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Veteran's Psychosocial Needs: How Higher Education Gets Impacted

By

Heather K. Schmidt, B.S.W

MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the
School of Social Work
St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas
St. Paul, Minnesota
in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Social Work

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The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify if institutions of higher learning were able to address the psychosocial needs of veteran students upon reintegration. This quantitative study asked the University of St. Thomas's (UST) students to take part in an exploratory survey. Data was collected by sending out an anonymous survey via email where respondents (N=37) were requested to answer 11 questions in regards to their experience at UST and reintegrating into an institution of higher learning after military involvement. Findings showed veteran students attending UST feel their expectations have been met in an institution for higher learning. The findings also show that obstacles were experienced in adapting to life as a non-traditional college student making reintegrating a challenge. The results of this study report that institutions of higher learning, primarily UST, have the ability to assist their veteran students in beneficial ways. Also, this study identified that veteran students do need assistance in adjusting to civilian life, balancing subsystems (military, family, school subsystems), as well as succeeding in school. Veteran students at UST have identified skills the military has taught them to help them succeed even when an obstacle is present. This research highlights the needs veteran students at UST have but also highlights that they are still succeeding and moving forward while still struggling with reintegration obstacles.

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Introduction

Research suggests that after the GI Bill was enacted in 1944 it became common for military veterans to return to school (Rumann, Hamrick, 2010). The GI Bill gave veterans opportunities to attend universities free of tuition. Veterans are considered non-traditional students (O'Herrin,2011). A non-traditional student is generally defined as an older student. (O'Herrin,2011). Veteran students attend universities for many reasons. For example to experience life as a student and/or to obtain better employment opportunities (O'Herrin, 2011). However, the transition into college life, and becoming a student, especially a non-traditional student is not always easy.

Veterans who go back to school after service are considered to be “in transition.” A transition is considered to be the process of changing one state to another, which can be demonstrated between relationships, routines, and/ or roles (Rumann, Hamrick,2010). Reintegration issues are often characterized by strained relationships, changes in routines, and role identity issues (Maher, 2008). Research suggests that these are just a few of the reintegration issues that are causing obstacles in veteran's lives.

As veterans are attempting to transition into an educational setting they are often faced with physical illness and mental health concerns (Herrman, Raybeck, & Wilson, 2008). Overcoming these while trying to handle the challenges of college can be a difficult experience for some veterans. Many educational institutions struggle to meet the unique needs of veteran students. While it is acknowledged that veteran students should have the opportunity to obtain higher education, many are hindered by feelings

of not being adequate or worthy of the opportunity (Herrman, Raybeck, & Wilson, 2008). Researchers agree it is important to determine what colleges can do to improve their services for veterans (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Nichols-Casebolt, 2012; Moon & Schma, 2011). The challenges of becoming a non-traditional student create a need to discover ways to better assist these individuals.

Previous research has focused on helping veterans succeed, reintegration issues, and ways in which the GI bill led to the increase of veterans attending college. It is important to identify these three topics when considering the ways that professionals can help assist veteran students.

This paper will be focusing on the reintegration issues many veterans face throughout their transition back to school. More specifically it will focus on identifying whether private institutions are meeting the psychosocial needs of veteran students.

Literature Review

The GI Bill of Rights, also known as the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 assisted in waiving tuition for veterans (VA, 2012, & Mettler, 2005). Due to improvements in the GI Bill, the Post 9/11 GI Bill was established. This increased the number of veterans returning to college. In 2011, it was reported that roughly 924,000 veterans took advantage of the Post 9/11 GI Bill (Lighthall, 2014). Considering veterans reintegration issues and higher attendance in post-secondary education, a proactive approach in assisting veteran students' needs is necessary. This research discusses the history behind the GI Bill, reintegration obstacles of veterans, and what some campuses are doing to create a smoother transition back to civilian life for their veteran students.

GI Bill

The Senate and the House argued over the content of this controversial bill (VA, 2012). Some of the controversies that occurred were based around the government paying unemployed veterans \$20.00 a week; this was believed to discourage the idea of seeking employment. Also, many thought that sending men that witnessed war to college was a privilege deserved for the rich (VA,2012). President Franklin D. Roosevelt, however, knew that some sort of transition for veterans back into civilian life needed to occur (Mettler, 2005). President Roosevelt's initial impacted a small number of veterans verse the majority. For example, his initial proposal only allowed a select few to receive educational benefits for one year (Mettler,2005). The American Legion proposed that veterans should receive educational benefits dependent on time severed

in the military (Mettler, 2005). The GI Bill was finally introduced to congress by Harry Comery, a former Republican National Chairman and a previous commander in the armed services (VA, 2012 & Mettler,2005).

Once the GI Bill was passed many veterans were able to achieve their goals due to benefits received. (VA, 2012). Veterans were attending school, buying homes, and work (VA,2012). The rates of veteran admissions had increased. In the year 1947, out of the 38 colleges and universities surveyed, 49% of enrollments were veteran students (Greenberg, 2004). Data collected showed that about 500,000 veterans had gone to college due to this bill. Prewar data suggests that would not have been the case previously (Greenberg, 2004).

Over the course of the past several decades the GI Bill has changed. The most recent bill is called the Post 9/11 GI Bill. This bill differs in that it affects the veterans that have, or are serving in, Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) (Military.com). During July in 2008 the Post 9/11 GI Bill was signed (Military.com). President Obama stated, "you pick the school, will pick up the bill," which has the same notion as the previous bill (www.whitehouse.gov). Benefits have been added to the Post 9/11 GI Bill to make it more accessible. The benefits provide up to 100% of full tuition/fee coverage, a monthly living stipend, living expenses, a relocation stipend, and the ability to transfer benefits to family members (Military.com).

Another feature of the Post 9/11 GI Bill is the Yellow Ribbon Program (YRP). This program is to help students who want to attend a school that is not fully covered by the GI Bill. The YRP is only available if the school is a participating member. The school

decides how much of the tuition they are willing to cover for the student, and the VA will match that said investment for the student (VA, 2013).

Overall, the GI Bill has assisted veterans in attending school. Yet, there are many obstacles for them returning to school that have come up due to their reintegration needs/issues.

Reintegration Issues

Maier (2008) expressed her concerns about the reintegration process of Iraqi Veterans. Families, spouses or significant others were left to do the everyday work alone while their loved ones were deployed. This included taking care of the children, maintaining the house, and/or working a full time job. With that said, a new routine, new schedules and new expectations of other family members were created (Maier, 2008). This can be confusing and frustrating for both parties when the soldier returns home. This is because roles need to be reestablished and those new routines need to be redefined (Maier,2008).

It was said that 20% of active and 42% of reserve soldiers were returning from a war zone with mental health concerns, possibly post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Maier,2008). PTSD has been reported in 1 in 5 veterans, roughly 300,000 in 2012 (George Washington University, 2013). PTSD looks like a variety of things, but can be acted out through anger, social isolation, or emotional numbing (Rosen, Adler, & Tiet, 2013). There can also be co-occurring emotional difficulties like anxiety and depression. Many veterans start to utilize self-prescribed medication and other illicit drugs which may lead to substance abuse and/or addiction (Rosen, Adler, & Tiet, 2013). Symptoms

of PTSD can result in domestic violence or generalized violence towards others (Maher,2008). These are mental health concerns that have been exacerbated due to reintegration issues (Rosen, Adler, Tiet, 2013).

