). The roles of both the organization and the individual are renegotiated to share a constructed reality (Jablin, 1987). In higher education, many students redesign their living spaces as a reflection of their acknowledged identities or seek out activities or clubs to individualize their experiences. Clubs on college campuses may reflect individual identities through religious beliefs,
political leanings, fraternities and sororities, or various team sports (both sponsored and not
sponsored by the university). However, for many organizational minorities (like veterans on
campus), the infrastructure does not exist to allow members to individualize their
surroundings to salient identities. Without a community available for members, some
newcomers are left feeling isolated and alienated which can create an environment with high
student attrition (Glomb, Midenhall, Mason & Salzberg, 2009).

As members become more familiar with expectations and institutional norms,
they begin to learn labels older organizational members apply to actions and people
(Ashforth & Humphrey, 1997). Labeling objects, actions, and people is inherently
ambiguous; however, the power of labeling (in part to remove uncertainty) allows
understanding in a complex world. When newcomers understand or are made privy to an
organization’s labeling, it is a critical tool used “for organizing, and communicating
experience within organizations and, in turn, for guiding experience” (Ashforth &
Humphrey, 1997, p. 43). Labels are also applied to new members which gives inexperienced
members added flexibility while navigating through new environments (Greenberg, 1996). In
this context, older students (veterans and returning students) may have a unique
disadvantage: by the appearance of age (or experience) alone, many older students will not
be assigned the “newcomer” label and therefore not afforded flexibility by peers or
professors.

While anticipatory and encounter socialization phases focus on new members’
transition into an organization, metamorphosis is described “as the psychological adjustment
that occurs when uncertainty has been managed and individuals move from being
preoccupied with their transition to maintaining their new situations” (Kramer, 2001, p. 55).
This stage of the socialization process is thought to occur between the third to sixth month of new member assimilation (Jablin, 2001), but it is entirely dependent on the circumstances. Members begin to feel part of the organization in the metamorphosis stage, as behavior expectations are apparent, and the transition to membership is effectively complete.

One aspect of college as an organization is unique: most members join the institution with a planned organization exit. The disengagement/exit stage of assimilation is the final transition of organizational socialization (Jablin, 2001). During the encounter stage of socialization, members personalize organizational values to reflect personalized beliefs, but during the disengagement stage, members begin to deidentify with the organization (Davis & Myers, 2012).

Socialization assists with the members’ organizational assimilation. Socialization helps members create relationships, navigate uncertainty, and ensure that members and organizations benefit from each other (Jablin, 2001). Socialization experiences on college campuses are targeted towards traditional college students. Given the importance of organizational socialization to new members and the organization, the lack of attention paid to the student veteran experience in general, and university claims of “veteran friendliness”, the following research question is posed:

High Reliability Organizations (HROs)

Student veterans recently separated from the military may find stark contrast between organizational life on campuses and life in the military. The culture and identity of the military have, for many, left a distinct impression on veterans. It is important to understand how military organizations may create different expectations for this population as they transition to civilian and university life.
Military agencies are classified as High Reliability Organizations (HRO) and members of HROs work in environments that have the real possibility for catastrophe and the very serious potential of causing death (Miller & Horsley, 2009; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001). Within HROs, complex systems are separated into departments which work in tight coupling and create environments of near constant chaos through which members must perform flawlessly (Horsley, 2008; Miller & Horsley, 2009; Roberts, 1990). Even seemingly simple tasks can result in deadly consequences. For example, in February 2012, U.S. Bagram Air Base burned multiple copies of the Quran that Taliban prisoners were using to communicate with each other; however, the destruction of the books resulted in massive protests from the Afghani public, 30 deaths, and over 200 wounded (“Koran burning by US troops in Afghanistan provokes outrage and revolts”, 2012; Walsh & Popalzai, 2012).

The potential for disasters prompts public and government scrutiny in the form of consumer watchdogs or oversight from government agencies, and because of HRO complexity, organizations and members are sensitive to intrusion by outsiders (Miller & Horsley, 2009). This may be one reason why little research has been conducted about these organizations and even less research conducted about members who have exited these organizations (Miller & Horsley, 2009).

In HROs, central hierarchy is emphasized from the beginning of a person’s membership (Weick, 1987). Centralized hierarchy and its rules and regulations are “a set of core values [that are] hammered out and socialized into people” (Weick, 1987, p. 124). After centralization, many HRO environments undergo decentralization, allowing members and departments to work autonomously (Roberts, 1990). The culture of HROs centralized hierarchy which binds members to a clear authority, and decentralization which empowers
employees to report conditions which could create crisis, have a profound effect on members. “HROs are organizations that continually operate under conditions of high danger but are able to avoid catastrophe through careful planning and leadership” (Myers, 2005, p. 345).

Veterans may no longer be members of high reliability organizations, but for many, they continue to identify with the military (Coll, Weiss, & Yarvis, 2011). When members enter the military, the values taught by the organization are vigorously imposed on new members and affect them both on and off duty (Coll, Weiss, & Yarvis, 2011). When veterans enter new organizational environments, it is likely their previous expectations of organizational operation and socialization influence their ability to assimilate into new environments. This study seeks to understand how veterans are making sense of their new environments, what stories they tell, and how their unique experiences as members of the military may be decoding information and interactions resulting in interpretations radically different from traditional students. The investigation of student veterans’ experience on college campuses prompted the follow research question:

RQ1: What are veterans’ socialization experiences at “veteran friendly” college campuses?

Identity and Organizational Identification

The concept of “veteran friendly” is intricately intertwined with student veterans’ identity and organizational identity. Initial organizational socialization is often the catalyst for members to identify with an organization. Organizational identity, developed from ideas of personal identification (Gioia, 1998), is defined as what is central, distinctive, and enduring about an organization (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Universities who assume the title
“veteran friendly” must have policies which promote that organizational identification and accept the identity “veteran” or be considered merely symbolic (MacLean, 2003). The term identity is normally understood as the perception of the stakeholder, and image or reputations refers to the understanding of outsiders (Ran & Golden, 2011). If a student veteran does not feel comfortable with their “veteran” identity on a campus, how can the organizational identification “veteran friendly” be appropriate?

Identity

Tajfel and Turner’s (1986) social identity theory explores and predicts certain behaviors based on groups with whom individuals associate. Individuals identify themselves through groups they interact with, and claim titles (labels) to roles they perform (teacher, doctor, student, retiree) (Robertson, 2011). Groups that individuals associate with are called “in-groups” (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Individuals often (but not always) claim membership to groups that they perceive can improve their self worth, and in-group membership is assigned, helping members create positive self-views (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). A few examples can be seen empirically: pride in local sports achievements or the accomplishments of fellow college alumni. The gratification in executing an action, such as winning the World Series, is shared by those who associate themselves with the group, such as a Giant’s baseball fan, when in reality the success can only be attributed to a small group of athletes, coaches, and support staff. It could be assumed as well that individuals may reclaim negative stereotypes to increase their positive self-esteem. For example, someone of Irish descent might reject the negative stereotype of the Irish alcoholic to appropriate the idea that heavy drinking may increase his or her worth (“I can drink you under the table! I’m Irish!”). Ultimately, when
individuals identify with an organization, it is in their best interest to promote positive ideals about the organization, and thereby maintain positive self-views.

However, not all identities recognized by individuals create positive self-views. Tagler (2012) noted when an individual has low self-identification to a group (but acknowledges that the public at large may associate him or her with that group), the individual may feel strain to live up to others’ ideals of those group members, creating pressure which is “disruptive to performance” (p. 402). Student veterans, by definition, are categorized into two separate groups (and organizational identities): as students and as veterans. As discussed previously, many veterans report low “academic self-concept” scores (HERI, 2010), including having lower beliefs in their academic ability, drive to achieve, and intellectual self-confidence. Historically, many veterans enter higher education reporting significantly lower grades than traditional students in the same college environment (HERI, 2010). As a member of a higher learning institution, veterans may struggle to believe in their own ability to succeed and may find the organizational identity ‘student’ difficult to accept.

“Student” may be a difficult identity for veterans to accept; however, for many the identity “veteran” is equally as problematic. Veterans are situated in a passive space. That is to say, they are defined by what they have done: they have been in the military. However, while the membership requirements never change, the meaning of veteran does. The public understanding of veteran, especially in times of war, includes mostly male combat veterans. However, not all veterans fill that role or were active during times of war. It is not difficult to imagine veterans having low self-identification as a veteran if they do not meet the social definition of that group. Military members understand that not all airmen, marines, sailors, and soldiers are infantry or have combat experience, but civilians often do not understand the
nuances of military structure. As members separate from the military, constant assumptions from civilians about military roles may exacerbate feelings of low self-identification.

Interestingly, Rosenthal and Crisp (2007) found evidence suggesting that the presence of two positive stereotypes can have a detrimental effect on participants’ performance, supporting the notion that increased pressure from positive stereotypes can result in “choking under pressure” (p. 324). For student veterans the connection is clear. In his conclusion, Tagler (2012) summarizes that more work is needed to determine whether the appearance of a stereotype “lift” – that is a positive stereotype – hurts or helps individuals overall.

The labels an individual gives him or herself are often used by others as well. That is to say, others identify the individual by how an individual chooses to identify him or herself (woman, veteran, athlete, artist). The effects of labels, images, reputation, or stereotypes others associate with us are more difficult to articulate. Some studies show a significant link between negative stereotypes and self-views (Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996). Perhaps the most well documented effects of negative stereotypes fall on those who suffer from mental illness. Common tropes in entertainment are crimes committed by those who suffer from mental illness, and news media is more likely to classify the subject of a news story by mental status rather than race. Mental illness stigma is well known, and to individuals who identify with this group, it can lead to negative feelings towards the self (Rüsch, Angermeyer, & Corrigan, 2005). Furthermore, the stigma can deter individuals from seeking help (Corrigan, Watson, & Bar, 2006; Fung, Tsang, & Corrigan, 2008). The mental illness stereotype is among the most dangerous: a cyclical effect that damages the self-concept and provides no outlet. Approximately one-third of all combat vets returning from
Iraq or Afghanistan are diagnosed with a mental illness (National Alliance on Mental Illness [NAMI], n.d).

One-third of all combat vets who are diagnosed with mental illness computes to between 330,000 to 660,000 returning veterans (NAMI, n.d.). These numbers only include diagnosed cases of mental illness and are made up of mainly male military members who occupy the majority of combat jobs (CNN Library, 2012; NAMI, n.d.). Further research suggests that over 80% of female veterans have been exposed to some type of trauma (both before or during military service), including childhood physical or sexual abuse, adult domestic abuse, or sexual assault (Zinzow, Grubaugh, Monnier, Suffoletta-Malerie & Freuh, 2007). A 2009 Department of Defense (DoD) report stated that female vets are twice as likely to be sexually assaulted than their civilian counterparts, and that 20% of female veterans who served in Iraq or Afghanistan have been identified as having experienced military sexual trauma (Foster & Vince, 2009).

Female veterans assaulted in the military are nine times more likely to exhibit PTSD symptoms; are more likely to have problems with alcohol or drugs; have lower economic and educational outcomes; and experience difficulty maintaining relationships as well as stable housing and employment. (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012)

Considering the effects of mental illness stigma on veterans both within the college environment and outside of it is important for researchers to consider.

Every person has multiple identities and multiple groups they identify with (man, teenager, student, athlete, veteran, college alumni), although only certain identities are activated at given times (Robertson, 2011). These multiple group memberships are self-identified and lack universal definitions. This lack of definition allows each individual to fully conform the identity to themselves through social construction and linguistic and
rhetorical acts (Brown, 2007). As Brown (2007) summed up, “identity of any kind is something we do [verb], not something we say we are [noun], and cannot be simply explained by referencing some reified object [organization]” (brackets in quote, p. 2). As individuals become socialized with organizations, they not only gather information to reduce uncertainty, but they also act to construct and negotiate the organizations’ identity to better reflect their own. For military veterans transitioning to civilian and student life, traditional college activities may not have options for veterans and older students. This void may lead to veterans struggling to establish an identity within the organization’s parameters.