Many of the authors agree that reintegration issues are prevalent concerns for returning veterans (Maher,2008 & Bowling & Sherman,2008). Like Maher (2008), Bowling and Sherman (2008) stated many problems occur in the home life due to the adjustment from war, such as the reassigning of roles. A potential challenge veterans faced was feeling insecure in both family and community roles. Bowling and Sherman (2008) discussed the difficulties that arise in a veteran's life when they know they are redeploying. At this point in a veteran's civilian life, family members and the community maybe reluctant to the idea of returning to life like before the veteran left. Families and communities may not want veterans to reestablish old roles that will need to be reestablished again once the veteran redeploys. At times their feelings of inadequacy with themselves where they potentially felt a great deal of "significance" while on deployment (Bowling & Sherman, 2008). All this can induce potential problems such as high anxiety, depression, and withdrawal. At this point the problems in a veteran's social life tend to get worse, the relationships tend to fade due to personality changes and behaviors or attitudes towards certain things change as well (Bowling & Sherman, 2008). Many of these problems can be addressed with help from mental health professionals as well as acceptance from community, family and themselves. Unfortunately, it will take years to fully understand the impact the war in Iraq and Afghanistan has had on service men and women.

Jakupcak et al. surveyed 117 participants in a study measuring levels of PTSD. Forty-seven participants had PTSD, 21 had sub threshold PTSD and 49 were reported to have had no PTSD (Jakupcak et al., 2007). Sub threshold PTSD is noted as a veteran experiencing some symptoms of PTSD but does not meet full criteria for PTSD (Jakupcak et al., 2007). This led to a study done on each category of participants to measure their level of anger, hostility, and aggression in relation to PTSD. A series of questions were given to the participants to assess the connection between PTSD and anger, aggression, and hostility (Jakupcak et al., 2007). It was found that over 50% of veterans in the PTSD group and the sub threshold PTSD group had acted out in aggression. It did not matter the level of PTSD each participant had. Participants who reported levels of non-PTSD showed little aggression. Consuming alcohol was also assessed and whether or not it played a role in aggression, anger and hostility. It was found veterans suffering from any form of PTSD had higher anger, hostility and aggression issues than non-PTSD participants regardless of the involvement of alcohol (Jakupcak et al., 2007).

In a preliminary data collection it was reported 22% of VA users are meeting the criteria for problematic drinking (Calhoun et al., 2008). With Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan the Department of Defense (DoD) and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs are worried about this specific problem with alcohol consumption (Calhoun, Elter, Jones, Kudler, Straits-Truster, 2008). Due to high stress and combat related experiences military personnel are at greater risk for becoming dependent on alcohol or consuming more alcohol in a week than the

average civilian (Calhoun et al., 2008). Calhoun et. al. (2008) suggests that a red flag is present as more veterans are returning home with combat related mental illnesses.

The survey Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test-Consumption Items (AUDIT-C), was used to measure hazardous drinking in veterans (Calhoun et al., 2008). The population surveyed ranged in age, race, and sex as well as unit type. There were 1,508 OEF/OIF Veterans screened in this process. Different aspects of drinking were assessed; the AUDIT-C varied its questions on amount consumed, combat witnessed, education on drinking, and counseling usage (Calhoun et al., 2008). The survey concluded that out of the 1,508 veterans screened 605 (roughly 40%) showed signs of high risk hazardous drinking (Calhoun et al., 2008). The survey also reports that this section of the population has sufficiently low rates of “risk-reduction counseling” (Calhoun et al., 2008). “Risk-reduction counseling” is used to help reduce the abuse of alcohol in participants through education on its effects. Calhoun (2008) reports that OEF/OIF veterans screened could potentially benefit from some sort of “risk-reduction” education. Research suggests that issues related to alcohol abuse could become more prevalent for returning veterans (Calhoun et al., 2008).

Research suggests that PTSD and substance abuse exacerbate reintegration issues in many facets of life including school. When a veteran student has reintegration concerns having an effective teacher student relationship gives that student another avenue for support. Barnard-Brak (2011) explains it is how the teacher works with an individual in regards to their success. Self-efficacy, also known as “teacher efficacy”, which is defined as the ability to reach or create a personal standard in teaching based on their own perspectives and beliefs. A study was conducted to determine whether a teacher

self-efficacy regarding work with student veterans impacted their ability to build relationships with students with PTSD (Barnard-Brak et al.,2011). This study took 596 faculty members from various campuses all over the country to examine the self-efficacy level professors had in working with students that suffered from PTSD (Barnard-Brak et al, 2011). They found that professors who were against the war had a harder time providing self efficacy to veteran's. This impacted the relationships hindering assistance to those veterans in need. The professors that respected the veterans for their service, regardless of personal opinion, provided self-efficacy that helped the veteran succeed in the school setting (Barnard-Brak et al.,2011).

With many of these issues co-occurring it is apparent that veteran reintegration issues are in demand for solutions. With the Post 9/11 GI Bill it will result in an increased number of veterans returning to school. Previous research will introduce what higher education is doing to address these concerns.

Previous Research

Creating a Campus of One

According to Nichols-Casebolt (2012), having a veteran friendly campus is useful in developing a body of one verse having a segregated campus. Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) created the Green Zone (GZ), a program developed to promote an easier transition from "combat to classroom," (Nichols-Casebolt, 2012). The ultimate goal of GZ was to provide veterans have access to a network of supports to aid them in this transition. The GZ suggests that having knowledgeable and

supportive staff universities it will create an environment of success and support (Nichols-Casebolt,2012).

The GZ was a program run by volunteers. The volunteers must attend a training seminar and be willing to identify themselves publicly as a military student friendly personal (Nichols-Casebolt,2012). The author suggests this as creating a successful program in developing a body of one on campus. A survey was conducted at VCU, where 356 students were identified as military personal with a response rate of 150 students (Nichols-Casebolt,2012). The survey asked several questions regarding how the program was beneficial, and the transition from “combat to classroom.” Results showed students had a lack of knowledge on GZ. However, students wanted to learn more and agreed there could be positive outcomes from the program. The author ranked the program as a good starting point in generating a more veteran friendly campus (Nichols-Casebolt,2012).

Like VCU, Western Michigan University (WMU) created a “System of Care,” which is similar to Green Zone. This program was formed by a military oversight committee with a veteran advocacy office (Moon & Schma, 2011). The idea is that veteran students can address everyday problems that develop with the help of onsite staff (Moon & Schma, 2011). WMU also brought in the concept that “Everybody Plays.” This idea established that everyone, from faculty to staff, embrace, and actively participate in a military friendly campus.

WMU also noticed that many of their veteran students were deploying mid-semester (Moon & Schma, 2011). When this occurred many would fail to notify the

registrar's office, resulting in failing grades. This would create lower GPA's and make veterans student's transcripts appear less desirable due to those failing grades. Additionally, deployment mid-semester resulted in veteran students having a disruption in the sequence of their education program (Moon & Schma, 2011).

Veteran students entering college after their service, struggle to receive credit for their military education. Many schools are not trained to identifying what military credits could, or should, transfer over to educational credit (Herrmann, Raybeck, & Wilson, 2008). For example, Herrmann, Raybeck & Wilson (2008) discuss that many military programs teach chemistry and physics, which fails to transfer to educational credit. Another issue stems from students not receiving GI Bill benefits in a timely fashion due to schools having financial deadlines. In lemans terms, tuition is due on a set date that does not adhere to the timeframe of when a veteran student will receive their benefits check to pay the tuition (Herrmann, Raybeck, &Wilson, 2008). These issues have been identified as problematic by WMU, as well as many other campuses across the United States.

Specific Needs

Once on campus, veterans have specific needs like any other non-traditional population. It would be beneficial for universities to create programs and policies to help veterans graduate. As McGovern (2012) points out, it would be helpful for campuses to start thinking of ways they can help their veteran students from start to finish (McGovern, 2012). One beneficial task would be to create specific points of contact. A point of contact is someone who provides direction for a veteran student

(O'Herrin,2011). Many veterans have expressed that military life has always had points of contact to give them directions and expectations (O'Herrin, 2011). Jumping into the "college experience," can be daunting. It is described as being a culture shock, compared to previous military life experiences. One of the easiest ways to alleviate this concern is to create points of contact on campus that veteran students are aware of (O'Herrin, 2011). The University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA) has established a "Veterans Resource Team" which provides students with a list of faculty and staff that can address their concerns or questions (O'Herrin, 2011). By knowing who to turn to, veterans are able to seek out the help they need such as financial aid, housing, and finding other veterans on campus (Moon & Schma, 2011; Nichols-Casebolt,2012).

Another idea would be to create a task force team comprised of student veterans. This would be used to develop ideas and address concerns of veteran students on campus. The general format would be to develop cross-campus communication and teamwork (O'Herrin, 2011). Fairleigh Dickinson University (FDU), an institution in New Jersey, created one of these task force teams to discuss issues that needed to be addressed on their campus. The team has developed into a stronger organization that now meets with the Dean of students, and director of psychological services, to improve the students' experiences on campus (O'Herrin, 2011).

Many local partners like the VA, other veteran service organizations, and nonprofits will be helpful to veterans by bringing their expertise to campuses (O'Herrin, 2011). The University of WI-Eau Claire works with the VA who provides a social worker to connect veterans with resources, health care, therapy, etc. with the appropriate provider. This has helped those get connected who otherwise would not be reached.

It is important that veterans receive an orientation to the campus to assist them in a smoother transition. It is common for veteran students to not be able to attend the traditional orientation due to their military duty (O'Herrin, 2011). By creating times that the non-traditional students can attend, like midweek evenings, it allows for them to get the "college experience" without causing difficulty with their schedules (O'Herrin,2011).

Connection tools can be created in numerous ways. One of the most supportive things that have been found helpful in the transition is knowing someone who has had similar experiences. The veteran student may struggle with civilian teaching styles. Veterans learn in the military by various types of learning aids such as motion pictures, training paraphernalia, and visual aids (Kraines, 2013). One way O'Herrin (2011) has found to overcome these issues is to have veteran centered classes. These classes are specific for veteran students to ease the transition back to the college classroom settings (O'Herrin,2011). These classes are similar to the freshman head start classes that are mandatory as an introduction course. This also allows relationships to develop between veteran students creating connection points and introducing them to that person with a similar experience.

Building relationships with other students is imperative to veterans' academic success (Whiteman, Barry, Mroczek, & Wadsworth, 2013). One challenge a veteran faces is developing interpersonal relationships with peers on campuses (Whiteman, et.al. 2013). When there is a lack of growth in interpersonal relationships there is a higher correlation between veteran students experiencing mental health problems, like anxiety or depression. (Whiteman et.al, 2013). It is also important to note that the article establishes that having few interpersonal relations leads to difficult academic

adjustment. Whiteman (2013) discusses that research shows little development in supporting the reasoning behind the correlation between interpersonal relationships and lower academic success. This creates a challenging college experience both personally and academically (Whiteman et.al, 2013).

Research Study

One research study consisting of six participants, who had all deployed to either Iraq, Afghanistan or Kuwait, were interviewed to establish views on campus environments after a deployment in order to observe the issues that may arise (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010).

Participants identified the role of incongruities as causing difficulties with reintegration. The research shows that there were three main areas of incongruities. These were established as being, "Military and academic life, the incompatibilities of lingering stress and anxiety with returning to college, and enacting aspects of the "student" role during deployment and aspects of the "military" role during college." (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010).

Respondents discussed incongruities about the how the military life worked verses the academic life worked. As participants pointed out military life has points of contact that gives a veteran directions and expectations. Participants stated that in an academic setting there are fewer points of contact and adjustment to that can be challenging. In elaborating on the stress and anxieties of returning to college respondents shared their opinions on the positives and negatives of the experience itself. Rumann and Marick (2010) discuss that veteran's experience the student role

different than the military role. Participants added that adjustment to these roles takes time. Many of the students compared “routines” of military and academic life. Some discussed ways to do both, be a student and a soldier (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Many struggled with the similar everyday routines that took place in both facets of life causing frustration that there was no diversity throughout their days (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010).

Another issue that participants’ in the Rumann and Hamrick (2010) discussed was how maturity levels were different for veteran students. One participant of the study stated that witnessing someone get killed every couple of weeks changed your reality and what is really important to you (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). This established a new norm for veteran students. Another respondent stated that after seeing what life could be like as a soldier, he was more inclined to want to succeed at school because he knew he did not want to be in the military his whole life. One of the biggest changes amongst these veterans was the realization of their priorities. They discussed being able to focus on being successful while enduring stressors anxiety. They focused on change, and things that kept them motivated and active, to stay focused on their goals (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Many of them preferred the structure back in the military. This would create a foundation for success. (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010).

Many articles addressed relationships when discussing the transition from soldier to student or from student to soldier. Many veterans stated it was difficult making friends, or keeping the ones that they did have because of deployments. This also goes back to the maturity segment. One respondent reported feelings of being more mature than her classmates making it harder to relate and causing difficulty connecting and

making friends (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). This is consistent with the discussion of the incongruence's among maturity levels between veteran and civilian students.

Rumann & Hamrick (2010) points out needs for veteran services and the need for campuses to take notice of its students.

Conclusion

When looking at the Post 9/11 GI Bill as an expansion of the previous GI Bill, veteran students are able to benefit from greater tuition coverage, housing stipends, as well as the ability to transfer personal benefits. Research shows that veterans are returning to school at an increasing rate. However, recent veteran students are returning to school with reintegration issues, alcohol and substance abuse issues, and relationship concerns. These have been a cause of concern which is why institutions of higher education have worked on improving their services to address these needs.

Conceptual Framework

Person-in-Environment

Person-in-environment (PIE) was developed for social workers and other health care professionals to ease the communication barriers between each other by developing a common language in psychiatric care (Karls & Wandrei, 1992). PIE allows practitioners to utilize that common language in identifying and describing their client's concerns, problems and needs. Human behavior of individuals is seen when external forces, intrapersonal and interpersonal forces are joined together (Weick, 1981, Karls & Wandrei, 1992, Saari, 1992). PIE gives professionals the ability to develop a fuller picture of the individual they are working with. It also allows them to identify environmental factors that shape and impact the person's life. A clinician can diagnosis a disorder and work towards addressing that disorder but unless they identify social roles and environmental factors in an individual's life, healing that person as a whole is a challenge (Karls & Wandrei, 1992).

When looking at individuals and their environment PIE uses four factors to asses an individual and the impact that certain areas of their life and/or environment can have on them. The four factors are : 1) identifying social role problems, 2) identifying environmental problems 3) identifying how a client's mental health impacts them, 4) identifying any physical health issues or concerns (Karls & Wandrei, 1992).