Organizational Identity

Organizational socialization and organizational identification have benefits for both the member and the organization. Socialization can increase members’ satisfaction, commitment, and performance proficiency within the organization (Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Chao et al., 1994; Morrison, 1993), and positive organizational identification is directly related to individual performance (van Knippenberg & van Schie, 2000), and negatively related to turnover and attrition (Kreiner & Ashforth 2004).

However, organizational identity research so far has “lack[ed] the central, enduring and distinctive meaning” that Tajfel and Turner’s (1986) social identity theory has (Whetton, 2006; Bond & Seneque, 2012, p. 14). Organizational identities are a construct, often formed by executive members, but accepted as a collected understanding from organizational members (Gioia, 1998). An organizational identity can encompass multiple accepted realities (for example: research, athletics, commuter schools), but for this research, the organizational identity “veteran friendly” is what campuses are striving towards.
Organizational identity features are permanent and salient, and are contrasted against other organizations. The values, beliefs, and attitudes of the identity are both fixed (tied to historical understanding of the organization) and fluid (interpretations of organizational values may change in order to maintain a stable identity in a changeable environment) (Gioia, Majken & Corley, 2000). An organization must adjust its identity to maintain homeostasis.

Alignment of individual identities and organizational identities, while not necessary, cannot be in contrast to each other. A campus that touts the euphemism “veteran friendly” but fails to live up to student veteran’s expectations, or worse, is actively antagonistic to the veteran identity, may abuses the label and may fail to satisfy students’ expectations. Student veterans who feel their campuses are aggressive to their population, either because of policies, staff, faculty, or other students, will struggle to identify with institutions. Organizational identity can be beneficial to both the organization and those who identify with the organization. If a population in an organization is feeling alienated and isolated from other members, these key components – successful organizational socialization and organizational identification – may be missing from their experience.

Sensemaking

As members in organizations inevitably attempt to make sense of their environment, they do so in fairly predictable ways. Sensemaking is the process individuals use to make sense and give meaning to experiences. Sensemaking is a dynamic process occurring during all stages of organizational socialization (Pratt, Rock & Kaufmann, 2001, p. A5).
Weick (1995) listed the seven properties of sensemaking: (1) Sensemaking is grounded in identity construction, (2) retrospective, (3) enacted by individuals as parts of their own environment, (4) a social experience through plausible narration, (5) a dynamic and ongoing process, (6) extracted from contextual cues, and (7) focused more on plausibility than accuracy. Each of these seven properties is explored below.

The identities people associate with are the contexts which will help them decipher their interactions in the world. When they participate in their environments, individuals experience and learn about their identities from the reactions of others (Weick, 1995). Knowledge of that observation and experience is how individuals understand what expectations others have for them (Weick, 1988). “Identities are constituted out of a process of interaction” (Weick, 1995, p. 18). Identities are formed through interaction, and those identities help make sense of experiences. When veterans interact with the public, the public’s generalizations and understandings about the military are reflected on members. Whether the public believes veterans are potentially violent, mentally unstable, “meatheads,” or “heroes,” that understanding is reflected to veterans. From that experience, veterans learn what expectations others have for them.

Retrospective sensemaking refers to our inability to judge life in the moment. All of our thoughts, conceived ideas, even feelings are a reflection of memories – a reflection on a moment that has already ceased to exist (Weick, 1995). The world is first seen, and then an impression is made to determine the meaning of the moment (Weick, 2001). When that moment is remembered, it allows the individual to put meaning to the experience. The moment is re-imagined using multiple identity constructions and life experiences to understand the context of that experience. This may be one reason two eye witness accounts
are never the same. When veterans reflect on experiences, their identity constructions and life experiences are vastly different. Using veteran identities, moments can have measurably different meanings. Consider the change in meaning of “Open Door Policy” when the communicator is a college professor or a military Commanding Officer. There is a change in meaning when military law and custom dictates that all grievances are handled at the lowest level. Veterans, for example, are taught that directly appealing to a Commanding Officer, regardless of a commander’s open door policy, is not appropriate. How does that experience change the meaning of a professor’s open door policy?

Individuals are, in part, responsible for their environment. This refers to the “making” portion of sensemaking (Weick, 1995). Individuals alter attitudes and expectations to navigate situations, and this can affect the outcomes of interactions (Weick, 1988). Individuals often enact their environment linguistically, and it can be examined through their narration. Narratives serve to organize experiences and to clarify understand what an individual thinks. “How can I know what I think until I see what I say?” (Weick, 1988, p. 307). Individuals’ enactment can be made through the choices they make (the act of speaking, the words they choose, the thoughts they share) (Weick, 1995). Through discourse and narration, individuals can create environments and construct laws that give experiences meaning (Weick, 1995). Traditional college students’ narratives include high school stories, traversing the food services and student meal plans, and horrible (sometimes amusing) dorm catastrophes. Veterans’ narratives may include basic training, world travel, and full-time occupations. While traditional students and veterans may appear to have nothing in common, some of their differences are enacted by their choices of language. Dorm life and barrack life,
food services and mess tents may have a lot in common; it is the linguistic choices that construct barriers between these demographics.

For experiences to be interpreted and identities constructed through interactions, it must be understood that sensemaking is a social process (Weick, 1995). Individual sensemaking is influenced by “actual, implied, or imagined presence of others” (Weick, 2001, p. 461). With implicit self-stereotyping an individual reacts to spoken (explicit) or unspoken (implicit) stereotypes (Greenwald, Banaji, Rudman, Farnham, Nosek, and Mellot, 2002). That is to say, whether individuals acknowledge, understand, or accept positive or negative stereotypes about a subgroup they identify with, the individuals will assign these characteristics to themselves (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995), and it will influence how an individual deciphers interactions with others (Weick, 1995). Therefore, it is possible that whether or not veterans accept the labels and narratives of their group, as they seek to make sense of their environment, and through implicit self-stereotyping, veterans may be reacting to generalizations society holds about veterans.

Sensemaking is an ongoing and fluid process where there are no absolutes (Weick, 1995; Weick, 2001). Individuals project their identity (or identities) into a social situation and from others’ reactions learn about their identities and decode the experiences. As the information is processed, changes in how individuals project their identity may occur, causing renegotiation by the audience, and the process begins again. Individuals can, through trial and error, deduce clues regarding their identity as perceived by others (Weick, 1995). Beyond the process of sensemaking is a slow steady movement of ebb and flow, not a destination to be reached. On campuses, student veterans who struggle to receive consistent support from staff and faculty may conclude their struggles are a result of their veteran
identity. Ultimately, the ongoing interaction with campus systems shapes and influences student veterans’ belief about whether their campus is “veteran friendly.”

Sensemaking is the process of extracting contextual cues picked up during encounters (Weick, 2001). Salient cues are focused upon in multiple ways including framing. Entman (1993) describes framing as making some aspects of a reality (real or perceived) more evident in order to promote a particular viewpoint, interpretation, or evaluation. Described as “selection and salience,” salience is defined as “a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences” (Entman, 1993, p. 53). Cues can also be decoded based on receivers’ identities, experiences, and expectations (Weick, 1995). By retrospectively considering other experiences, individuals make sense of a new interaction. The college experience is mainly directed towards younger demographics. The language constructed on college campuses may reflect the college organization or the age of the majority population it serves. That language can create barriers to veterans returning to education after five or more years. Previous experience and language expectations can make deducing cues through interactions a struggle for older students.

Finally, the conclusions that are gathered through the process of sensemaking must be plausible, but that does not mean that they must be accurate as well. This step of sensemaking is problematic. For the individuals making sense of situations, environments, or interactions, the narratives they imagine must have true qualities that their history and experience can support. For example, some veterans may believe that higher education institutions are antithetical to military service. Therefore, if presented with a situation of disagreement with campus organizations, veterans may be willing to believe that the friction
was created from their veteran identity based on those past personal narratives of incompatibility.

Sensemaking is a fluid process. Members in an organization are dependent on the audience and their individually lived experiences to understand and make sense of interactions. Many student veterans have considerably more experience than their 18-year-old peers, and the sensemaking process of these distinct groups will be inevitably different. Veterans returning from school have recently undergone a change in occupation (from military member to civilian) and location (moving from their last permanent duty station back to their home town). This fluctuation in occupation and location can have major effects on members’ identifications and life expectations.

The potential for competing identifications as student and veteran and mismatched expectations between prior (the military) and current (university) organizational socialization, creates challenges for the student veteran population. To understand student veterans’ communication in this potentially complex organizational environment, the following research question is posed:

RQ2: How do veterans negotiate the dual-identities of veteran and student on college campuses?
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The primary goal of this research was to understand how veterans are socialized onto college campuses, how they navigate these new experiences, and how they bridge their military experiences with civilian life.

The dynamic nature of individual identities and sensemaking makes qualitative methodology the best choice to gather individual experiences, thoughts, and opinions, and to focus on the themes that emerge from data. Seeing individual points of view will help understand how the student veteran population navigates college expectations, accepts new organizational identities, or rejects one or both of their dual-identities as student-veterans.

Participants

The goal of this study was to examine the experiences of veterans who have enrolled in California colleges. Participants in this study were recruited through various California State University veteran gatekeepers, including Veteran Coordinators, Student Life directors, directors of Veteran Affairs, Veteran Affairs Certifying Officials, Veteran Specialists, and Veteran Success Center directors (all hereafter referred to as Campus gatekeepers). Additionally, contact was made through two student veteran organizations’ presidents at two separate California State University campuses. Campus gatekeepers
were contacted at 21 California State University campuses. The California State University system is one of the most affordable higher education systems in the country, and California has the largest population of military veterans. Therefore, not only is the California State University system the most logical choice to recruit student veterans because it is accessible to the researcher, but also because of its accessibility to the researched population.

Initially, gatekeepers received a telephone call introducing the research and the author: if unavailable, the researcher left a voice mail message. Following the phone call, an email was sent (see Appendix B). Out of 21 contacted Campus gatekeepers, 13 gatekeepers agreed to publicize the invitation to participate. Publications were through online blogs, Facebook groups, group emails, fliers, and interpersonal invitations. Twenty-two participants volunteered from six different California State Universities: CSU, Bakersfield, CSU, Channel Island, CSU, Chico, CSU, Sacramento, CSU, Stanislaus, and CSU, San José. Sixteen of the participants identified as male, four as female, and two did not identify. Participants’ school experiences ranged from freshman to graduate students. Veterans from the Army, Air Force, Marines, and Navy participated. The average length of active military service was 5.3 years.

Procedure

Open-ended questions were created to allow participants to express their experiences through narratives. Open-ended questions can gather social actors’ perspectives allowing their socialization experiences to emerge naturally from the data. After receiving IRB approval, interviewing participants took place in three ways. Three
of the participants were interviewed face-to-face. One participant was interviewed over Apple Facetime. Eight of the participants completed the questions via Microsoft Word, either by hand or typing onto a word document. The remaining ten completed the questionnaire through a Google Form available on the Internet. Although the methods were varied (in-person or computer mediated interviewing, hard or soft document questionnaire, or online survey), the questions all remained nearly identical. The use of multiple methods is often referred to as convergent methods, multimethods, or triangulation (Jick, 1979).

The in-person interviews were conducted on two separate California State University (CSU) campuses. All of the handwritten responses were conducted at a single time and place. All other interactions occurred through computer-mediated interaction. Online interaction with participants has many advantages and disadvantages. The advantages include lower costs and time effectiveness (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011); however, for this research, the most salient advantages are the range of the researcher to contact potential participants, the confidentiality of online interactions, and the diminished threat of socially desirable answers (Bennink, Moors, & Gelissen, 2013; Mann & Stewart, 2002). Two disadvantages identified by James and Busher (2006) surround the issue of credibility and trustworthiness. However, by self-identifying as a member of the researched population (both as a student and as a veteran), and by enlisting the help of Campus gatekeepers, the credibility of the research was enhanced.

Because of the diverse geographical locations of participants, online contact was necessary. While Skype and Facetime were also offered to participants, most preferred online questionnaire methods. The online questionnaires may help participants
feel more comfortable delving into sensitive topics like alienation or isolation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Furthermore, allowing the participant to choose the form of interaction can increase participation (Kazmer & Xie, 2009; Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). To ensure a varied sampling of responses, and given the constraints of location and time, the method of data collection was as varied as participants required and as the researcher could accommodate.

As members of the population from around California expressed interest in participating in the research, contact was initiated as listed in Appendix C, and participants informed the researcher of the contact they preferred (online/digitally, Skype, or Facetime). In a small number of cases (three), it was possible to conduct the interview face-to-face. To increase participation, a reminder email was distributed to those who had expressed an interest in participating.

All data was separated from any identifying information. Any data recorded by physical copy (hand-written surveys) was kept in a physically locked location. All electronically gathered data (online surveys) was kept in a password-protected environment. The online survey collected no identifying information, but did allow participants the option to leave their email if further contact was needed. No emails volunteered were CSU affiliated emails. The returned handwritten surveys did not request contact information, and all identifying information was removed from the documents. All data was kept secured in a physically locked location or an electronically password protected environment.
Instrumentation

Participants were asked 23 open ended questions and 15 biographical questions. The open-ended questions focused on either understanding the participants’ experiences as student veterans on campus or their identities as veterans and students. The first five questions asked the participants to recall when they first considered enrolling in college and their first experiences as a college student: their anticipatory socialization experiences. Questions included their considerations before enrolling or applying (“Why did you choose this institution?”), expectations prior to attending classes (“What expectations did you have coming to college as a student veteran?”), first experiences on campus (“What was it like for you as a student-veteran when you first came to campus?”), perceptions of the organization’s outreach (“What kind of outreach from the college did you receive? Was outreach directed at you as a student or as a student-veteran?” and “Did you attend orientation? What was orientation like?”), and how military credits were processed at the institution (“Did your school accept any military credits? Was this beneficial?”).

The next sequence of questions (6-10) inquired about participants’ experiences post enrollment: Asking student veterans about their classroom experiences (“What have your classroom experiences been like?”), campus interactions (“Have you found a mentor [or a sponsor] on campus? If so, what impact did he or she have on you? Have you created a social circle, a community, on campus?” and “To what extent do you hang out/study with other vets?”), and resource navigation (“Do you have resources you can turn to for help in navigating your college experience?”). These questions were
designed to help participants articulate their encounter and metamorphosis socialization through narration.

The final sequence of section one (questions 10-12) examined participants’ experiences as student veterans on campus, and asked these participants to consider a larger view of college. The questions prompted participants to articulate how confident they feel as a student (“To what extent do you feel you will be able to be successful in college? Why or why not?”), whether college campuses have a place for them (“Do you feel like [your] college has a place for you? To what extent do you feel you ‘fit-in’?”), how they would rate their campus ‘military friendliness’ on a scale from one (unfriendly) to seven (friendly), and finally asking them to explain and describe what might make the campus more military friendly.

Section two of the questionnaire focused on participants’ identities as a veteran and a student. The final seven questions (13-19) asked participants to consider an identity (either as veteran or student) in various situations, and discuss how they self-identify, how they negotiate those identities, and how or when they reveal those identities. Also, considering the popularity of group work in college classes, a specific prompt was given to examine this population working in small groups in the classroom (“Tell me about your experiences working in small groups in class. To what extent, if any, does your military experience influence your experiences working in small groups?”). Finally, a scale was used to ask participants to self-identify which identity (student or veteran) was more salient (“When considering your dual role as a student-veteran, please indicate which identity is the most prominent for you”). Additional clearinghouse questions were asked (“Would you like to add anything?” and “Do you
have any comments for me?”). The remaining questions gathered the participants’ biographical information (CSU campus, year in college, home of record, MGIB version, gender, branch of service, length of service, rank, and job classification). (A full copy of the online survey is located in Appendix D)

Analysis

All interviews and questionnaires were compiled and completely transcribed generating 156 single spaced pages of data. All participants were assigned a codename to protect confidentiality. Two researchers both of whom are trained in grounded theory methodology initially read the data separately. We took notes on narratives that stood out about veteran’s socialization experience, identity, navigation, and stressors. We followed up with one respondent who reported self-harm.

The data was organized in a manner that allowed for a review of responses to individual questions across participants, as well as reviewing a single participant’s complete responses. Responses ranged from single word answers to filling half a page. We began with general assessments of complete narratives and move to detailed coding of individual responses.

For research question one, after an initial reading, we engaged in open coding of the data. Open coding allows themes to emerge from the data without being influenced by prior knowledge. Open coding requires a line-by-line examination of data, and involves grouping data into comprehensive categories that have been built through close investigation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Open coding identified emergent categories
which were discussed among the researchers. All areas of disagreement or overlap were
discussed, creating a more nuanced understanding of the categories.

Once the categories were determined to be discrete, we returned to the
socialization literature and created a coding sheet to capture communication that occurred
during the various phases of socialization. At this time, a third researcher joined the team
and was trained in qualitative methods to participate in the analysis. The third party was
brought in to protect against bias by the other researchers because of prior knowledge
with the literature.

The organizational socialization coding sheet allowed for other categories to
emerge, and the researchers engaged in the constant comparative method refining
categories. At the completion of category examination, it became apparent they were
consistent with the White House Administration’s “The 8 Keys to Success” (a framework
promoted by the White House Administration to identify objectives important for veteran
educational success; Baker, 2013). A new coding sheet was developed and all three
researchers engaged in axial coding. After adding “The 8 Keys to Success” all three
researchers discuss the categories and any potential disagreement.

We approached the analysis of research question two by reviewing
participant’s responses to the following questions: 13-18. By reading and rereading
participant answers, codes and categories emerged as is consistent with the open coding
process (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Three categories emerged from the data: self-
identification, leadership, and navigation. The researchers revisited evidence of each of
the categories to ensure the categories were discrete.
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS

This study’s findings will be outlined in two sections. First, the findings for research question one are detailed using “The 8 Keys to Success” as a framework. Research question one probes the socialization experiences of student veterans on California State University campuses which are deemed ”veteran friendly”. The second section reports findings from research question two which explored how veterans navigate their dual-identities on college campuses and considers how student veterans’ identities help participants make sense of the college environment.

Socialization on Campus

While “The 8 Keys to Success” provided a framework for analysis, some Keys naturally intersect. To create discreet categories and remove overlap, three overall themes grouped the eight keys. The theme “Support from Departments and Staff” contains Key 1, Key 2, and Key 7. The theme “Centralized Communication Systems and Spaces” contains Key 3, Key 4, Key 5, and Key 6. Finally, the theme “Missing Sustainability of Effective Practices for Veterans” contains Key 8. Refer to Table 1 for a simplified view of all themes, categories, and keys for Student Veteran's Perceptions of ”Veteran Friendly” College Campuses. Codes are explained as they relate to each section below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support from Departments and Staff</td>
<td>Culture of Trust and Connectedness.</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>I received emails from [redacted] the VA rep, at least once a month starting summer of last year, checking in with me about my admission status and answering any and all questions I had.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>There's a lot of red tape veterans have to climb through to get benefits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consistent and Sustained Support from Campus</td>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>I really didn't see anything from any other members such as [the campus president] or any of the other like top officials here on campus. So, it was pretty much just low-key from any of the higher ups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional Development for Faculty and Staff</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>... but people like prof. [redacted], [redacted] and [redacted] have gone above and beyond their position to help and support my college path, both as a veteran and a minority who is first to attend university.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(and Students)</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>... when a professor speaks out against wars and against the military intently. It often angers me. I am not opposed to opinions and beliefs from professors, but to blankly say what my close friends died doing is &quot;stupid&quot; is just as bad as making a racial slur...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centralized Communication Systems and</td>
<td>Early Alert Systems.</td>
<td>Needed</td>
<td>An early heads up if your paperwork is missing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spaces</td>
<td>Designated Spaces: Coordination and Centralization.</td>
<td>Beneficial</td>
<td>I went to the student veteran center one day when it was raining and cold and I couldn't eat lunch outside. I found the veterans were very friendly, and I instantly had my new home, my safe place on campus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coordination of Services for Veterans (Local and Government Agencies)</td>
<td>Needed</td>
<td>We have been trying ...[for] years ... towards gaining a physical space and no one can ever give a straight answer to reasons why progress is non existent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uniform Data Tools to Collect and Track</td>
<td>Available</td>
<td>The [VA representative] takes care of us here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information on Veterans: Military Credits</td>
<td>Beneficial</td>
<td>[Did your school accept any military credits?  Was this beneficial?] Yes and Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not Beneficial</td>
<td>My junior ... [college] accepted military credit, but amounted to nothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>no, the school didn't expect [sic] any military credits that I'm aware of.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing Sustainability of Effective</td>
<td>Sustainability of Effective Practices for</td>
<td>Inconsistent</td>
<td>There's been times when my GI bill was so delayed that I needed emergency money but couldn't get it. I actually went homeless and dropped out of school for awhile because of this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practices for Veterans</td>
<td>Veterans</td>
<td>Practices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It should be noted that to protect participants’ confidentiality, to avoid identifying campuses, and to allow for ease of reading comprehension, the names of employees, other students, and campus locations have been simplified or removed.

Support from Departments and Staff

Research question one asked: What are veterans’ socialization experiences at “veteran friendly” college campuses? During analysis, participants’ voices mirrored the White House Administration’s “The 8 keys to Success”. Three keys from “The 8 Keys to Success” were categorized as support from campus departments and staff: culture of trust and connectedness (Key 1), consistent and sustained support from campus leadership (Key 2), and professional development for faculty and staff (and students) (Key 7).

Culture of Trust and Connectedness. Perhaps the broadest objective from the White House Administration, Key 1 is designed to promote trust and create an environment where students can reach out for and receive help. Participants responded with stories that presented a positive or negative view of the campus culture and the trust on campus (Codes: Positive/Negative). Multiple participants expressed energetic appreciation for members of their campus whom they felt they could trust for advice and guidance (Positive). “I felt more support than I did at [my community college]. [Veteran affairs employee] was a big help and helped my transition.” Another mentioned where he or she could go for help, “I could ask [veteran affairs office employee]. [She/He is] very nice and supportive.” For many participants, not only knowing where to find help, but with whom to speak prevented them from feeling alone.
Some participants who lacked a personal connection with people on campus, either staff, faculty, or other student veterans, articulated a sense of isolation on campuses (Negative). As one participant said, “I am on my own.”

Consistent and Sustained Support from Campus Leadership. While multiple participants commented on various resources across campus, very few mentioned campus leadership (Code: Missing). Participants’ perspectives offered a much more localized approach about how well various services and available support works with the veteran population. One member did report that the veterans affairs office “pretty much welcomed me to [CSU] and told me how to get my benefits started and so it was a really nice introduction. Especially to the campus… but I really didn’t see anything from any other members such as [the campus president] or any of the other top officials here on campus.” The lack of consistency was evident in another participant’s interpretation of a campus wide celebration of Veterans Day:

I have attended the Veterans Day celebration that is supposed to be for its current events and they don't even honor current vets. They don't let vets carry in the flags or be actively involved. They don't even recognize current vets other than mentioning that this event is for them.

Professional Development for Faculty and Staff (and Students). “It’s also difficult explaining to teachers [that] you’re a veteran and have a disability.” Key 7 focuses on how professors and staff can affect veterans on campus. While veteran designated spaces and veteran affairs offices can create a safe space to congregate and seek out information, the classroom (the focus of any campus life) can be starkly different. Individual experiences with professors are diverse populating both ends of the spectrum (Codes: Positive/Negative). Some reported a close (Positive) relationship with
professors: “Professors have been extremely interpersonal in a great way,” and “The age difference [with other students] is very evident, but I feel more comfortable talking with professors.” Others expressed troubles communicating with instructors (Negative): “I HATE IT!!! GRRR Makes me angry just thinking about everything I’ve had to put up with teachers;” “I had to tell [the professor] I was in the military and then he asked me if I had threatened any of the students; implying that because I was in the military that is all we do.”