The theory indentifies subsystems that are a part of an individual's environment such as school, church, family, social relationships, place of employment, and/or other cultural community resources. Subsystems give the opportunity for individuals to develop variant roles; a parent, a leader, a soldier and/or a student. Forces that impact

individual's social, physical and mental wellbeing are what make each subsystem unique to an individual (Karls & Wandrei, 1992). People try navigating between these different subsystems, that transition can be a challenge in any individual's life. For a military personal they could need to transition from being a spouse and/or head of the house hold, to a student at a university, to being the soldier they are trained to be. If difficulties develop during various transitions it could be beneficial to identify areas that need to be addressed in improving the individual as a whole. As individuals transition from different subsystems challenges could present themselves in a physical, mental, or emotional way. By having a common language that PIE embodies client's needs are able to be met by all their practitioners.

Veterans are a population with subsystems and environments different than many individuals. This researcher wants to look at the various environmental factors that impact a veteran student's reintegration into a higher education university. Veterans, like many unique population groups, have the potential to transition frequently from various subsystems on a daily basis. Research can help identify challenges and positive experiences that develop due to these transitions. How a veteran transitions from subsystem to subsystem, primarily transitioning into the school/student subsystem and out of the school/student subsystem to another, will help this researcher identify if their environmental factors truly impact their experience and ability to reintegrate back to a higher education university.

Methods

The purpose of this quantitative study was to identify how well private universities in the Twin Cities Metro Area address veteran students psychosocial needs on their campus. An exploratory research design was used for an analysis of previously deployed, veteran students from the University of St. Thomas-Twin Cities. Research was collected based off information from an eleven question survey.

Sample

The research surveyed both undergraduate and graduate level veteran students that have had previous military involvement before attending the University of St. Thomas. Both male and female veteran students qualified for this study. The sample was gathered through a non-probability –purposive sample.

Data Collection

The project interviewed veterans whom utilize the University of St. Thomas to help identify whether the psychosocial needs of the veteran population on campus are being met. Terry Eggert, the head of the veterans support staff at the University of St. Thomas was available to identify all veterans on campus. The researcher did not have knowledge of this list. Terry Eggert then forwarded an email containing information written by the researcher explaining the project and its purpose. The email was attached as Appendix A. Consent was obtained when participants decided to submit the Qualtrics survey. Terry Eggert had agreed to distribute the email to all veteran students attending the University of St. Thomas. This allowed for a large population of veterans have had

the possibility of being surveyed during the course of the project. Participants were instructed to the website link where the Qualtrics questionnaire is located.

Measurement

The survey consisted of demographic questions, three Likert scale questions, a multiple choice question, and three open-ended questions that helped identify whether the psychosocial needs of veteran students were being met on campus. See Appendix B for questionnaire.

Protection of Human Subjects

Due to working with human subjects measures were taken to protect the rights and confidentiality of participants. After the veteran students received the email by Terry Eggert, they were informed that she did not have knowledge of who participated or who did not. Participants were sent an informed consent which will explain that the survey was anonymous and that no identifying information was needed for the completion of it. It was noted that the veteran's responses to the survey were only used for this research study and did not have any connection to the University of St. Thomas, Veterans Affairs, or Department of Defense. Participants had the opportunity to address any questions or concerns with this researcher or the IRB if necessary.

Data Analysis

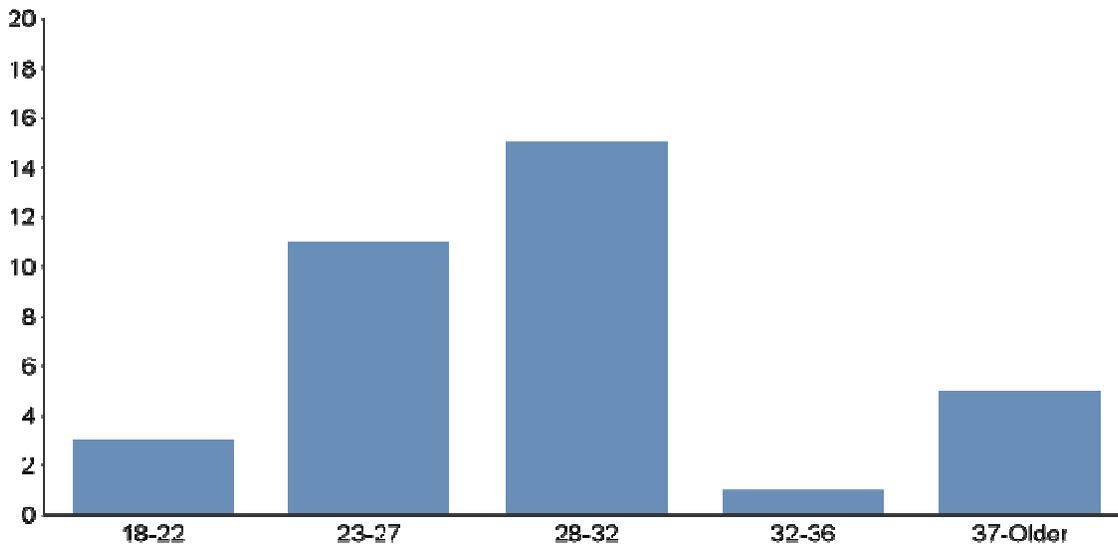
The data collected was analyzed by descriptive analysis.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to quantitatively identify what veterans are experiencing at private university institutions. More specifically, if the universities are meeting the psychosocial needs around re-integrating back into an educational setting? The study focused on identifying the reintegration issues many veterans face throughout their transition back to school. The following section summarizes and analyzes the results that were collected.

Demographics

All 37 (100%) participants attended the University of St. Thomas (UST). Twenty (54%) respondents were attending UST as an undergraduate while 15(41%) attended various graduate programs. Two (5%) were students attending the law school at UST. Twenty seven males (73%) and 10 (27%) females participated in the study. Twenty five (68%) respondents reported they had been deployed and 12(32%) reported no experience being deployed. The mean ages identified were 28-32 which represented 15(43%) respondents. Figure 1 illustrates the age category that participants fall under. The mean age of respondents was in the, "28-32" category. This represented the largest group of respondents (N=15, 43%).



| # | Answer | Bar | Response | % |
|---|----------|-----|----------|---------|
| 1 | 18-22 | | 3 | 8.57% |
| 2 | 23-27 | | 11 | 31.43% |
| 3 | 28-32 | | 15 | 42.86% |
| 4 | 32-36 | | 1 | 2.86% |
| 5 | 37-Older | | 5 | 14.29% |
| | Total | | 35 | 100.00% |

Figure 1. *Age distribution among respondents.*

Data Analysis

The questionnaire asked participants to report on which services/resources they have accessed at UST, whether their expectations were being met, which obstacles interfered with their reintegration at UST, and what, or whom, they identified as support systems. Additionally, participants were asked to identify positive aspects of their military experience that contributed to their schooling.

Participants reported on what services/resources they have accessed at UST and their usefulness. Respondents report that they found the resources useful at UST. Table 2 illustrates the resources accessed with the respondents rating how beneficial those resources are. The levels of usefulness was rated on a scale of 0-6, zero representing, “not useful at all,” three representing “moderately useful,” and six is representing, “extremely useful.” The majority of respondents reported utilizing the School Certifying Official-Registrar Office, and Academic Counseling and Support reporting the most at UST. The Disability Resource Center, Personal Counseling Centers and the Dean of Students were identified by respondents as the resources utilized the least.

Table 2.