One participant reported: “I think there should be a program that professors and staff could attend to understand the diversity of veteran life and what it is like to come from a life of service to a life as a civilian.”

However, for some participants, diversity training should go beyond campus employees. “Students should be given a sensitivity course that encourages them to interact with veterans and teaches them what are appropriate questions to ask a veteran and what isn't appropriate to ask a veteran (Example: Did you go to war?)”. This sentiment was echoed by one third of the participants who acknowledged a hesitation to reveal their veteran history. (This topic will be explored below in Identity.)

Centralized Communication Systems and Spaces

Four Keys of Success were categorized as centralizing communication systems and spaces for veterans: early alert systems (Key 3), designated spaces: coordination and centralization (Key 4), coordination of services for veterans (local and government agencies) (Key 5), and uniform data tools to collect and track information on veterans (Key 6).
Early Alert Systems. Navigating the multiple avenues of college can be daunting for any student, and many participants found themselves struggling while attempting to understand how to employ various areas of support. Key 3 focuses on the alerts campuses can establish to ensure student success and those who participated articulated a need for early alerts (Code: Needed). One participant said, “I didn't know how to navigate the system. I kept going to the [veterans affairs office] to ask how to do things. They emailed me the first semester to say I had lost over $3000 in funding after I had been given the money as a grant. Evidently the state created that problem, but they accidently gave me the money then took it back and I didn't know what was going on.”

Another participant expressed further frustration with financial red tape: “There's been times when my G.I. bill was so delayed that I needed emergency money but couldn't get it. I actually went homeless and dropped out of school for awhile because of this.”

Designated Spaces: Coordination and Centralization. One of the strongest themes surrounded the use of or need for a designated space for veterans and is also recommended in Key 4 (“Coordinate and centralize campus efforts for all veterans, together with the creation of a designated space [even if limited in size]”). Participants expressed how their ability to seek help or create a community in veteran resource centers was invaluable and emerged in multiple answers (Codes: Beneficial/Needed). The spaces varied in size, but the effect was similar: When asked where could you turn for help, one participant said:
I usually come here [to veteran designated space]... between them [other students and the employees of veteran designated space], any question I have will get answered. And there's a knowledge base between them that you don't have to go very much further.

Another student reported:

I didn't connect with any other vets until I went to the [veteran designated space] one day when it was raining and cold and I couldn't eat lunch outside. I found the veterans were very friendly, and I instantly had my new home, my safe place on campus.

One student who recently transferred to a CSU campus said, “The [veteran designated space] center has also been a tremendous help.” Finally, a senior about to graduate described his ability to ‘fit in’ said:

We’re just all students trying to get a degree, but then when I, and again I refer back to this room, every time I come in here I feel like this is my nitch. And, and, and for a lot of veterans, and this is kind of sad, they don’t know about this place, or they’ve never been here. Granted it’s small, but the people that you talk to in here, they have cool stories about what they did and whether they’re real or not ya know is also questionable. I mean, it’s definitely cool to talk to people. I almost feel like this is what a VFW or a um, (snaps) I don’t know, another one of those veteran organizations would be like, one of their head quarters. Like this is a place to go bullshit around, or ya know. Sorry about the swearing. You have to type this out don’t you.

At least nine of the participants mentioned their campuses’ veteran designated space positively, and two articulated a need for a physical space for student veterans when asked what would make their campus more veteran friendly.

Orientation. An additional finding categorized in Coordination and Centralization surrounds the issue of campus orientation. Centralizing orientation as well as a physical space is an integral part of socialization. While not all participants reported attending campus orientation (two did not attend any orientation, and one completed orientation online), of the ten participants who reported a positive experience, eight were
assigned to a specific veterans’ only orientation group. Orientation groups included
groups separated by declared major (9), transfer students (1), veterans (10), and online (1)
(See Table 2 below). Participants’ responses were categorized whether they articulated
that orientation was a positive, negative, or neither positive or negative (neutral)
experience.

Coordination of Services for Veterans (Local and Government Agencies).

Another theme that emerged from participants, which was consistent with Key 5 was the
need for help navigating available support structures on campus and in the community
(“Collaborate with local communities and organizations, including government agencies,
to align and coordinate various services for veterans”). Participants articulated that help
navigating veteran services were either Needed or Available (Codes: Needed/Available).

One participant’s experience included difficulty getting medical treatment:

I tried to get help from the [health clinic] for injuries I sustained overseas, I get
headaches and neck pains but they told me they could not help me and did not have
the support I needed and that I should find a private physician but I cannot afford
that as a college student. Trying to get help from the VA is a constant struggle. I
contacted my senator but they also brushed me aside….

However, another participant expressed appreciation with internal campus
support structures: “I did have outreach from disability services, who offered to shuttle
me to my classes. They were the most helpful of all.”

Finally, members who are leaving college are questioning the next chapter in
their lives and are concerned about available support services. One respondent said,
“When I graduate I will be back to being homeless because there's no program to help me
pay my bills while lining up a job.”
### Table 2  Campus Orientation: Student Veteran Perceptions of Anticipatory Socialization at “Veteran Friendly” College Campuses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category name</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>How participants rated</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orientation by Declared Major</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Nice and sweet”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“It was orientation as usual. Nothing veteran related.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“...it was boring.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation by Veteran Status</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“We had a separate orientation for veterans which made me feel very welcome and accommodated.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“We did have a veterans’ group and they talked a little bit about the organization or the center. But it was mainly what we needed to do like filling out paperwork and stuff like that. No, not super informative. I didn’t even find out about the club, until my second or third semester.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Honestly it seemed like a waste of time.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation by Transfer Status</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“I attended transfer orientation. It was annoying being meshed in with kids almost ten years younger than me. Hearing questions being asked that were not relevant and seeing people on the cell phones constantly made me realize how little some people care for what they have.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Orientation</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“It felt redundant due to my previous institution orientation.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not attend Orientation</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Uniform Data Tools to Collect and Track Information on Veterans.** All participants were enrolled at California State University campuses; however, participants’ military credits were accepted or rejected in varied ways, sometimes on the same campuses. Many participants expressed confusion and frustration by the way their campuses accepted or rejected military credits. Key 6 prompts colleges to create uniform tools to track veterans and a uniformed system of tracking military credentials. Question five asked participants to recall what military credits their college accepted and whether this was helpful. Five different answers were recorded: (1) no credits were accepted
(Code: Not Beneficial), (2) unsure if any were accepted (Code: Unknown), (3) ten credits or less were accepted (Code: Not Beneficial), (4) Yes, the college accepted credits and it was helpful (Code: Beneficial), and finally (5) too many credits were accepted (Code: Not Beneficial).

For most participants, their campuses acceptance of credits was a negative experience (Not Beneficial). Five members reported that no credits were accepted and four other members did not know if any were accepted. Ten of the participants reported very few credit acceptance: one answered, “The only credit I received for four years active duty was a physical education credit. I was saved from having to take golf or archery.” Another said, “No, I was told in the military that the classes and tests I took would count for something, but it was just another lie.” Two participants regarded the military credits their campus accepted as helpful; however, two final participants remarked that “Yes. I suppose it was beneficial, but it also hurt because I was considered to have ‘excess’ units and put on special circumstance because of it.” And:

[My campus] did and I really wished they didn’t. Because I have like 190 units and … the only thing that really counted was [in] PE or something like that. I thought that was kind of ridiculous…. It’s one class that I didn’t have to take but like now I’m stuck with all these extra units that hinder me… When you finally apply for graduation they are going to look at your units and say, “Oh well, you have way too many you need to get out as soon as possible” but, in all actuality, I don’t have 190 units towards a specific degree. So, I just feel they should [consider] the type of units that are coming in and actually give units for specific things. I took an English class in the military that should go towards an English [class] instead of just [a] random [class] like mechanics, [or] like working on track vehicles … give it as credits for something [useful]. I just think that’s kind of stupid.

Missing Sustainability of Effective Practices for Veterans

The final key focuses on the sustainability of practices and the final code represents the inconsistent experiences many student veterans experience (Code:
Inconsistent Practices). The experiences of participants with the structural support of colleges were assorted, but even the participants reporting a positive college experience often reported some administrative issues. When explaining why they rated their college a six out of seven in military friendliness, a student explained, “I have no reason to say it is not. All paperwork regarding aid is filled out in a timely manner (well accept [sic] on one occasion).” Others struggled to find help in departments outside of the veteran affairs offices:

As a stated veteran supported campus I expected a lot. As a minority veteran and the first of my family to attend college I was hoping to get the assistance of EOP [education opportunity program]. And I tried my best working with them to get their support but they denied me because of one flaw I made in my application.

Other participants articulated a difficult time understanding “exactly what the VA can do for me. What kind of opportunities I have as a veteran… We've been told, but we haven't been told the specifics of how to take advantage of those.”

Identity

Questions 13-18 asked participants to think about the dual roles they inhabit as students and veterans. The respondents’ answers were categorized in the following ways: self-identification, leadership, and identity navigation and helped to reveal how student veterans are negotiating their dual-identities of veteran and student on college campuses.

Self-identification

Participants articulated three forms of self-identification when expressing themselves as veterans or as students: I am always comfortable informing others of my
veteran/student status, I reveal my veteran/student status when relevant, and I rarely/never inform others of my veteran/student status. Participants who explained that they reveal their veteran or student status when relevant articulated that they do not share their identity (either student or veteran) unless specifically asked or appropriate. See Table 2 for a detailed list of examples. Two further categories emerged from the questions specifically designed to elicit responses regarding participants’ identity: leadership and identity navigation.

**Leadership**

In the classroom, participants explained how their former military experience helped shape interactions while working with traditional students.

Generally, you end up being the one who takes over. It sucks. I didn't want to do it for the project we just had a few days ago, that we had to do as a presentation.... I just sat there and looked at all of them and it felt like a little triangle table with all of them at the top and I'm just sitting at the panel [and they’re] just staring at me.

While not all participants enjoyed working in groups (“I dislike group classes. I want to take charge”) not all of them disliked the opportunity (“I enjoy working in groups. I try to organize the group”); however, the theme repeated most often was an innate leadership aptitude which many attributed to their time in the military: “Being a leader previously helps me deal with individuals and team dynamics,” and “I want to take over and lead the group. Get people organized. I feel veterans excel at efficiency and we're extremely bothered when other people think they can be more efficient.”

**Identity Navigation**

Finally, when participants explained how they navigated their dual identities, members answered in three ways. First, 12 of the participants expressed how their
Table 3  Identity Disclosure Choices of Student Veterans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category name</th>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am always comfortable informing others of my veteran/student status</td>
<td>Veteran Identity</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>&quot;I reveal it every opportunity and chance I get. I'm so proud, humbled and honored.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student Identity</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>&quot;I reveal my student status to everyone. I feel it allows me to be seen as more normal and inquisitive.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I reveal my veteran/student status when relevant</td>
<td>Veteran Identity</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>&quot;Whenever my status is relevant, I am comfortable revealing it.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student Identity</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>&quot;When asked what I do…. 'I'm a student.'&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I rarely/never inform others of my veteran/student status</td>
<td>Veteran Identity</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>&quot;Never, it isn't relevant to learning. I'm so much more than a 'veteran' It carries a stigma I choose I avoid.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student Identity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&quot;I don't tell people I am a student because it is embarrassing to be this old and returning to the work force for a new career after losing 2 already.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

veteran identities and experiences complemented their current role as a student. One participant said, “I keep a combat mindset. Survive this…. [This] battle is no different just the battleground. My objective now is to survive and graduate.” Another explained, “I haven't noticed any tensions between my roles, in fact they seem to complement each other well…”

A second theme explained the tensions that existed because of other outside responsibilities. Four of the respondents mentioned the tensions experienced when their responsibilities maintaining non-school relationships counter their goals as students. One participant explained:

I try to balance it out as much as I can. Sometimes, I don't do anything I just pout, I guess. I just quietly pout and where no one knows….But after that, then I'm like, you know what? I've got stuff to do.... Schoolwork will always be there. So I'll always try to do it as early as I can in case other stuff comes up. But if I have time tomorrow, I can do it tomorrow and watch my son. Usually, by [tomorrow] I'm right back on it. That's like me and my child custody stuff. I've been able to make it work. That was the main big thing, my child custody stuff. Court every two
weeks…. That’s when I have to sit there and put the work to the side, and I'll have to put it off till tomorrow.