Frequency Distribution of Access of Services.

| Services/Resources | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Disability Resources | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| Personal Counseling | 2 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Dean of Students | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Other | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Career Counseling | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| Duane Bauer-MN VA Higher Education Representative | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 5 |
| Academic Counseling and Support | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 2 | 5 |
| School Certifying Official-Registrar Office | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 8 | 8 |

Participants were asked to rate whether or not UST met their expectations as students. The rating scale was 0-6. With zero representing, “none of my expectations have been met,” one representing, “expectations were mostly unmet,” two representing, “expectations were somewhat met,” three representing, “expectations were met,” four representing, “somewhat exceeded expectations,” five representing, “most expectations have been exceeded,” and six representing, “all expectations have been exceeded.” The majority of students’ responses to this scale demonstrate that the university met their expectations as students. The mean response rate was 5.6 with a standard deviation of 1.2 as shown in Figure 3.

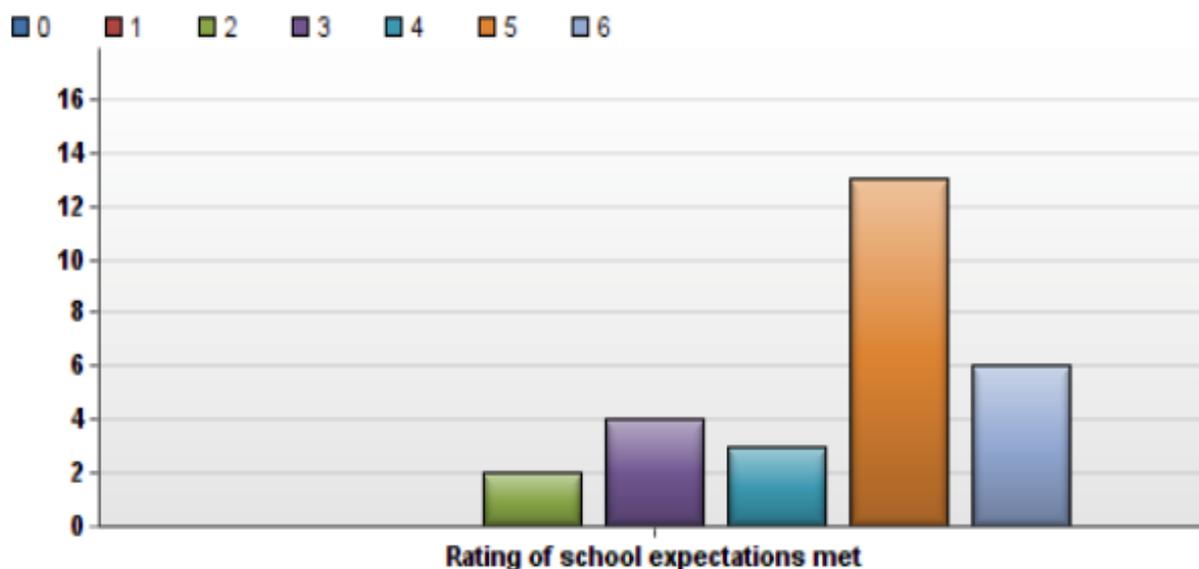


Figure 3. Rating of Expectations Met.

Respondents were asked to describe which expectations of theirs were met. Five (23%) participants reported the veteran service offices met their expectations. As one respondent reports, “The lady who helped me even went as far as to help me develop a

degree audit...She gave me three different audits before I even committed to UST, that was true selflessness.” A similar response, “I feel that the school has planned well and is organized. I have had all my needs met very promptly from the financial aid office, VA certifying official office, and the school's health insurance plan.” Six (27%) participants reported that relationships developed with UST staff and/or faculty exceeded their expectation for the UST campus. One respondent reports, “I received very helpful advice and hope the school appreciates the fantastic job he does.” Another respondent reports, “For UST being a non-traditional school this came as a surprise to me, their expertise and expedition on matters regarding our benefits has been wonderful.” Challenges of connecting with peers as a non-traditional older student was reported by three (14%) veterans who identified this as a preconceived expectation met.

Respondents were then asked to describe which of their expectations were not being met. Three (19%) respondents reported having a struggle with the veteran service offices and/or staff. These participants reported that veteran service staffs were unaware of the benefits, new procedures and the expectations that veterans students have. As one veteran reported:

The person whom I spoke to there was not helpful and basically told me to look the benefit information up on the internet...No one at UST reached out to me to offer assistance with this and I felt disconnected...I ended up missing out on my first semester benefits which would have paid 100% of my tuition and \$869.00 in BHA a month.

As another respondent reports:

Academic Counseling and Support. I spent two hours in conference about my transfer credits and found out later that none of the paperwork was filed and no emails sent out. Then, when I went to follow up, I was treated like it was my fault and that I was unintelligent.

One participant reported struggling with “issues” after returning from deployment. He suggested that staff members participate in a “once a year,” follow up to personally check the “condition” of their veteran students. This veteran reported, “...do something other than an automated email to an entire list of people.” He continued by reporting the reason military personal are not encouraged to “open up about feelings” while serving and how having faculty and/or staff reinforce its normalcy to open up might be “well received.”

Participants were asked to identify the support systems they utilize while attending the university. Figure 4 illustrates who veterans primarily identify as their support system. Participants (29) responded by selecting all support systems they identified with. There were five options which included friend (non-veteran), fellow peers who are veterans, education staff/teachers, other students, and other. The majority of veterans rated a friend (non-veteran) (16), fellow peers who are veterans (14), and/or “other” (16) as their primary support while attending UST. “Other” was defined as family members, spouse or partner, church, and other community resource allowing the respondents to identify alternative support systems not already provided. Education staff/teachers (8) and other students (7) were selected the least.

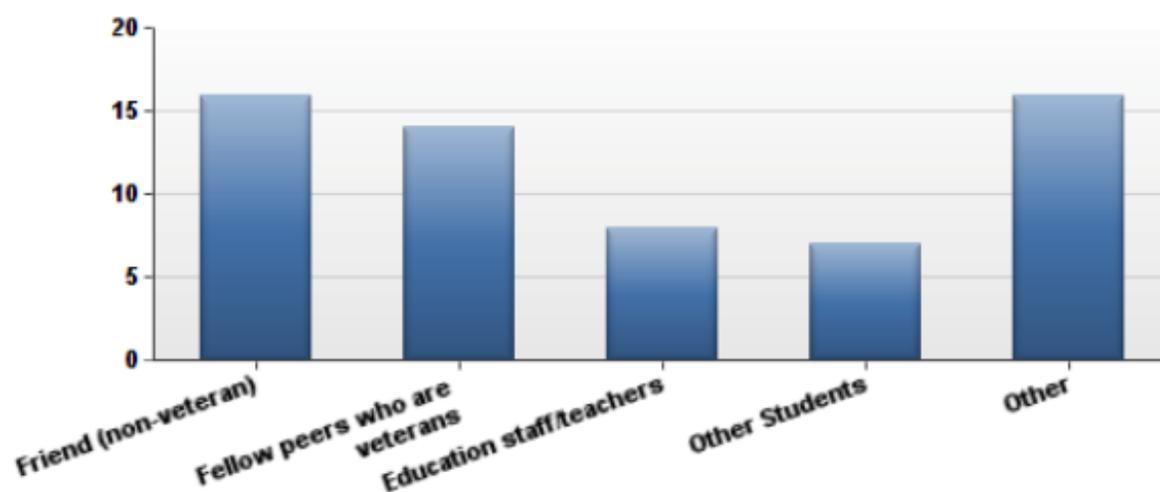


Figure 4. Support systems veteran students identify using.