Another participant tells “everyone I'm too busy to do anything except study” to ensure success in school.

The final five participants struggled in their dual roles. When asked how they navigate the dual roles, one participant answered, “I don't. I struggle and I'll continue to struggle until I'm out of here…. I'm constantly frustrated and upset. I feel like I'm walking around in an oppressive atmosphere on this campus.” Another wrote, “I stress because I feel I am not up to par for school.” A third participant said, “I try to keep my workload as small as possible. I try to distract myself from stress when it’s there. When I can’t cope, I hurt myself, and then I feel better.” This response was particularly troubling. The participant indicated they hurt themselves to cope with workload stress. Another respondent who also indicated they struggle with extreme stress as a student veteran, and in transitioning from military to civilian life, indicated they have coped by dropping out of school and been homeless from time to time. Not all participants wrestled in their roles, but those who did expressed frustration, loneliness, and many used this research to publicize their struggles.

Participants’ experiences surrounding their “Socialization on Campus” and “Identity” help to bridge the gap of understanding surrounding this populations’ experience on campuses. Military veterans are returning to college in record numbers (NCVAS, 2012), and this study’s findings have explored participants’ understanding of campus experiences as they assimilate into student life. By directly reaching the student veteran population enrolled at California State Universities, a university system with 23
separate campuses across California, and one of the most affordable universities in the nation, this research can be used to form and evaluate best practices for this underrepresented population. The implications of these findings will be discussed in Chapter V.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study extends research and provides insights into the socialization experience of veterans as they enroll into California State University campuses. The findings gathered from participants’ responses have extended the White House Administrations theoretical “Keys to Success” into clear policies and benchmarks campuses must strive for to be seen as an effective “Veteran Friendly” school.

This chapter explains the implications of participants’ varied socialization experiences, and by connecting respondents’ narratives to the literature, offers a new way to understand this population and enable colleges to best prepare services for veteran success. This chapter will discuss the significance of student veterans’ experiences on “Veteran Friendly” college campuses and how these experiences support or hinder veterans.

Student Veteran Socialization

The following section will consider the implications of student veteran socialization on “veteran friendly” college campuses. The implications are categorized through interactions with staff and faculty, in the classroom, veteran connections, and inconsistent practices.
Interactions with Staff and Faculty

Many participants expressed positive relationships with campus employees also perceived that their campuses had a place for them, and believed that they would be successful as a student. For example, one participant explained, “I believe I have found a mentor. [In my] junior year a [psychology professor] reached out to me and asked [if I would] consider being [a] TA. This next quarter I will [be a] TA. I respect [the professor’s] style, personality, skills, and … intelligent swagger.” And the participant continued to explain, “I am confident that I will be successful in my college career,” and “I feel like I fit [in] just fine.” Seven participants named faculty or staff who directly contributed to their success on campus. In all seven participant’s narratives, they believed they “fit in” their campuses and that they would be successful in their college career.

However, some participants lacked that connection with a mentor on campus. For many of them, their relationships to the organization are strained or non-existent. One participant reported that when problems arise, “I am on my own.” The participants’ narrative described an isolated experience on campus: “as far as professors in my major of computer science I am looked at as a freak… I do my best to be successful but I do worry all the time of failing.” Another member described how a close connection with an older member of the campus would have impacted his or her experience:

I haven't found a mentor until my last semester that I'm currently in. I wish I had someone like this sooner to help direct me in my endeavors, rather than being forced to pick a path and have to stick with it for sake of receiving benefits.

Generally, socialization literature focuses the responsibility of the newcomer to learn the social norms of the organization to ‘fit-in’; however, it is “through relationships that newcomers [can find] their way into and around the social structures of
the work groups and [develop] a shared understanding of the workplace culture” (Korte & Lin, 2013, p 423). In other words, not only is it the responsibility of newcomers to attempt to learn the norms of new organizations, but also the responsibility of older members to sincerely welcome and accept new members into the group.

A need for acceptance was echoed in other narratives: “I can't relate to anyone very well. It's difficult to interact with students that don't have the life experience a veteran does. It's also difficult explaining to teachers that you're a veteran and have a disability.” Another articulated a desire to feel “invited as a teammate.”

The feelings of isolation or inclusion by participants were rarely attributed to the campus as a whole, but rather referenced specific departments or units on campus. This underscores the important role that individual units and departments at a university play in influencing student satisfaction of the university at large. Participants identified individual structural supports: experiences in particular majors or specific departments (for example: education opportunity program, disabilities, or veteran affairs). The few comments that referenced the university described disappointment over the lack of mention of veterans as a student population (see consistent and sustained support from campus leadership in Findings for specific examples).

For Student veterans the availability of a single mentor, with organizational experience and knowledge, who can guide them, is a large key in the participants expressing satisfaction with their campuses. This finding is consistent with previous research (Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992; Louis, Posner, & Powell, 1983; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). The mentor relationship, whether formal or informal, presents student
veterans with a connection to the university, and a way to become more familiar with organizational expectations (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1997).

In the Classroom

For veterans whose background makes it difficult to connect with younger, traditional students, compassionate professors may be the first connection veterans have in the classroom. Multiple respondents mentioned a difficult time connecting to other students and more familiar comfortable relationships with professors. “I do not connect with other students very well and I connect more with my teachers.” Another respondent mentioned the “extreme age difference” with other students, but that “Professors have been extremely interpersonal in a great way.” However, not all classes resulted in positive views of professors. “I think a lot of the professors do not understand the veteran experience.” A lack of understanding from campuses and from professors, staff, and even the students is directly and indirectly asked for by the participants: “sensitivity training for non-veterans” and “Professors [ought] to be alerted to which of their students are vets without having to ask.” Informal mentor relationships can have multiple benefits for career development and job satisfaction (Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992; Louis, Posner, & Powell, 1983; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Organizational, departmental, and staff inclusion are explored further in Implications for Campuses.

Veteran Connections

Even among veterans who had a negative experience on college campuses, they reported positive associations with designated veteran spaces. Across multiple narratives, participants articulated a need for centralized communication where students
can receive and seek out information. Designated areas for communication have multiple benefits.

First, the creation of a veteran designated area can help student veterans acclimate during the encounter phase of socialization when members merge previously held beliefs with new organizational values (Jablin, 1987). In this space, a new constructed reality can be created and shared by multiple members of the community.

I found a group of people… in this room actually. This [veteran designated space]. That has really been a big stress relief. You can come into this room and talk about whatever you want and talk about things that you find… I mean all of this in this room we find conversation similar and we talk about things…. So, I think if I had to pick a specific thing - that one thing that’s been a mentor - is this room.

The language and communication styles as well as the previous organization experiences are familiar to members (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1997). The ability to communicate and socialize with other organization members can ease the shock for incoming students whose expectations are starkly different from reality. Participants often narrated their frustrations when they first arrived on campus: I was “Isolated. Didn't know anyone (still don't),” and was “Unfamiliar with the processes and often felt many in place don't apply to veterans,” “I was very frustrated,” “I felt distant;” however, participants who struggled also reflected the most on the designated veteran centers, “I have been spending more and more time in the [designated veterans space] as time goes on,” and “I usually keep to myself or when on campus I keep with my fellow veterans. Even though we had different experiences I feel most comfortable around them.” Through designated veteran areas, student veterans can come together and narrate their experiences, gaining insight from other members.
Second, campus physical spaces as a location for communication also highlights the need for coordination of campus information about veteran’s services and to include these sites as important part of the campus infrastructure to effectively disseminate information to veterans. It also creates a centralized space where fliers, pamphlets, and announcements targeted at the specific population can be posted. Many veterans find it difficult to navigate through the federal, state, and school protocols to access available services, but participants revealed they do share and gather important information about these resources with each other in designated veteran spaces.

Designated veterans spaces can include both an information center (well informed employees, pamphlets, public computers, and other student veterans) and a relaxed atmosphere that promotes socialization and schools goals like academic excellence and service to school and community. It allows members to discuss aspects of school they have in common and feel ‘traditional’ in the space. Designated veterans spaces can support student veterans with the issues that are important and salient to the population: Issues like medical coverage, Department of Veteran Affairs navigation, or navigation through campus structures. As two participants said, a singular location where “the benefits process … [is] streamlined” and where staff can “handle all facets of enrollment, scheduling test[s], transferring credit[s], [and] filing all requisite paperwork completely and on time” is and would be extremely beneficial.

Coordination and dissemination could help inform student veterans of services available. For example, one student explained that “preferred/early enrollment for juniors transferring in” would positively impact the military friendliness of their campus.
However, the California legislative bill, AB-2133, also known as the Combat to College Act of 2012, guarantees:

any member or former member of the Armed Forces of the United States, and who is a resident of California, who has received an honorable discharge, a general discharge, or an other than honorable discharge, and to any member or former member of the State Military Reserve (AB-2113, 2012)

four years of priority enrollment for up to 15 years after the member has separated from the service. Two other students also mentioned early enrollment, not realizing that for most military veterans, it is a legal obligation by California State University campuses.

Veterans must understand and be able to access this information. The coordination of services is explored further in Implications.

Inconsistent Practices

The number of veterans enrolling in college is projected to increase with veterans separating and retiring from the armed forces. The systems put into place to assist veterans’ success must be consistent.

Many of the participants narratives revealed inconsistent experiences on veteran-friendly campuses, even from those who are enrolled at the same campus and rated their schools positively: “I did not receive any outreach until I registered and that outreach was from the [veterans designated space];” “It’s obvious they support military enrollment, but there are not a lot of military resources unless you are disabled;” “a lot of trying … to find my way around here. I haven't really been too successful…. [understanding] what the VA can do for me. What kind of, you know, opportunities I have as a veteran.” The experiences of these veterans on the same campus reveal the need for uniform, sustainable practices.
Many participants discussed the failures of their campuses to live up to veteran expectations, especially with policies that deal with available services such as EOP, disabilities, and regular MGIB financial support. Student veterans, because of their previous memberships in High Reliability Organizations (HROs), may be more likely to consider a single instance of inconsistent support as catastrophic and a failure of the entire organization. Furthermore, policies that organizations fail to comply with are perceived as merely symbolic and trivial (MacLean, 2003). The term “veteran friendly” means nothing to participants if the policies (or perceived policies) of the organization are not upheld.

Not all socialization experiences of student veterans are the same. However, participants’ stories reflect a need to connect and communicate with others on campus. The connections articulated occur in two ways: connections with peers (in designated spaces) and connections with mentors (formal or informal, classroom or structural support). The connection with peers and mentors are fundamental to a sense of well being on “veteran friendly” college campuses. Inconsistent practices, while frustrating for multiple participants, often were abated by connections with mentors or other veterans who can communicatively help them through difficulties.

Identity and Sensemaking

Three themes emerged from participants’ narratives surrounding their identity: self-identification, leadership, and identity navigation. For student veterans on campus the ability to negotiate to whom and when they share their identity is necessary on a “veteran friendly” college campus. Clearly the most interesting identity findings
pertained to the self-disclosure of the participant’s identities: student and veteran. Clair, Beatty, and MacLean (2005) reported on the choices of individuals with invisible social identities (identities that are not readily apparent to others, such as religion, sexual orientation, or veteran) as passing (hiding social identities) or revealing (disclosing social identities). Individuals must constantly choose which identities to reveal over and over again in multiple situations. For example, as the findings exposed, student veterans must decide in every classroom whether to reveal or hide their personal history in the military.

Tajfel and Turner’s (1986) social identity theory suggests that individuals often claim membership to groups that can improve their self worth. For the participants of this study, many articulated very clear reasons why their invisible social identities (student or veteran) may be a group membership to circumvent. Members may refuse to identify with one or both identities because of group membership stigmas.

Participants acknowledged that ‘veteran’ “carries a stigma I choose to avoid,” and “I thought younger people would be more respectful or inclined to understand veterans, but they tend to have nothing at all to say to us, like we all have extreme PTSD or something.” “Sometimes in classes I see that the teacher or students do not think highly of military or war. I generally keep to myself in those classes.” To avoid the stigma surrounding ‘veteran’, many participants chose not to reveal this identity.

Three participants explained how they avoided the stigma associated with returning students: “I don't tell people I am a student because it is embarrassing to be this old and returning to the work force for a new career after losing 2 already.” Two of the participants acknowledged that when they revealed their student status, they freely revealed their veteran status because, as one participant explained,
I think we feel the need to justify why we're in school and I'm finishing a Bachelor's Degree at the age that most people would be working on a master's, or doctorate. And then I say, 'No, I went to the military instead of to college…”

However, the stigma attached to student identity was clearly less pervasive than veteran stigma. Most participants conditionally revealed their identities, also known as being “partially out” (Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005, pp 81-82). Furthermore, participants who identified as female were hesitant to reveal either identities as a student or a veteran.

In some ways this finding among female veterans seems counterintuitive. The stereotypes associated with veterans often exclude female veterans. Female military members are less likely to be perceived as combat veterans; combat veterans who are sometimes assumed to have mental illnesses (PTSD) or have violent behaviors (CNN Library, 2012; NAMI, n.d). Female veterans enroll in college at a rate higher than their male counterparts. While on average only 15 percent of veterans are female, over 30 percent of student veterans are female (NSSE, 2010). College campuses may need to be prepared to help close the gender gap left by the Department of Veteran Affairs. The identity of female veterans may result in a far different experience than male veterans.

Given the sample size, this finding warrants further research.

Participants avoiding negative stigmas are only one potential reason they choose to conceal their military identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). As one participant explained why they were hesitant to disclose their veteran identity, “I am hesitant because people expect certain things.” For members who feel as though they fail to live up to the veteran stereotype promoted by the media (mainly male combat veterans), civilian expectations may be vastly different than a member’s actual military experience. This suggests a low self-identification to their veteran identity (Tagler, 2012).
Revealing identities presents participants with varied risks on college campuses including stigmatization and discrimination. Past identity disclosures that result in negative reactions shapes future expectations and behavior (Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005). Participants who revealed they had experienced negative consequences after self disclosure were less likely to reveal their invisible social identity in the future: “There was a time I was so depressed that I explained the situation to a teacher, got no forgiveness, then permanently felt less inclined to discuss my situation with future instructors.” In other words, they are less likely to communicate their identity with the organization after a single negative incident. Participants are using their identity to make sense of the campus environment and for members who perceive individuals are reacting negatively to their veteran identities, the campus fails to live up to its “veteran friendly” banner.

Implications and Future Directions

The Vice President for Victory Media Sean Collins said, “The administration’s ‘8 Keys to Success’ provide[s] high-level, macro suggestions that schools can take to help veterans and service members transition into the classroom, but lacks actionable definition of best practices needed to really move the needle on campus” (PRWeb, 2013, para. 3). While the students articulated their needs in terms of “The 8 keys to Success” the following section details four distinct ways campuses can promote and help student veteran success. Four specific concrete changes colleges can make to help student veterans’ success, satisfaction, and socialization include: (1) campus orientation for veterans, (2) standardized credit assessment and acceptance, (3) training
for faculty and staff to increase understanding of the student veteran population, and (4) the creation of designated spaces for veterans, preferably staffed with employees who can help student veterans navigate on and off campus support structures. Finally, potential future research by communication scholars is discussed.

**Veteran Orientation.**

Louis, Posner, and Powell's (1983) findings indicate formal orientation programs are often less important than contact with peers. The peer socialization process can begin during a veteran specific campus orientation. Many participants narrated difficulties relating to traditional college students, but regardless of differences in military experiences, gender, and age, many participants found a deeper connection with other veterans on campus. By providing a veteran only campus orientation, the encounter socialization process can be tailored to meet the specific needs of this population, needs that may include finding financial support, helping to answer medical questions, and reviewing individual military credits.

**Standardized Credit Assessment and Acceptance.**

Training experiences of veterans vary greatly: Veterans may receive years of medical training, electronic or mechanical schools, professional development classes, and all receive some physical education. Many of the participants expressed confusion regarding the worth of classes they attended in the military. To help standardize credit acceptance, introducing staff to the military’s Joint Service Transcripts will help credit assessment. Joint Service Transcripts (JST) are available to Army, Coast Guard, Marine Corps and Navy: Active duty, reserve and veterans. (The Air Force uses an alternate service.) JST describes courses taken, assigns a credential value, and is in partnership
with the American Council on Education (ACE) (See Appendix E for an example of an unofficial JST). By considering the needs of the students and their major, it may limit the confusion many participants had surrounding the acceptance of their military credits and prevent an excess of credits from affecting graduation expectations.

**Faculty and Staff Training.**

Individual training of staff and faculty to recognize the unique needs of the veteran population would directly impact the success of student veterans. Furthermore, veteran friendly faculty who can act as major advisors would give student veterans more advocates to assist with their education progress. Faculty can help student veterans when exiting the organization to translate their education and military skills into civilian desirable skills.

**Designated spaces.**

The creation of a designated space for veterans accomplishes multiple benefits that can lead to positive organizational socialization. Physical locations for veterans to gather can create a communication space where students can discuss ways to navigate campus difficulties. Difficulties may include trouble acclimating to the educational rigor of college, family responsibilities, financial problems, medical concerns, or navigating their veteran identity on campus. Through communication, members can reduce uncertainty, decipher organizational norms, and discover navigation through campus and government requirements (Gilsdorf, 1998; Jablin, 2001; Kramer, 2011).

**Future Research**

Further research should consider issues surrounding the gender, race, and disabilities of veterans, as well as address how veterans perceive they are received on
campus, and how campus faculty, staff and students perceive veterans. The university participants attend should also be expanded. The California State University system is one of the most affordable colleges in the nation; however, this financial accessibility begs the question how veteran populations, who pay higher tuition on college campuses, accommodate the change in financial expectations. Furthermore, many participants discussed their campus locations as convenient and a “commuter campus”. For student veterans who move to complete their education, how does a change in location affect their experiences?

Limitations

While the participants in this study did represent many CSU campuses across California, there were difficulties getting in touch with some Campus gatekeepers. And while many gatekeepers verbally agreed to promote the study, most schools did not have any volunteers.

This method did provide access for student veterans willing to participate at any California State University campus; however, the technical aspects (online survey, computer word document, Skype, or Facetime) may have intimidated some participants who feel less comfortable dealing with technology. Furthermore, because of the confidential nature of the online survey, it was difficult to gauge whether all of those who volunteered completed the online survey. Also, many participants indicated that they had several responsibilities that limited their involvement such as school, employment, and parenting.
Although a diverse set of method options were offered to participants, clearly the most preferred method was through online survey. In fact, only one individual requested an in-person interview, unfortunately the member was located in Southern California making an in-person interview impossible for the researcher. Narratives gathered through email and questionnaires limit the ability of the researcher to probe the participant for deeper comments; however, conversely, email responses offered participants a certain amount of confidentiality to divulge truthful answers without fearing a reaction from an interviewer and allowing them time to carefully articulate their answers.

By requesting the help of Campus gatekeepers an important population of student veterans may have been inadvertently missed: those whose negative interactions with staff or faculty may prompt them to distance themselves from campus related activities, students who do not identify as a veteran and wish not to speak for that community, and those who do not frequent campus veteran affairs offices. Future studies should attempt to reach these populations.

While the researcher’s identity as a student veteran may have given the study credibility to participants and gatekeepers, some participants might have had preconceived ideas of what responses were desired. Socially desirable answers may have been avoided if the survey was done anonymously and might have elicited more honest answers.
Conclusion

There are several areas of the participants’ experiences that are particularly troublesome and warrant further exploration, specifically unsupportive relationships between student veterans and faculty. While reading the participants’ experiences of struggles with professors, the stories often seemed difficult to believe, especially given the researcher’s own positive history as a student veteran. However, while writing the discussion section of this paper, an incident occurred with a part-time faculty member at the local community college who posted comments to her personal Facebook page about her experience working with student veterans. The instructor made generalized comments about the poor academic skills of student veterans and disparaging comments about military members as potential rapists (Olenyn, 2014). In an interview with the local news, the professor defended the comments. “It’s not just a matter of just one or two isolated incidents… how many apples in the barrel have to be bad before we start to suspect that the barrel has problems?” (Olenyn, 2014). These comments, made by a community college faculty member, both validate and underscore the tensions veterans experience when choosing whether or not to reveal their veteran status to campus faculty and other students. Navigating their dual identities as student and veteran as they transition from a high-reliability organization to a loosely coupled one, as well as managing the revelation of their veteran status under differing circumstances to avoid possible negative repercussions, makes the “veteran-friendly” status of these campuses more ironic than a reality. Incidents like these present significant challenges and communicates a lack of respect for this already strained subpopulation of students, and damages their relationship with their purportedly veteran friendly campuses.
This study reveals the diverse and complicated passages student veterans must traverse to graduate from California State University campuses. Student veterans’ narratives expose the strengths and weaknesses of CSU campuses as campuses welcome this population. The strengths of campuses include veteran orientations, designated veteran spaces, and a supportive and well-informed faculty and staff. The weaknesses are comprised of poor communication about academic, financial, and post education career advice, inconsistent military credit acceptance, no inclusion from campus leadership, and a faculty and staff insensitive to student veteran needs. These experiences mirror the recommendations of the White House Administration’s “The 8 Keys to Success” with emphasis on Key 4 (“Coordinate and centralize campus efforts for all veterans, together with the creation of a designated space [even if limited in size]”), Key 5 (“Collaborate with local communities and organizations, including government agencies, to align and coordinate various services for veterans”), Key 6 (“Utilize a uniform set of data tools to collect and track information on veterans, including demographics, retention and degree completion”), and Key 7 (“Provide comprehensive professional development for faculty and staff on issues and challenges unique to veterans”).

Most participants associate their success in college with the skills they acquired in the military, and credit those skills with successful navigation through college. However, some view their veteran status as a potential barrier to their success in college. Many student veterans struggle sharing their veteran identities with students and faculty. The perceived stigmas associated with mental illness, physical handicaps, and combat experience makes them reluctant to be associated with the ‘veteran’ identity. “There is … an expectance [sic]” one student said, “that we can just step back into
civilian life[;] like the experience we have can be tucked away in the closet like an old uniform.” Ultimately, many of the veterans who participated believe that change is possible. As one student noted, “I hope you are able to create social change from this study. It breaks my heart that I'm not able to get the most of my college experience...”
REFERENCES
REFERENCES


Combat to College Act of 2012: An act to amend section 66025.8 of the education code, relating to public postsecondary education. AB-2133. (2012).


Obama, B. H. (2012, April 27). *Remarks by the President and First Lady at Fort Stewart, Georgia*. Addressed at Fort Stewart, GA.


doi:10.5465/APBPP.2001.6133587


Military Friendly Schools® Methodology

The 2014 list of Military Friendly Schools® was compiled through extensive research and a free, data-driven, survey of more than 10,000 VA-approved schools nationwide. The survey results that comprise the 2014 list were independently tested by Ernst & Young LLP based upon the weightings and methodology established by Victory Media. Each year, schools taking the survey are held to a higher standard than the previous year via improved methodology, criteria and weightings developed with the assistance of an Academic Advisory Board (AAB) consisting of educators from schools across the country. A full list of Military Friendly Schools® board members can be found on the Advisory Board page. This year’s Military Friendly Schools® list criteria also incorporate a survey of over 4,000 actual student veterans. This feedback provides prospective military students with insight into the student veteran experience at particular institutions based on peer reviews from current students.