In Table 5 participants report on the various obstacles they experienced during their reintegration to being a non-traditional student. It illustrates how many participants identified with certain obstacles and how difficult it was to overcome them. The level of difficulty is rated on a scale of 0-6, zero being, “no difficulty,” three being, “moderate level of difficulty,” and six being “extreme difficulty.” Nineteen (51%) participants stated that “Navigating the VA Education Benefit System” was an obstacle with “some level of difficulty.” The total mean score for this obstacle was 3.14, which represented “moderate level of difficulty.” Nineteen (51%) participants identified “Adjustment to Civilian Life” as an obstacle with “some level of difficulty.” The total mean score was 2.9 which most closely identified as a “moderate level of difficulty.” Fourteen (38%) participants identified family obligations as an obstacle with “some level of difficulty.” The total mean score was 2.6 which most closely identifies as being “moderate level of difficulty.” Fourteen (38%) reported mental health as an obstacle with “some level of difficulty.” The total mean score was 2.4 which most closely identifies with two, “some

level of difficulty.” Nine (24%) participants identify physical health as an obstacle with “some level of difficulty.” The total mean score was 2.3 which most closely identifies as two, “some level of difficulty.” Fourteen (38%) participants reported conflicts with school as an obstacle with some level of difficulty. The total mean score 2.1 which most closely identifies as two, “some level of difficulty.” Five (14%) participants identified active military commitments as an obstacle with “some level of difficulty.” The total mean score was 1.8 which most closely identifies as two, some level of difficulty. “Other” is defined as obstacles not otherwise listed. Two (5%) participants identified “other” as an obstacle with some level of difficulty. The total mean score was .6 which most closely identifies with one, slight level of difficulty. For the purpose of this study “Navigating VA Education Benefit System,” and “Adjustment to Civilian Life,” will be the focus of further discussion.

Table 5.

Frequency of Recognized Obstacles.

| Obstacles | Level of Difficulty | | | | | | | Total Responses |
|---|---------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----------------|
| | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | |
| Navigating VA Education Benefit System | 3 | 8 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 22 |
| Adjustment to Civilian Life | 1 | 2 | 2 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 20 |
| Family Obligations | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 18 |
| Mental Health | 3 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 17 |
| Physical Health | 7 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 16 |
| Conflicts with School Schedule | 1 | 8 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 15 |
| Active Military Commitments | 8 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 13 |
| Other | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4 |

Twenty-two participants (59%) replied to the open-ended question, “What positive aspects did your military experience contribute to your schooling”. Nine (41%) participants reported discipline as being a positive aspect derived from their military involvement. Four (18%) respondents reported time management to be a positive aspect. One respondent reports:

I'm light years beyond where I otherwise would have been without the military.

I'm dedicated, hard-working, and no longer give up on things because they're 'too hard.' The military made me cry, sweat, and bleed my way in to the man I am today, and I'll forever be grateful for having served with such an elite group.

Another respondent states:

I didn't set out to get good grades, I set out to do what was required to completion and incidentally got straight A's. The simple sense of getting things done carried over into the classroom. One of my professors allowed me to jump from my first 100 level class into his most difficult 300 level class just because of my mindedness to figure out how to do things until I got it right. 'Be where you need be, when you need to be there, with what you need.' - these slogans developed an effective classroom ethic. Just the discipline to show up was more than a lot of kids had.

When reporting what positive aspects contributed to their schooling, a respondent reported his concerns about discussing life in the military in any UST setting:

I think you have to be a little careful when you share that you are Veteran. You don't know your audience. As a two-time deployer with more than 13 years in the service- you'd like to think people are on your side but sometimes that is not the case. I now use extreme caution in sharing that I am a Veteran. Is this wrong? Possibly.

The respondents reported that after traveling internationally and obtaining a cultured perspective on life they were able to recognizing the importance of education.

Comparing Variables

Four chi-squares were created to identify if there was any statistical significance amongst variables. The comparison of the variables consists of, "Have you been deployed?" in comparison to "Adjustment to Civilian Life," "Navigating VA Education Benefit System," and "Expectations Met" at UST. The final variable comparisons are of "Male/Female" compared to "Expectations Met," at UST.

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between participants who have and have not had deployment history to the "Adjustment to Civilian Life" obstacle and its level of difficulty in returning to school. The relationship between deployment history and the level of struggle was not statically significant ($p = .94$).

| | | Have you been deployed? | | Total |
|--|--|-------------------------|-----------|-------|
| | | Yes | No | |
| What have been your obstacles in returning to school? - Please check all that apply and rate its - Adjustment to Civilian Life | Check all obstacles in returning to school | 6 6.43 | 3 2.57 | 9 |
| | 0 | 1 0.71 | 0 0.29 | 1 |
| | 1 | 1 1.43 | 1 0.57 | 2 |
| | 2 | 1 1.43 | 1 0.57 | 2 |
| | 3 | 4 4.29 | 2 1.71 | 6 |
| | 4 | 2 2.14 | 1 0.86 | 3 |
| | 5 | 2 1.43 | 0 0.57 | 2 |
| | 6 | 3 2.86 | 1 1.14 | 4 |
| | Total | 15.00 | 6.00 | 21.00 |

Figure 1. *Relationship between deployment history and the obstacle “Adjustment to Civilian Life.”*

Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between deployment history and the obstacle “Navigating VA Education Benefit System,” and the level of difficulty the obstacle created. The relationship between deployment history and the obstacle “Navigating the VA Education Benefit System,” and its rating was not statically significant ($p = .69$).

| | | Have you been deployed? | | Total |
|--|--|-------------------------|-----------|-------|
| | | Yes | No | |
| What have been your obstacles in returning to school? - Please check all that apply and rate its... - Navigating the VA Education Benefit System | Check all obstacles in returning to school | 8 7.73 | 2 2.27 | 10 |
| | 0 | 3 2.32 | 0 0.68 | 3 |
| | 1 | 5 6.18 | 3 1.82 | 8 |
| | 2 | 2 2.32 | 1 0.68 | 3 |
| | 3 | 2 1.55 | 0 0.45 | 2 |
| | 4 | 3 2.32 | 0 0.68 | 3 |
| | 5 | 1 0.77 | 0 0.23 | 1 |
| | 6 | 1 1.55 | 1 0.45 | 2 |

Figure 2. *Relationship between deployment history and the obstacle, "Navigating VA Education Benefit System."*

Figure 3 illustrates the relationship between deployment history and levels of expectations met at a higher education institution. The relationship between deployment history and met expectations is not statically significant ($p = .81$).

| | | Have you been deployed? | | Total |
|--|-------|-------------------------|-----------|-------|
| | | Yes | No | |
| Did your school reintegration experience meet your expectations? - Rating of school expectations met | 0 | 0 0.00 | 0 0.00 | 0 |
| | 1 | 0 0.00 | 0 0.00 | 0 |
| | 2 | 2 1.43 | 0 0.57 | 2 |
| | 3 | 2 2.86 | 2 1.14 | 4 |
| | 4 | 3 2.14 | 0 0.86 | 3 |
| | 5 | 9 9.29 | 4 3.71 | 13 |
| | 6 | 4 4.29 | 2 1.71 | 6 |
| | Total | 20.00 | 8.00 | 28.00 |

Figure 3. *Relationship between deployment history and level of met expectations.*

Figure 4 illustrates the relationship between gender and levels of expectations met at a higher education institution. The relationship between gender and met expectations was not statically significant ($p = .75$).

| | | Are you male or female? | | Total |
|--|-------|-------------------------|-----------|-------|
| | | Male | Female | |
| Did your school reintegration experience meet your expectations? - Rating of school expectations met | 0 | 0 0.00 | 0 0.00 | 0 |
| | 1 | 0 0.00 | 0 0.00 | 0 |
| | 2 | 1 1.50 | 1 0.50 | 2 |
| | 3 | 4 3.00 | 0 1.00 | 4 |
| | 4 | 3 2.25 | 0 0.75 | 3 |
| | 5 | 9 9.75 | 4 3.25 | 13 |
| | 6 | 4 4.50 | 2 1.50 | 6 |
| | Total | 21.00 | 7.00 | 28.00 |

Figure 4. *Relationship between gender and level of met expectations.*

Discussion

Summary of Findings

Thirty-seven veteran participants were surveyed from academic programs at the University of St. Thomas (UST). The average age of the participants was 26 and roughly 75% of these participants were reported to be male. Just over 69% of participants reported having deployment experience.

The results demonstrated that the majority of these participants felt that the educational institution met all their expectations as student learners in higher education. Five (23%) of participants reported the “veteran service offices” and the staff and/or faculty involved in helping the veteran student exceeded their expectations. Whereas 3 (19%) of participants reported the “veteran service offices” and the staff and/or faculty they went to for assistance failed to meet their expectations of what help could be offered in a veteran students entrance into an institute for higher education. It appears there is a small disconnect with several students on what is needed for them to do on their end to fulfill UST’s and the military requirements when it comes to accessing their benefits. With the lack of knowledge on requirements veteran students are seeking help from outside resources instead of relying on UST for support. The need for better communication between UST staff and veterans has been reported as a desire for improvement.

The findings illustrated the diverse obstacles veterans are facing when returning to schools of higher education. One of the most reported obstacles was “Navigating the VA Education Benefit System.” This obstacle was described in both the open-ended

questions and the Likert scale question rating the difficulty level of various obstacles; in this case the obstacle of navigating their military benefits was the most reported obstacle. "Adjustment to Civilian Life," was also reported as another challenging obstacle in returning to school.

Even with these obstacles identified by veteran students, respondents felt their military experience helped them in a positive way to excel at school.

Comparing Findings with the Literature

Previous research done on veteran's reintegration gave this researcher the desire to compare and contrast the experiences of veteran students at a private university of higher education. The peer-reviewed, research journals examined several avenues with reintegration and its impact on veterans. They also examined veteran's experiences and the things they would benefit from at a university of higher education in improving their success rate and better their school experience.

The survey's responses validated Maher's (2008) article on discussing the concerns of reintegration back into civilian life. The survey addressed, in one of the Likert scaled questions, the various obstacles that many veterans face in returning to life as a civilian. Like Maher (2008) the survey showed that family obligations, mental health and physical health concerns, as well as adjusting to being in the role of a student again caused stress in returning to school. Bowling & Sherman (2008) also confirm that adjustment and/or concerns, like mental health/physical health or family obligations, to returning to civilian life can potentially create challenges that other

students may not have. This makes the higher education experience more difficult than a freshman enrolling right after high school.

Bowling & Sherman (2008) also discussed the concerns veterans face when redeploying as well as when they are out of the service permanently. Several veterans report that they have good social support systems in areas of their life and feel good about the connections that they have made at UST. Unlike the Bowling & Sherman (2008) article this research found that veterans are finding support through new veteran peers, fellow peers, or rebuilding their relationships with their families. The article discusses how veterans retreat and/or avoid peer relationships because of the challenges their military experience brings. In some instances this could happen when veterans attend a higher education program but the responses support the idea that they feel connected and supported in several areas. The responses do note there is room for improvement in building more social supports at UST. This will assist the ones who avoid or retreat from their previous supports in establishing new support systems that benefit them.

The article by Barnard-Brak (2011) elaborates on this as well but continues by discussing the professor/student relationship in more detail. Barnard-Brak (2011) found that the professor's views on war was positively correlated with how they related or treated their veteran student. In this survey veterans reported many professors and/or staff members as being exceptional in what they do and their support provided. This could contradict Barnard-Brak (2011) research; however, due to a small sample size it is not statistically significant to discount the previous research analyzed. The open-ended question regarding which expectations were not met gave participants an

opportunity to express their concerns and suggestions for areas of improvement. Also, unlike previous research articles reported, participants felt the biggest concern with a select few staff was not their attitudes toward war but their limited knowledge of their GI Benefits and moving forward with the military documents. After analyzing the responses it was not apparent that the staff members who assisted the veterans were against the war or their service. For this survey the distinction between veteran students and the assistance they received on the US Military Benefit System through faculty and/or staff contradicted Barnar-Brak's (2011) article.

When discussing the resources that schools have provided for their veteran students, participants were able to respond to what they felt would be helpful in benefiting their school experience. Moon & Schma (2011) discussed how one university of high education implemented staff, a military oversight committee, to learn and assist veterans in accessing their benefits and/or forwarding them on to a more beneficial resource. This was described as helpful by several veteran students at this university when it came time to redeploy, access benefits, or seek extra help through resources like disability resources or mental health counseling. This survey identified that the personnel who work with these veterans have positively impacted their experience; creating an easier transition. This supports what McGovern (2012) and O'Herrin (2011) found in their research. Both research articles stated that having certain points of contact in college settings give veterans a clearer direction adding to a smooth transitioning experience into higher education. This survey validates that the points of contact an individual makes on campus with support systems either contribute to their reintegration as a student or creates obstacles.

Participants of this survey reported that having a veteran center, other than the veteran club, would be useful in creating connections. The research projects of O'Herrin (2011) Whiteman, Barry, Mroczek, & Wadsworth (2013) Moon & Schma (2011) & Nichols-Casebolt (2012) report that a veteran center would be beneficial in creating bonds and/or assist in dealing with challenges by creating awareness to the different points of contact at higher education facilities.

Previous research by Whiteman (et.al., 2013) demonstrates a positive correlation between the lack of interpersonal relationships and lower academic success. Participants did not discuss this finding when discussing challenges, the expectations they might have of UST, or what military skills impacted their success. This research shows that the military provided many skills such as discipline, time management, and respect which helped individual veterans succeed in their own way. Respondents did not confirm that having more friends made the reintegration to school easier. Participants reported that having staff that are knowledgeable about their military benefits and implementing what they have learned in the military, promotes their success in an academic setting.

This survey's responses positively validate many of the previous research articles published on veterans and their reintegration into a university of higher education. Some of the articles discussed show slight differences when comparing them to this current research project. The difference in the participant's responses may be due to the limited sample size that was accessed.

Limitations

This project cannot be generalized to the entire veteran population since only one private Twin Cities university was used to gather data. Also, due to the limited sample size statistical significance could not be measured between many of the variables discussed. After reviewing the responses it was apparent that some of the questions were confusing. This led to participants answering differently than the researcher intended.

Contribution to Social Work

The veteran population in the United States is continually growing in size due to recent years of world conflict. Veterans today have differently benefits and resources than those that received the original GI Bill's benefits. Now they are able to attend school because there is easier access to tuition reimbursement, provided housing stipends and more. However, moving from a military subsystem that they have been a part of for several years to a civilian subsystem increases the possibility of reintegration issues causing that transition to be a challenging one. At any given point in an individual's life someone may know a deployed veteran or have heard a story relating to a positive or negative event during the a world conflict .However, after hearing that story or knowing that veteran many people move on from that event or stories from deployment . This could potentially leave the veteran needing to adapt on their own back into the life they used to know and be a part of. Their lives as individuals are drastically different from ours, in ways that many of us will never understand. Which means sometimes they need someone to hear their story.