Research findings are compiled and weighted according to the following categories to determine a final score:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weighted Value</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description and Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24%</td>
<td>(Non-financial) Military Support on Campus</td>
<td>Defined as programs and policies which provide support to enrolled military students. This category includes support of specific military installations (such as on-base programs) and the number of full-time veteran counselors or advisors on staff at the school. Also included is assistance with career placement, mentoring and on-boarding programs for new military students, networking events, clubs and associations. Veteran-specific resources, including a page on the school website, are also measured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Academic Credibility</td>
<td>Defined as the school's level of academic accreditation: Regional, National, Hybrid and/or Programmatic.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Percent of Military Students</td>
<td>Defined as the number of military or veteran students enrolled at each school as a percentage of total enrollment. This category includes separate categories for both full-time and part-time students. Note¹: Survey values are banded around an optimal enrollment of 10 percent military students; schools reporting a higher or lower number of military students receive diminishing survey values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Academic Credit for Service</td>
<td>Defined as credit for CLEP and/or DSST exams. Also included is the award of ACE credit for military training and credit transfer policies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Flexibility for Military Students</td>
<td>Defined as policies for military students removed from school due to deployments and PCS orders. This category includes availability of evening, weekend and online academic programs; it also includes requirements for living on campus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Graduation Rates</td>
<td>Defined as graduation rates for military students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Student Tuition Assistance</td>
<td>Defined as scholarships and tuition discounts for military students and veterans. This category includes in-state tuition without residency requirements for active-duty military students and/or dependants, as well as Yellow Ribbon Program participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Student Survey</td>
<td>Defined as participation in the Military Friendly Schools student survey of enrolled military students. This category includes post-graduation employment rates of military students, as well as policies for military spouses and dependants. Note²: This category will receive increased weighting as participation from institutions regarding job placement data is made available. The survey results that comprise the 2014 list were independently tested by Ernst &amp; Young LLP based upon the weightings and methodology established by Victory Media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Employment Rates</td>
<td>Defined as government approval in a variety of areas, including VA approval, TA (Tuition Assistance) and MyCAA. This category also includes SOC consortium membership and participation in the DANTES external degree catalogue.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"Best for Vets" Methodology

Representatives from more than 650 schools responded to this year’s survey. Among them were some 140 schools that identified themselves as career and technical institutions, from which we compiled a separate ranking in the September issue of Military Times EDGE.

Those schools that did not self-identify as career or technical colleges competed for placement on this list. They were rated on numerous factors based on what student veterans have told us they value most in a college or university.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall 2011 enrollment</th>
<th>Shows the combined full- and part-time enrollment for that semester.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At or below TA cap</td>
<td>Indicates whether a college's per-credit-hour rate for all programs was at or below the $250-per-credit-hour cap on military tuition assistance in the 2011-12 school year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow Ribbon participation</td>
<td>Indicates whether a school is participating in the Veterans Affairs Department’s Yellow Ribbon program during the 2012-13 school year, under which a school and VA contribute equal amounts to partially or fully make up the difference between a school’s tuition and the Post-9/11 GI Bill’s nationwide cap. If the school and VA provided contradictory information but the school confirmed its Yellow Ribbon status, Military Times relied on the school’s answer. Because some schools’ tuition rates fall at or below the GI Bill cap, the Yellow Ribbon program may not be necessary. Every school on this list either has tuition that falls below the GI Bill cap or is a Yellow Ribbon participant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxed residency</td>
<td>Indicates whether some state residency rules are waived for service members, allowing them to pay in-state tuition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans office</td>
<td>Indicates whether a school has a central office for handling veterans issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepts ACE credits</td>
<td>Indicates whether a school grants at least some academic credit for military training, as recommended by the American Council on Education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans Upward Bound</td>
<td>Indicates whether a school participates in this federal program, which determines student veterans' basic academic skills and works to improve those skills when needed through tutoring, mentoring, counseling and academic instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans staff</td>
<td>Rates the number of staff members dedicated to veterans issues, how much time they spend on veteran-specific work and other factors. Best rating is four stars.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic support</td>
<td>Rates a school's academic help for veterans, such as special withdrawal and re-enrollment policies for service members who are deployed, as well as veteran-only classes, tutoring and mentorship programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation</td>
<td>Indicates a school's institutional accreditation: ACCSC is the Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges; ACICS is the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools; DETC is the Distance Education and Training Council; MSCHE is the Middle States Commission on Higher Education; NCACS is the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools; NCCU is the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities; NEASC is the New England Association of Schools and Colleges; SACS is the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools; WASC is the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation</td>
<td>Rates from the National Center for Education Statistics show the percentage of first-time students who graduated within 150 percent of the expected completion period for the degrees they were pursuing. For students seeking a bachelor's degree, the percentage shows the proportion of students who began in 2005 and graduated by 2011. For students seeking an associate degree, the percentage shows the proportion of students who began in 2008 and graduated by 2011. Military students are more likely than most to transfer from one school to another, and having a large number of transfer students may bring down an institution's graduation rate. The average graduation rate for this period was 59 percent among four-year schools, 34 percent among two-year schools, 54 percent among public schools, 64 percent among private schools and 40 percent among for-profit schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Default</td>
<td>Rates from the Education Department indicate the percentage of students from the 2009 graduating class who defaulted on loans within two years of beginning to repay them. The average rate was 9.9 percent for public two- to three-year schools, 4.3 percent for public four-year schools and 3.7 percent for private schools.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**“Best Colleges for Veterans” Methodology**

*U.S. News’ inaugural rankings for top-ranked schools offer benefits to veterans and active service members that can help them pursue a college education. Four separate criteria are used to rank institutions: The colleges must be included in *U.S. News* 2014 edition “Best Colleges Ranking”, Yellow Ribbon participants, certified by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs for the GI Bill, and a member of the Service members Opportunity Colleges (SOC) Consortium. The criteria listed above are expanded below.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Certified for the GI Bill</strong></td>
<td>Over 500 institutions are eligible for the GI Bill including less than 2-year and 4-year, public, private, and for profit institutions. For more information visit <a href="http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/college_navigator.asp">http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/college_navigator.asp</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Member of the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) Consortium** | Membership requirements include:  
  - Flexible policies for mobile service members (and families)  
  - Accredited colleges and universities  
  - Reasonable credit transfers (including military credits) and credit for nationally-recognized testing programs (for example: CLEP)  
  - Reduced Academic Residency – institutions requiring no more than 25% of degree requirements (not including the final year or semester) in residence (or 30% for online degrees).  
  For more information visit http://www.soc.aascu.org/socconsortium/Default.html for a full list of membership requirements. |
| **Yellow Ribbon Program** | While the Post 9/11 GI Bill pays all in-state tuition and fees, student veterans who attend colleges as out-of-state students or attend private colleges may have tuition above what the Post 9/11 GI Bill will pay. To assist veterans, some colleges participate in the Yellow Ribbon Program that promises to contribute a specified dollar amount of tuition expenses above the GI Bill maximum amount (maximum cap), and VA will match the contribution, not to exceed 50% of the difference. |
APPENDIX B
My name is Gail Kirk, and I am a graduate student at CSU, Chico, a U.S. Navy Reservist, and a veteran.

I would like to request your assistance in my masters’ thesis that will help understand the unique experience of veterans returning to college by enlisting the support of your office in recruiting student veterans to participate.

I have written an invitation to student veterans that I have included below.

The veteran student population has doubled in the last decade, and another one million service members will separate from the military in the next five years. Government programs, like the Montgomery GI Bill, have improved financial opportunities for veterans to return to school. However, many reports suggest veterans are still struggling in college, having a difficult time connecting to their new environment.

The CSU system is one of the most affordable higher education systems in the country, and California has the largest population of military veterans. It is only logical that California State Universities should lead higher education in providing veterans a structure for success.

I hope that by interviewing student veterans who served after 2001, my thesis can be used to enhance student veterans’ success on campuses. This study was inspired by multiple veteran friendly college rankings that do not include veteran voices.

To further discuss any aspect of this research, I can be reached at (650) 704-0807 or by email at gkirk1@csuchico.edu.

Thank you,
Gail Kirk
Gkirk1@csuchico.edu

Invitation to participate in a student veteran study

My name is Gail Kirk, and I am a graduate student, eight-year active duty Navy veteran, and three-year Navy reservist. I would like to ask your assistance in a study I am conducting this spring for my master’s thesis.

I am looking to understand veteran experiences on college campuses through brief confidential interviewing of student veterans (in person, email, or Skype).

This study was inspired by veteran friendly college rankings that do not include veteran voices.

I hope by listening to veterans about what constitutes veteran friendly campuses, we can better inform veterans who are returning to school and the campuses that serve them.
If you are interested in finding out more and possibly participating in the study, please indicate your interest by replying to gkirk1@csuchico.edu. You will then be contacted with additional information, and I will be happy to address any questions you may have.

Or you can directly click the link below to an online questionnaire.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1oGRISGVM-hmiVhnQR_NdXR_3RYpGMiASHP8EXJ-2ZL1/viewform

Thank you,
Thank you for your interest in participating in this study.

After reviewing the info below, if you would like to proceed, let me know which method (Email, Online Survey, Skype or FaceTime) you prefer for contact.

My name is Gail Kirk, and I am a Communication Studies graduate student at California State University, Chico. In addition, I was active duty in the Navy from 1998 to 2006 and reenlisted in the Reserves in 2011.

The goal of this study is to better understand how veterans are socialized onto college campuses, specifically California State University campuses. This is part of my master’s thesis and will help the CSU system provide better resources for veterans returning to education. Your contributions to this research are critical to help pave the way for other student veterans. Your participation in this study is encouraged, appreciated, and voluntary and there are no consequences should you decide not to participate or wish to discontinue the interview.

Below are some topics to help you answer some questions regarding participation.

***How will the interview take place?
Because it may be difficult for us to meet in person, this interview will occur over an online survey, email or Skype/Facetime: as you prefer. Online ensures that you can respond to the questions at a time convenient for you. However, if you prefer, there are other means of completing this interview including a recorded Skype call or chat.

***What will I be asked to do?
It may depend on which method is most convenient for you, whether an online survey or Skype/Facetime.
If email is most convenient, I will send out a questionnaire that you can use to type your answers about your experience on your CSU campus.
If an online survey is most convenient, a web link will be emailed to you to record your experiences on your CSU Campus.
If Skype/Facetime is more convenient, we can schedule a time for a video-conference.
I will ask you a series of questions regarding your experiences on your college campus. There are no correct answers, I am interested in hearing about your experiences.

***How much time will this take?
You can move through the interview questions as quickly as you wish. The questions have been structured so that it should not take more than 45 minutes of your time.

***Who will see my responses?
Every effort will be made to keep all of your answers confidential. No identifying information (name, email address, etc) will be made public. I will make every effort to keep your contribution confidential and ensure your privacy. After a response is received, the information will be removed from the Internet (as best as possible) and secured on a password protected computer file.
***I’m interested in participating. What do I do now? ***
If you are willing to participate in this study, please reply to this email with your preferred method of participation (online survey, email, Skype or Facetime). Your reply will be considered your agreement to take part in the interview. If you have any questions or concerns or wish to further discuss any aspect of this research, I can be reached at (650) 704-0807 or by email at gkirk1@csuchico.edu. My advisor, Dr. Stephanie Hamel can be reached at (530) 898-4478 or shamel@csuchico.edu.

Thank you so much for your interest in this research. If you have any questions, feel free to bring them up as they arise: now, during, or at the completion of the study.

If you would like to proceed, let me know which method (online survey, email, Skype or FaceTime) you prefer for contact.

Thank you,
Gail Kirk
CSU Chico
gkirk1@csuchico.edu
Informed Consent

I agree to participate in a study by Qali Kirk, a graduate student in Communication Studies at California State University, Chico. I understand this student and her work is supervised by Dr. Stephanie Hornel, a faculty member in Communication Studies. I understand the graduate student may use this interview or parts of it, in presentations, publications or a master's thesis. I understand that the interview questions are about my experiences as they relate to the topic of interest.