Social workers have worked over the years to build a knowledge base for listening, empowering, teaching, and encouraging individuals to adapt to their reality and find ways to cope with whatever life brings them. Social workers can greatly impact a veteran's life by being present to hear their story. Some veterans would value the work a social worker did had they had a similar military experience. Many though appreciate the support and guidance a social worker can provide without judgment of what they have been a part of during their life and/or time serving.

With ever changing subsystems many social workers value Person-in-Environment (PIE) which discusses the ideas that people's environments create a factor in addressing the obstacles in one's life. Veterans transitioning into a civilian life come from a dramatically different subsystem. That subsystem impacts them for better or for worse; however, adapting to a new subsystem can be challenging because the people and environments are dramatically different than that previously known. Helping veterans identify ways to overcome the little or big obstacles they experience through the use of PIE and/or another social work modality gives veterans the opportunity to move from subsystem to subsystem with potentially more ease. Social work as a profession can contribute to veteran's feeling like their experience and subjectivity is understood. By gaining an understanding of the veteran's experience, social workers can be helpful in helping promote a smooth transition from one subsystem to another. As in this case of transitioning from a military life subsystem to a facility of higher education subsystem.

This research shows the experiences of 37 veterans at one private Twin Cities institution. Their experiences are based on their expectations of a university of higher

education, the type of reintegrating they have done, and if they have obstacles they face. The research can be used to help benefit the work social workers do with veterans in a school setting. The respondents reported on their experience at an institution of higher learning; what they expected from higher education, the obstacles they face that cause them challenges as well as what unique skills that empower them to succeed. This type of information can give insight to a social worker on the impact of individual environments from student veteran's perspectives. One interesting insight was the amount of challenges that many veteran students faced such as "adjustment to civilian life" or "physical health" concerns. Knowing about these obstacles gives practitioners ideas on how to better assist those veterans in need. Social workers could potentially use this information to help identify ways in assisting the transitions of veterans into other subsystems they take part in.

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Appendix A

Dear Veteran Students,

Opportunity to Participate in Anonymous Survey on Your Life as a St. Thomas Student

I, Heather Schmidt, developed a research project through the Masters in Social Work program at the University of St. Thomas (UST). The project's goal is to identify what a veteran student's experience is like when reintegrating to a college setting, primarily UST. You have been chosen to voluntarily participate in this research project because you are a veteran student attending UST. You have experience with reintegrating into a college setting as a non-traditional student. Throughout my undergraduate studies I had dedicated my time working with the veteran population in a college setting. I witnessed reintegration obstacles, how enrollment in health care worked, and navigating the education system. My brother is serving in the military and has a strong desire to return to school in hopes of pursuing a higher education. However, he knows it'll be a challenge as he will return as a non-traditional student. This created a desire to understand a veteran student's experience at UST.

This research project will be requesting you to voluntarily fill out an anonymous survey, asking 11 questions about your experience at St. Thomas, concerns that you may face and reintegrating as a non-traditional veteran student. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete depending on the amount of detail you decide to write in the three open-ended questions. The survey was sent to you by Terry Lynn Eggert, Operation Manager-Registrar's Office, Co-Staff Advisor STVA (St Thomas Veterans Association). Neither Terry Lynn nor I will know who participates in this survey. Also, to those of you who decide to take part in this research it should be noted that by continuing to the hyperlink you will still remain anonymous. None of your responses will have any impact on your current military involvement, or involvement with the Veterans Affairs or Department of Defense as well as your enrollment, involvement, and/or relationship with the UST.

By completing the survey you are giving consent for your information to be used in this research project. There is minimal risk to taking this survey. The minimal risk involves bringing up possible negative emotions about UST. If emotional upset does occur support can be accessed at UST's Counseling and Psychological Services. The St. Paul campus phone number is (651)-962-6780 and the Minneapolis campus phone number is (651)-962-6780 as well. Their email is counseling@stthomas.edu. At any time you may stop the survey and/or decide to not answer a question if deemed necessary, that data will not be used. However, once your survey is submitted you cannot withdraw from the study. The results collected and analyzed will be used primarily for the School of Social Work research project this researcher is involved in. The anonymous findings will also be passed on to the university and implemented into future planning.

Please respond by September 19, 2014. If you have any questions or concerns about this project you may contact me at (612)-801-7119 or the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at UST at (651)-962-6038. I greatly appreciate your responses and support.

Survey Link

http://stthomassocialwork.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_72uOAhMSahsUYNn

Sincerely,

Heather Schmidt

Graduate Student
School of Social Work
University of St. Thomas/St. Catherine University

Appendix B

Questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey! All responses will remain anonymous throughout the process. The purpose of this survey is to look at veterans experiences at the University of St. Thomas. At any time you wish to exit the survey there will be no penalty. I greatly appreciate your help and support in participating in this research to help understand your experience at UST. Thank you.

--Please answer the demographic questions 1-4 that best fits your profile--

1) What school are you in at St. Thomas?

Undergraduate

Graduate

Law

2) Are you male or female?

Male

Female

3) Have you been deployed?

Yes

No

4) What age group do you fall into?

18-22

23-27

28-32

32-36

37-Older

--For each resource check all the ones that you have accessed on campus, for the ones you have checked you have accessed please rate how useful they were for you. (0 not useful at all & 5 is most useful it could be) --

5) What services/resources have you accessed on campus? How useful were they?

| | |
|--|-----------------------|
| School Certifying Official-Registrar Office | 0---1---2---3---4---5 |
| Personal Counseling | 0---1---2---3---4---5 |
| Disability Resources | 0---1---2---3---4---5 |
| Duane Bauer- MN VA Higher Education Representative | 0---1---2---3---4---5 |
| Academic Counseling and Support | 0---1---2---3---4---5 |
| Dean of Students | 0---1---2---3---4---5 |
| Career Counseling | 0---1---2---3---4---5 |
| Other | 0---1---2---3---4---5 |

--Please rate which number correlates with your experience---

6) Did your school reintegration experience meet your expectations?

0---1---2---3---4---5

--Please respond in the space provided as much as you want --

7) Which expectations of yours are being met? (open-ended)

8) Which expectations of yours are not being met? (open-ended)

--Please mark all that apply--

9) Who do you identify as your support system at school?

- Friend (non-veteran)
- Fellow peers who are veterans
- Education staff/Teacher
- Other students
- other

--Please rate each obstacle and its difficulty it potentially has had on you returning to school. (0 being no difficulty/no impact on returning to school & 5 being extreme difficulty/huge impact on returning to school.)--

10)What are the obstacles of returning to school?

Family Obligations 0---1---2---3---4---5

Mental Health 0---1---2---3---4---5

Physical Health 0---1---2---3---4---5

Adjustment to Civilian Life 0---1---2---3---4---5

Navigating the VA Education Benefit System 0---1---2---3---4---5

Conflict with School Schedules 0---1---2---3---4---5

Active Military Commitments 0---1---2---3---4---5

--Please respond in the space provided as much as you want --

11)What positive aspects did your military experience contribute to your schooling? (open-ended)

Thank you for your time and your service!