The questions may take approximately 30-40 minutes. If I choose to participate, my name and contact information will remain confidential and will be removed from my responses.

I understand that my responses will be kept for the duration of the study and copies will be stored within a secure, locked and/or password protected environment and destroyed once the project is complete.

I understand my participation is voluntary. If I begin to feel uncomfortable while answering the questions, I can choose to not answer certain questions. There will be no consequences if I decide not to participate.

For further questions about this research, I may contact either the graduate student Qali Kirk using the following contact information: studentveteranstudy@gmail.com

or Dr. Stephanie Hornel in the Department of Communication Arts and Sciences at CSU, Chico at (530) 895-4478 or shornel@csuchico.edu.

Submitting this form will be considered your agreement to take part in the interview. If you have any questions or concerns or wish to further discuss any aspect of this research, I can be reached at studentveteranstudy@gmail.com.

Thank you for your participation.

Section 1: I am very interested in understanding your experiences as a student-veteran and your experiences on this campus.

1. a. What expectations did you have coming to college as a student-veteran?

2. b. What was it like for you as a student-veteran when you first came to campus?

3. Why did you choose this institution?
   What did you know about this college before applying/accepting a position?

4. Did you attend orientation?
   What was orientation like as a student-veteran?

5. What kind of outreach from the college did you receive? Was outreach directed at you as a student or as a student-veteran?
   How? (example: newsletter, pamphlets, links to social networks: Facebook, Twitter, and/or veteran specific group/organization?)
8. Did your school accept any military credits? Was this beneficial?

9. What have your classroom experiences been like?
   Interactions with other students, professors, technology, age differences?

10. Have you found a mentor (or a sponsor) on campus? If so, what impact did he or she have on you? Have you created a social circle on campus? In other words, do you have a community on campus? How does having a community or NOT having a community affect you?

11. To what extent do you hang out/study with other vets?

12. Do you have resources you can turn to for help in navigating your college experience?
   Do you know where you might go for help with Veteran Affairs, money complications, health issues, and scholastic problems?

13. To what extent do you feel you will be able to be successful in college? Why or why not?

14. Do you feel like (your) college has a place for you? To what extent do you feel you fit-in?

15. Please explain your answer.
15. 12b. In your opinion, what would make your college more military friendly?

Section Two

I'm interested in understanding when you choose to reveal your status as a veteran and your status as a student.

16. 13. In what circumstances do you reveal your veteran status?
   - With employers?
   - With other students?
   - Tell professors?
   - In non-work, non-school settings?

   - In a classroom setting?
   - With employers?
   - With other students?
   - Tell professors?
   - In non-work, non-school settings?

18. 15. Are there reasons or times you are hesitant to reveal yourself as a veteran or a college student?
   - What are those situations like?

19. 16. How do you navigate your dual role as student and veteran?
   - How do you cope with any tensions (if they exist)?

20. 17. Tell me about your experiences working in small groups in class.
   - To what extent, if any, does your military experience influence your experiences working in small groups?

21. 18. When considering your dual role as a student-veteran, please indicate which identity is the most prominent for you?
   - Check the circle below the number that indicates your answer.
   - Mark only one box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Veteran</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22. 19. Would you like to add anything?

Biographical Information and Military Membership
23. Which CSU school do you attend?  
Mark only one oval.
- CSU Bakersfield
- CSU Channel Islands
- CSU Chico
- CSU Dominguez Hills
- CSU East Bay
- CSU Fresno
- CSU Fullerton
- Humboldt State University
- CSU Long Beach
- CSU Los Angeles
- California Maritime Academy
- CSU Monterey Bay
- CSU Northridge
- Cal Poly Pomona
- CSU Sacramento
- CSU San Bernardino
- San Diego State University
- San Francisco State University
- San Jose State University
- Cal Poly San Luis Obispo
- CSU San Marcos
- Sonoma State University
- CSU Stanislaus

24. How long have you been attending this school?  
(Dates to including this current semester)

25. When did you begin attending this school?  
(Worth and Year)  
(Regardless of any break in classes)

26. What is your intended major?

27. What is the highest level of college you have completed?  
Mark only one oval.
- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Graduate
- Other:

28. What is your home of record (where do you consider home)?  
City (Arms) and State

29. Are you currently using a version of the Montgomery GI Bill?  
Which version?  
Mark only one oval.
- Chapter 30
- Chapter 31
- Chapter 32
- Chapter 33 (Post-9/11)
- Chapter 30 & 33
- Other:

30. Sex  
Mark only one oval.
- Male
- Female
- Prefer Not to Answer

Military Membership
31. Which branch of service were you in?
   Mark only one oval.
   - Air Force
   - Army
   - Coast Guard
   - Navy
   - Marines
   - Other: __________________________

32. Active Duty: Length of Service
   Years: __________________________

33. Reserve Duty: Length of Service
   Years: __________________________

34. Inactive Reserve Duty: Length of Service
   Years: __________________________

35. What was/is the highest rank achieved?
   Mark only one oval.
   - E-1
   - E-2
   - E-3
   - E-4
   - E-5
   - E-6
   - E-7
   - E-8
   - O-1
   - O-2
   - O-3
   - O-4
   - O-5
   - O-6
   - O-7
   - O-8
   - O-9

36. What was/is your MOS(s) or Rate(s)
   Separate multiple with a semicolon
   __________________________

37. Do you have any comments for me?
   __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________

Thank You!

Your responses are appreciated and your voice is important.

38. Can I contact you if I have further questions?
   Email address: __________________________
### Example of a Joint Service Transcript (JST)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation ID</th>
<th>ACE Identifier</th>
<th>Dates Held</th>
<th>Description - Credit Areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9502</td>
<td>NEC-9502-002</td>
<td>25-FEB-2005</td>
<td>Instructor: Knows lesson planning, instructional strategies, selection of visual aids, and teaching skills; designs lessons from a body of content; develops behavioral objectives; prepares test items; evaluates instructional materials and the results of instruction; presents material clearly; possesses platform (teaching) skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Instructional Media 3 SH L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Interpersonal Communication 3 SH L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Principles of Speech 3 SH L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Instructional Strategies and Methods 3 SH U</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Student Teaching 3 SH U</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(12/01)/(12/01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9502</td>
<td>NEC-9502-003</td>
<td>25-FEB-2005</td>
<td>Instructor: Individuals direct teaching and learning activities in schools, training centers, and selected reserve units; write learning objectives; prepare test items; evaluate instructional materials and results; and counsel students on academic learning problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Introduction To Teaching And Learning 3 SH L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Public Speaking 3 SH L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>(11/07)/(11/07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9502</td>
<td>NEC-9502-004</td>
<td>25-FEB-2005</td>
<td>Instructor: Directs teaching/learning activities in schools, training centers and selected reserve units; and evaluates instructional materials and counsel students on academic learning problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Fundamentals Of Training 3 SH L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Introduction To Teaching And Learning 3 SH L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Speech 3 SH L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(2/13)/(2/13)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
JST Official Transcript Explanation

The American Council on Education (ACE) is the nation's unifying voice for higher education. ACE serves as a consensus leader on key higher education issues and seeks to influence public policy through advocacy, research, and program initiatives. ACE's Military Programs evaluates formal service courses and occupations approved by a central authority, employing the services of teams of subject-matter specialists from colleges and universities (professors, deans, and other academicians) that, through the discussion and the application of evaluation procedures and guidelines, reach consensus on content, description, and amount of credit to be recommended for selected courses and occupations. For comprehensive information on the ACE Military Evaluation process, consult the Course and Occupation Evaluation Systems, described in the online Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services at: http://www.militaryguides.acenet.edu/AboutCrsEval.htm.

ACE, the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO), and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation have developed a set of guidelines contained in the Joint Statement on the Transfer and Award of Credit (http://www.militaryguides.acenet.edu/JoinStatement.htm) that are intended to serve as a guide for institutions developing or reviewing policies dealing with transfer, acceptance and award of credit for courses and occupations completed in a variety of institutional and extramural institutional settings, including the military. More information on guidelines for awarding credit for courses and occupations appearing on JST transcripts is contained in The AACRAO 2003 Academic Record and Transcript Guide.

Service members may request copies of JST transcripts directly from the Operation Centers at https://jst.doded.mil. ACE does not issue these transcripts or make any adjustments to missing or incorrect information contained in them. Service members must contact the respective service specific Operations Centers for adjustments or corrections to the transcripts. Colleges and universities may also receive web-based official copies of these documents by contacting the JST Operations Center at jst@doded.mil.

Understanding JST Transcripts

The full exhibit and description for courses and occupations listed on JST transcripts can be found in the Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services which is available only online at: (http://www.militaryguides.acenet.edu) and updated on a daily basis as new courses and occupations are evaluated for recommended credit.

Key to transcript terms:
Military Course ID: This is the number the military service has assigned for this particular course.
SH: Semester hours.
ACE Identifier: The number ACE assigns a particular course. Courses are identified by a 2-letter prefix that designates the military service (AF - Air Force, AR - Army, CG - Coast Guard, DD - Department of Defense, MC - Marine Corps, and NV - Navy), followed by a unique eight-digit course identifier.

ACE Credit Recommendation is listed in semester hours, in the following categories:
V = Vocational; L = Lower level (freshman or sophomore level); U = Upper level (Junior or Senior Level); G = Graduate level.

Dates Taken/Date Held: Courses and occupations will normally have a start and end date that will show the time period the course was completed or the occupation was held.
Location: Valid location(s) where the course was completed.

Occupational Codes:

Army MOS:
MOS - Army MOS has 5 digits. The first 3 digits identify the occupational specialty and the last 2 digits identify the skill level (E1-E4 = skill level 10; E5 = skill level 20; E6 = skill level 30; E7 = skill level 40; E8 = skill level 50; E9 = skill level 60).

Navy Rates and Ratings:
NCR - Navy enlisted rates are occupation identification assigned to personnel at paygrades E-1 to E-9. Each general rate involves the performance of entry-level tasks and leads to one or more ratings. Career patterns from recruit to master chief petty officer are identified by 4 to 5-digit codes.

NEC - The NEC Structure supplements the Enlisted Rating Structure by identifying skills requiring more specific identification than that provided by general rates and ratings and that are not rating-wide requirements. Selected NECS have been evaluated by ACE to date.

LDO, NWO - Limited Duty Officer, Navy Warrant Officer - Technical officer specialists who perform duties that are technically oriented, with skills acquired through experience and training that are limited in scope to other officer categories. These specialties are normally identified by 4 digits, each successively providing more precise identification of the individual holder.

Marine Corps:
MCE - an MOS has 4 digits and a descriptive title; the first 2 digits normally describe the occupational field and the last 2 digits identify the promotional level and specialty within the occupation.
MCO - officer MOS.

Coast Guard:
CGA - Coast Guard officer aviation competencies.

CGR - Enlisted rating structure used for classified enlisted personnel and qualifications, with career levels from recruit to master chief petty officer.

CGW - Coast Guard Warrant Officers are technical officer specialists who perform duties that are technically oriented and acquired through experience and training that is limited in scope and relation to other officer categories.

MATMSP - Maintenance Training and Evaluation Program, a standardized, documentable, level-progressive, technical skills management and evaluation program for enlisted aviation technical maintenance training. The Summary sheet submitted by the service member lists the current level of training completed and should be used by the evaluator to verify the attained level in awarding credit.

DANTES - The Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support maintains the educational records of the service members who have completed DANTES subject Standardized Tests (DSTTs), CLEP examinations, and GED tests. For examinations administered at military installations, results of these tests may appear on JST transcripts for consideration in the award of the recommended credit. However, individual colleges and universities may reserve the right to request official scores directly from ETS or DANTES, to confirm completion of these exams and the credits recommended.

COLLEGE LEVEL EXAMINATION PROGRAM (CLEP) - The College-Level Examination Program or CLEP provides students of any age with the opportunity to demonstrate college-level achievement through a program of exams in undergraduate college courses. There are 2,900 colleges that grant credit and/or advanced standing for CLEP exams.